PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 374

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
5 November—16 November 2001

£70

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5 November 2001

5 NOVEMBER 2001

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 374**

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Monday 5 November 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

SELECTION

Ordered,

That Ms Karen Buck be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Joan Ryan be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Keith Hill, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Magna Centre (Stirling Prize)

1. **Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): If she will make a statement on the award of the Stirling prize for architecture to the Magna centre in Rotherham [10019]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote recently to Chris Wilkinson, architect on Magna, and to Stephen Feber, its chief executive, to congratulate them on winning the Stirling prize. Transforming the redundant Templeborough steelworks into a world-class science adventure centre has been a triumph not just for the architects, but for all those involved. Visitor numbers and earnings for the first six months have exceeded targets and estimates for the first year: that goes to show how the very best buildings contribute to their communities economically, socially and environmentally. I am delighted that the Millennium Commission has helped to facilitate this wonderful project, and I congratulate the Magna team once again.

Mr. Clapham: As my hon. Friend said, in addition to receiving the award for architecture, this is a major regeneration initiative which creates a unique opportunity for young people to engage with science. In fact, it is the first UK science centre. However, does he agree that there is a need for the centre to collaborate with local universities, such as Sheffield university, which has a high-calibre science base? That would help attract more science-based industry to south Yorkshire, supporting the information technology industry there. Furthermore, will he ensure that south Yorkshire receives its fair share of lottery moneys, so that towns, such as Barnsley, which want to regenerate their cultural capital, will have the money to do so?

Dr. Howells: I am sure that the efforts now being made will address the problem that some areas have not been as fortunate as others in the distribution of moneys, and not before time. Until recent years, no country in the world could rival us in the way in which we locked up much of our intellectual capital in our universities, making it redundant. I am extremely glad that schemes are being encouraged to ensure that our universities reach out into our communities and work to tap the potential of those communities.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): In congratulating those responsible for the Magna centre on their brilliant success, does the Minister agree that the Stirling prize and, indeed, other architecture awards have

helped to raise public awareness of the need for good quality architecture? Will he encourage that through the setting up of more prizes, and will he also recognise that the introduction of the national lottery has made it possible for many of those projects to leave the drawing board and become a reality? Will he do everything to encourage that trend?

Dr. Howells: I shall do everything to encourage it as long as it does not involve additional expenditure for Department.

Community Sport

2. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): If she will make a statement on her targets for encouraging sport in local communities. [10020]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Department is committed to raise significantly year on year the average time spent on sport and physical activities by those aged six to 16. In support of that central objective, we are investing heavily in school sports facilities that will also be available to the wider community. In delivering that programme, we will ensure that school facilities are properly managed for the community as well as for schools. I recognise the problems involved in achieving that, but I am determined that we should use those assets for the wider community, and we shall pursue that.

I should inform the House that the announcement of a chief executive for Sport England is likely to be made later this week. I hope that the announcement will be made by Sport England. Contrary to some of the press speculation, on which I obviously cannot comment, it would be nice to bring an English missionary back from Australia.

Tom Brake: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he agree that youth football clubs, such as Roundshaw and District Colts football club, will help the Government to achieve their targets by developing youngsters' skills and boosting their fitness and by involving the local community? Does he further agree that those targets will be much easier to reach if clubs, such as the Roundshaw and District Colts, and better-known clubs, such as Wimbledon football club, respond to the wishes of their local communities as they seek to expand?

Mr. Caborn: I cannot comment on the specific cases that have been drawn to the House's attention, but I can say on behalf of football that, through the Football Foundation and the improved corporate governance of football, those involved are, first, seriously considering how to generate indigenous talent in the footballing world and, secondly, taking note of the facilities provided by the football academies that are being set up by a number of the premier and first division clubs. I welcome that, as well as the campaigns that have been run effectively to bring new sports facilities into the community, such as that by Donald Trelford of *The Daily Telegraph* for sports playing fields. Those campaigns are to be commended, and I hope that the Government will be able to respond to them.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I understand the need to ensure that young people have access to sports facilities, but does the Minister accept that community and amateur sports clubs offer many people post-16 a lifeline and are worthwhile places in which to partake in athletics? Unfortunately, such clubs are disappearing. Most local sports clubs, such as mine, once had three or four teams, but many of them now run only one or two. Will the Minister use his energy to ensure that more is put back into community and amateur sports clubs? Specifically, has he had discussions with the Chancellor about the consultation on the tax break that I announced—sorry, suggested—in my ten-minute Bill?

Mr. Caborn: I am sure that all the authorities will be pleased to have heard my hon. Friend's announcement on what the Chancellor will say, and I am sure that the Chancellor will be waiting to hear what my hon. Friend says.

On the second question, the answer is, yes, the Chancellor has announced that he is seriously considering relief for sports clubs. That is a matter for the Chancellor, but I have no doubt that he will act on it in the near future. I agree wholeheartedly with what has been said about sports clubs. It is important that that part of the sports infrastructure is given due attention. Although we are investing heavily in education facilities—about £750 million through the new opportunities fund—we are clearly doing so with an eye to ensuring that the wider community is involved. We want a system in which every young person—indeed everyone—has access to quality facilities and coaching, so that they can realise their potential. We are determined to put that structure in place in the medium to long term.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the Minister recognise that all his fine words are undermined by the fact that a third of primary schools reduced the amount of time for physical education during the past year, as the Select Committee on Health has shown? When the Government allow building on playing fields, such as Foster's field in Sherborne—a policy that has been savagely criticised by the very journalist whom the Minister prayed in aid in an earlier answer—are not all the Minister's fine words completely belied by the real facts?

Mr. Caborn: One of the first ministerial jobs that I had when the Labour Government were elected in 1997 was as Minister with responsibility for planning, and one of the figures given to me by the civil servants was that 40 playing fields a month were being closed each month when we inherited the Administration from Conservative Members, so we want no lectures from them on investment in sports facilities or playing fields. We have brought that figure down to one and a quarter a month. If they had done what should have been done when they were in power, we would not have been left in the sorry state that we are now in.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): We are looking forward to the announcement of £750 million for sport in the United Kingdom, but will that money

make provision for the employment of professional ground staff? When cuts are made in a local education budget, the first to go is either the librarian or the ground staff. We have no cricket fields or proper playing fields and, when there is a flood or it is hot, health and safety regulations deem it too dangerous for children to play. No one in the community cares about ground staff, so will my right hon. Friend reflect on that point and tell us whether it will be possible to use the money that will be made available for the employment of ground staff?

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend raises an important point relating to the links between schools and the local community. We all know that, on a Saturday afternoon, it is sometimes difficult to get the school caretaker to open changing facilities so that the local football team can use the playing fields. We must consider that issue. Sport England is engaged at the regional level in dialogue with local education authorities and local authorities to ensure that facilities are available for the community as well as for schools.

I hope that an announcement about the new opportunities fund will be made in the next few months and, when money is awarded for new facilities, one of the conditions will be that we examine the revenue side and try to ensure that the facilities are open for 24 hours a day seven days a week. I cannot guarantee that, but I will ensure that they are open to the community more than they are at present.

BBC Charter

3. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): What criteria she intends to apply when considering renewal of the BBC charter. [10021]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will make an announcement on the criteria in due course.

Norman Baker: In considering the criteria that will be applied, will Ministers pay particular attention to the commitment shown by the BBC to news, current affairs and serious programmes? Will the Minister confirm that it is his understanding that the BBC's obligation as our primary public service broadcaster to deliver news and current affairs is not met if those programmes are relegated to BBC Choice at 3 o'clock in the morning and that it has an obligation to ensure that they are on BBC 1 during prime time? Will he deplore the moves of BBC 1 to go down market so that it becomes some sort of tabloid channel?

Dr. Howells: The answers to the first three questions are yes, yes and yes. On the point about dumbing down, I am deeply suspicious about politicians who tell broadcasters what they should or should not put on television. Most politicians never watch the thing.

We must be careful about definitions of dumbing down. I am the world's greatest enemy of soaps—I hate the things—but I have inadvertently watched episodes of "EastEnders" that have dealt with serious subjects in a very adult way, so they have probably served a purpose in that respect. I certainly would not like Whitehall officials, Members of Parliament or, still less, Ministers to tell broadcasters what they can or cannot put on television.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): My hon. Friend will doubtless have been following carefully the proceedings on the Office of Communications Bill in the other place. He will have noticed that it and many outside commentators have been pressing for as much evenhandedness as possible in the regulatory environment between all the public service broadcasters, including the BBC. Will he therefore consider the possibility, as the shape of Ofcom develops through the legislative process, that the final backstop regulatory power in respect of the BBC should rest with Ofcom rather than with the Secretary of State?

Dr. Howells: As my right hon. Friend knows from his considerable experience, the Office of Communications Bill is about setting up Ofcom. It is certainly not about content, which will ultimately be decided by the communications Bill that we hope to publish in draft form in the new year. I am sure that, at that point, there will be adequate time and opportunity for debate on these sensitive subjects.

Tourism (Terrorist Attacks)

4. **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh): If she will make a statement on the effects of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on the promotion of tourism to the UK. [10022]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): Transatlantic tourism has been badly hit as a result of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. Airlines are reporting ticket sales down by between 20 and 30 per cent. on some key transatlantic routes. The impact on the British tourism market is severe, because transatlantic tourists typically spend £6 for every £1 spent by a domestic tourist. The fall in income could reach £2.5 billion this year, but a survey from the British Tourist Authority suggests that there will be a recovery in the second half of next year.

I have visited New York three times since 11 September and have been in close contact with the BTA, its staff and agents of the American tourism industry. I should like to take this opportunity—I hope that the House will join me—to pay tribute to the BTA's staff who are based in New York. They showed courage and commitment in the days following the attack, helping stranded tourists to get home.

Mr. Francois: Is the Secretary of State aware that the BTA has estimated a fall in overseas visitor numbers of up to 25 per cent. for the final quarter of this year? Given the pressure that the industry was already under as an after-effect of the foot and mouth crisis, what practical steps are Ministers taking—other than earning air miles—to alleviate the industry's problems?

Tessa Jowell: The tourism industry was hit hard in a multitude of ways by the terrorist attack on 11 September. As the August figures showed a recovery on the previous year as a result of the additional investment in marketing that the Government provided to the BTA, terrorism

struck when things were getting better for transatlantic tourism. However, the BTA and all the tourism agencies have worked closely with the Government and are investing £5 million in marketing Britain to destinations in Europe and beyond to attract visitors who want to enjoy the fantastic opportunities that Britain offers.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): May I remind my right hon. Friend of one of our more successful tourist venues, the Aldeburgh festival, which took place at the weekend? It is one of our major literary festivals and I am delighted to say that it was absolutely packed out. Will she congratulate all those involved in its organisation, including Michael Laskey and Naomi Jaffa, on producing such a successful event?

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend for the opportunity to give my wholehearted congratulations to all those involved in the Aldeburgh festival.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Does the Secretary of State agree that there is no historical analogy with the last great disaster in tourism to affect the United Kingdom, which happened after the American bombing of Libya and events in Chernobyl? The recovery then was led by the airline industry. Does she also agree that £5 million expenditure is peanuts? If she does not authorise a massive increase in spending through the devolved Assemblies, her Department and the tourism authorities, the industry will not recover to benefit the UK.

Tessa Jowell: Having had the opportunity in New York to talk to the BTA and American tourism bodies, it is clear that marketing travel to Americans at the moment will not get New Yorkers who do not want to leave home and are afraid of flying on to planes. That is why the BTA's strategy of marketing Britain to other countries that are part of the major market for inbound tourism is right. It welcomed the opportunity to reallocate resources, and I hope that that, coupled with its commitment, will be borne out by an increase in the number of visitors to Britain.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my right hon. Friend recall in her discussions with the BTA mention of one of its most successful publications linking film production to tourism? Given the increase in tourism at Alnwick castle after "Elizabeth" and in Sheffield after "The Full Monty", and given the success of the Harry Potter film, will she link both industries in the interests of both?

Tessa Jowell: I understand that the BTA has been involved in the development of a promotional film making precisely the link to which my right hon. Friend refers. We have also used football to promote British tourism in addition to the normal attractions of culture and heritage. So, the BTA is looking imaginatively at ways of marketing Britain, and I hope that that will be rewarded with the success that it deserves.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): My husband works for an American airline company, so the House will appreciate that I am only too aware of the effects on the promotion of English tourism caused by the tragedies on 11 September.

Does the Secretary of State accept that tourism numbers were already down before 11 September, in part due to the on-going foot and mouth crisis? The Government like league tables, and I have here one which may interest the Secretary of State. It shows bed occupancy levels in the English regions. She may not be aware that, in July, Yorkshire dropped to 10th in the regional table for bed occupancy, largely due to the on-going foot and mouth crisis. I hear what she says about the role of the BTA, but does she agree that there is an argument for the English Tourism Council being given a clear marketing role to promote tourism in the English regions?

Tessa Jowell: I welcome the hon. Lady to her new responsibilities on the Front Bench.

The hon. Lady will be well aware that the figures were down as a result of foot and mouth, but as I said in response to an earlier question, they were recovering, especially in transatlantic travel. Domestically, the picture is patchy. It is clear—in the work that we have been doing with leaders of the tourism industry, there is widespread recognition of this—that although tourism was badly hit by foot and mouth and then by the events of 11 September, the industry also faces issues such as variable quality and standards and value for money. We are working closely with the industry to do everything possible to ensure that it emerges stronger from those two crises than it was before foot and mouth first hit.

Millennium Stadium

5. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What proposals she has to encourage the use of the Millennium stadium for major UK events. [10023]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) should withdraw the remark about air miles made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. That statement was quite disgraceful.

The millennium stadium in Cardiff is an outstanding sporting arena and a fitting home for Welsh rugby union and football. Decisions about the events that are held there lie with the stadium operators and event-holders. Given the popularity of the stadium among fans and event-holders alike, there is no need for anyone, least of all the Government, to become involved in attracting events to it.

Paul Flynn: I am grateful for that reply, but following the great success of events held in the millennium stadium, should not it now be regarded as the natural home of international and national events for England and Wales and as the premier stadium in the British Isles? When my right hon. Friend searches for an alternative to Wembley and Picketts Lock, will he examine the claims of Birmingham, Coventry and every other town in the midlands and in the rest of the United Kingdom? I hope that the process will not be rushed. It should be measured and leisurely because the millennium stable—*[Interruption.]*—the millennium stadium will be available for decades to come to host such events.

Mr. Caborn: I have heard of a multi-purpose stadium, but never one that was a stable as well. I am sure that my hon. Friend knows that we have asked the International Amateur Athletics Federation to consider Sheffield for an

international athletics stadium. I have been taking advice on some of the activities at Cardiff and my hon. Friend—who, as everyone knows, is an expert on rugby union—tells me that if the Welsh team aspired to the performance that the stadium demands, Wales could be even more successful than it is now.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Does the Minister believe that Britain needs a national stadium, and, if so, where should it be?

Mr. Caborn: That decision will be made by the Football Association and it is with the FA now. Let me update the hon. Gentleman. I think that he knows that just before the election the FA, which had already received £120 million of lottery money, asked for another £300 million of lottery money. We brought in Patrick Carter to carry out a review; he has been responsible for the Commonwealth games financing, which he reviewed for us, and for Picketts Lock. He has done as we asked and discussions on the Carter review with the FA and Sport England are continuing. I repeat, it is an FA project and the FA takes the lead. The FA and Sport England are currently discussing Patrick Carter's report.

Mr. Yeo: The House will know that although Patrick Carter's report has been paid for by the public, it has not yet been seen by the public: it remains a secret document. Is it not now clear that the Picketts Lock fiasco has so damaged Britain's reputation that any chance we had of hosting either the Olympic games or the world cup has gone for the foreseeable future? Despite squandering millions of pounds of public money, the Government's incompetence and their failure to honour undertakings given by Ministers from the Prime Minister downwards will deny British fans the chance to see the world's top athletes perform on British soil. Does the Minister agree that the last-ditch attempt to replace London with his home city as the venue for the world athletics championships was merely a shabby attempt to conceal the damage that the Government have done to our reputation in sporting circles?

Mr. Caborn: I remind the House that the issue of Wembley stadium started in 1996 under the Conservative Administration, and it was not resolved under that Administration. As for Picketts Lock, as soon as Sheffield became a potential contender, under the ministerial code I was removed from any decision making. I hope that the hon. Gentleman was not implying that I was involved in that decision. Furthermore, contrary to the hon. Gentleman's comments, Patrick Carter's report was put into the public domain at 5 o'clock on the Thursday that the decision was made. Everyone has been able to read it and arrive at their own judgment, and a considerable number of people have told my Department that the right decision was made. It is not in the interests of British sport or the British sports industry for the hon. Gentleman to continue to talk down our very good facilities. Our country probably runs more international sporting events than any other European country.

Digital Television

6. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What plans she has to ensure equality of access to digital television. [10024]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): In the White paper "A New Future for Communications", the Government have set out tests that must be met before the analogue signal is fully switched to digital. Those conditions will ensure that everyone who currently receives analogue television will have access to digital television. To facilitate the switch to digital, the Government have just published a draft digital action plan.

Mr. Bryant: Is my hon. Friend aware that many of my constituents are deeply resentful of the fact that they get S4C instead of, rather than as well as, Channel 4? They would dearly love to see many of the free to air digital channels that are now available, but partly because they are not aware of the free to air option and partly because they are fearful of taking on extra financial burdens, they are not able to get them. Is it not time that we introduced a strategy to ensure that every household has a digital tuner? Toward that end, will the Government consider giving free, free to air digital tuners to every pensioner and every household that receives a free television licence?

Dr. Howells: I take my hon. Friend's point because, of course, I live just down the road from him and have never been able to get Channel 4—good though S4C is, I might add as Minister with responsibility for broadcasting. We will ensure that everyone who can currently get the main public service channels can receive them in digital form. The switch to digital has to be an affordable option, which is the point that my hon. Friend made. I know that there are a great many people in his constituency of the Rhondda who cannot afford expensive digital equipment. As a target indicator of affordability, 95 per cent. of consumers have access to digital equipment.

There are parts of the country to which, because of their topography, it will be difficult to get terrestrial digital—the Rhondda is certainly one of them. We have 230 analogue relays in Wales. They are expensive pieces of equipment to replace, but we have to look urgently at how we ensure that everyone who lives in Wales has the opportunity to receive, one way or another, a digital signal.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): The Secretary of State recently gave a welcome green light to new BBC digital stations. However, is the Minister uncomfortable with the fact that, while the entire British public are paying for them through the licence fee, only between one quarter and one third will actually be able to receive them? Does he believe that the time scale of 2006–2010 is still realistic for the digital switchover, particularly given ITV Digital's current commercial difficulties?

As the Government stand to make considerable proceeds from selling off the analogue spectrum after switch-off, will they consider using some of that money in advance to sponsor the further spread of digital television? Can they put pressure on retailers to promote the free to air option with the same vigour with which they promote the subscription option? In topographically difficult areas, will they use public money to ensure that areas, not only in Wales but in Lynton, Lynmouth and other deep valleys, get digital television because many of them are not getting analogue pictures at the moment?

Dr. Howells: There were a few questions there. We will certainly continue to press the regulatory authorities to ensure that, where possible, we can turn up the juice on transmitters so that we get better quality pictures and a much wider footprint. I hope that that will happen sooner rather than later. I share the hon. Gentleman's desire to press on with that timetable. I am as determined now as ever to ensure that the switchover will take place between 2006 and 2010. We have to be a good deal more imaginative and assertive than we have been to ensure that existing broadcasters do much more to publicise the virtues of digital technology.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I do not know whether my hon. Friend is aware of the collapse just a few weeks ago of the telecommunications company Atlantic Telecom, which delivered cable television to a number of my constituents after taking over Aberdeen Cable Services. My constituents therefore arrived home from work one night to discover that they had no television at all, just a message that their service had been withdrawn.

There is a wider issue. The digital service, including free to view channels, is often provided through platforms for which people pay, whether satellite, Sky or ITV Digital, so there is a danger that consumers may lose access to television for which they have paid. At present, there seems to be no protection in legislation. When the communications Bill is introduced, will my hon. Friend make sure that it provides that kind of protection for the consumer?

Dr. Howells: It is important that there is adequate regulation to ensure that that kind of protection is offered. However, I do not think that we need heavy-handed regulation to do that; it ought to be much simpler. That is the purpose of the White Paper and the new communications Bill, which, hopefully, will be published in the new year. We need light-touch regulation, which should be clear and transparent to ensure that both the industry and the consumer get a good, consistent service and do not receive unpleasant surprises.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Minister will recall the all-party support for the very effective campaign by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People for subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing on cable and satellite TV. Before the general election, the Government gave a clear commitment and a promise to introduce that. Nothing has been heard since then. Will the Minister take this opportunity to confirm that that promise still stands, and give us an idea of when that admirable and much desired change will come into effect?

Dr. Howells: I can certainly repeat that promise. I am meeting various RNID officials. There are some difficult problems, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows—problems with the technology, the take-up and the affordability. I want the initiative to be taken forward as quickly as possible. No doubt the hon. Gentleman knows that we have tried to raise the threshold generally to help people with disabilities, especially blind people, to overcome those problems when they watch television or listen to the radio. It is important that we take that agenda forward.

Commonwealth Games

7. **Mr. Mark Hendrick** (Preston): What discussions she has held on arrangements for the security of the Commonwealth games in Manchester. [10025]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): Security arrangements for the Commonwealth games are being reviewed, following the events of 11 September. They will be kept under constant review between now and the games. Greater Manchester police are in daily contact with the Commonwealth games organisers, the relevant local authorities, other emergency services and all other relevant parties in respect of security planning for next year's games. Greater Manchester police are confident that all planning is on track and will deliver a safe games for athletes, spectators, VIPs and the residents of the Greater Manchester area.

Mr. Hendrick: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that it is important for the games to go ahead, if possible, without terrorist incident—first, because of the obvious economic benefits to Greater Manchester and Lancashire, and secondly, to show the world that the UK, and Britain in particular, is capable of hosting a major world sporting event that requires new stadiums?

Mr. Caborn: I have no doubt that that will happen. We will produce a Commonwealth games of which not only Manchester and the north-west, but the UK and the Commonwealth will be proud. I pay tribute to Charles Allen and Francis Done, the chairman and chief executive of Manchester 2002, and their team for the tremendous work that they are doing. Now that they have a robust financial structure, which was put into place on the recommendation of Patrick Carter, we can deal more effectively with issues such as 11 September. As we now have more credibility, more sponsors are coming forward. That shows that the plan undertaken by Patrick Carter and the work done by him are paying dividends in many ways.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Does the Minister accept that since 11 September the cost of policing the Commonwealth games will be higher than it would have been before, and is likely to be more than £8 million out of the budget of Greater Manchester police? Will he undertake to make representations to the Home Office and his colleagues there to ensure that the people of Greater Manchester do not bear the burden of the cost of that policing? Will he ensure that the Home Office takes on the whole of that cost, to ensure that my constituents and others across Greater Manchester do not suffer from a diminution of police resources?

Mr. Caborn: No request has been received by the Department. The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to go into detail about security planning for the Commonwealth games, but from the contingency fund of £25 million that we put into the finances, we have been able to cater adequately for what the police believe would be the worst-case scenario. As regards the knock-on effect

on the revenue spend of Greater Manchester police, I have no doubt that if representations were made to the Home Office, they would receive serious consideration.

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): I thank my right hon. Friend for his reassurance. In Manchester five years ago, we learned something of the devastation that terrorism brings when an IRA bomb exploded at the heart of our city. Although it is important to take every precaution, will my right hon. Friend join me in emphasising that next summer in Manchester there will be a warm welcome for thousands of competitors and spectators from across the world, and an opportunity for them to enjoy the competition and the friendship that these important Commonwealth games will bring?

Mr. Caborn: I hope that that sentiment will be echoed on both sides of the House and in the national press, because it is certainly recognised in the north-west. There has been a tremendous take-up of tickets that are available now, and a lottery for that area will start in the next few days. Some 12,000 people have already volunteered, and people are volunteering at the rate of 200 a week. There is a real appetite for the games' success and I have no doubt that Manchester and the north-west will ensure that, contrary to what the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), the shadow spokesman, said—*[Interruption.]* I am having difficulty in getting his attention. He has just been critical of facilities in the UK and has run down the UK. Now, he cannot even listen and support Manchester in hosting one of the best international events to take place in 2002. His performance at the Dispatch Box is quite disgraceful.

Museums and Galleries Taskforce

8. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): What her response is to the findings of the regional museums and galleries taskforce. [10027]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I welcome the publication of the report of the regional museums taskforce, which contains a convincing analysis of the problems and opportunities of museums and galleries in the regions. I have asked Lord Evans of Temple Guiting for advice, by the end of the year, on ways in which Resource should begin to implement the report's recommendations on the basis of funds already allocated to it for supporting regional activities.

Shona McIsaac: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Has it been brought to her attention that the award-winning national fishing heritage centre in Grimsby closed its doors last week for six months because of funding difficulties? I heard the glimmers of hope that she gave in her reply, but that excellent regional museum needs help sooner rather than later.

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. It is important to recognise that 2,000 museums and galleries throughout the country are funded in large part by local authorities and in much smaller part by my Department. Lord Evans's report proposes a new relationship between regional centres of excellence and smaller, satellite museums in order to improve their contribution to education, access and social inclusion. I am sure that she will take those messages to her local museum in Cleethorpes.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will the Secretary of State consider museums that although are not in the national top 12, for which her Department has done a much appreciated deal allowing them some support in return for free admission, are none the less national museums in the first or second division rather than the premiership? In the borough for which she and I share responsibility there is the Design museum, which is unique in the United Kingdom. Is she willing to accept representations on ways in which that tier of national museum could be assisted if it, too, were willing to take the same approach to admission fees?

Tessa Jowell: I recognise the contribution that the Design museum makes to the life not just of Southwark but of London as a whole. However, I would not want to mislead the House by pretending that we are in a position to provide the necessary support to all museums and galleries to enable free entry, as is the case with those that my Department supports directly. At the beginning of next month, we shall see the completion of the programme that was introduced by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). I hope that Members on both sides of the House will continue to make representations about the case for improving access to less recognised museums, which are often the focus of local communities and represent their own kind of excellence.

Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton): The Commonwealth games will be an important event for my constituency in Greater Manchester. Will the Minister encourage Commonwealth countries to maximise their participation by reassuring them of the safety aspects of the games?

Tessa Jowell: Yes, we—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question was not about the Commonwealth games but about museums, so the Minister need not answer.

Gambling Review

9. **John Barrett** (Edinburgh, West): What assessment the Government have made of recommendation 70 of the report of the gambling review body on not-for-profit clubs. [10028]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): We have received more than 1,500 representations about the recommendation that jackpot gaming machines should not be allowed in such clubs. We have not yet reached conclusions on this or the other recommendations in the report. However, we shall consider very sympathetically the strong points made to us that recommendation 70 would have a damaging impact on many clubs and the communities they serve.

John Barrett: Does the Minister agree that the way to tackle the concerns about children having access to gaming machines is not in the way proposed, because a number of clubs have membership that is exclusively for the over-18s or can make other provisions?

Mr. Caborn: We have to be very careful about such judgments. As I said, I have received more than 1,500 representations from Conservative, Liberal and Labour clubs, as well as from the CIU, Miners Welfare and the Royal British Legion. Many of them cater for families, which we must acknowledge and welcome, however, we must ensure that we take the Budd report's concerns on board and also ensure that children do not have access to jackpot machines. If the Government are clear about that central question, the report's major concern will be answered. Although we have not made a decision, we are mindful that almost £250 million goes into the clubs' financial infrastructure, and to withdraw that would have serious repercussions across many communities the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission was asked—

National Audit Office

33. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): What resources the Commission has made available to the National Audit Office for the audit of spending by the European Commission in the last 12 months. [10063]

Mr. Alan Williams (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): As the Comptroller and Auditor General does not audit the European Commission's operations, under the treaties establishing the European Community, responsibility for the external audit of the European Community revenue and expenditure, including that of the Commission, rests with the European Court of Auditors. However, the CAG audits the expenditure of the money that the United Kingdom receives from the European Community budget that is spent by UK Departments and agencies. The CAG's estimate provides for the resources to discharge its responsibility.

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his response. Will he comment on the way in which the appointment of the British member of the European Court of Auditors is carried out? Does he believe that such a person should have considerable experience of audit, probably being a fully trained auditor? Does he also believe that the Comptroller and Auditor General should have a greater say in that appointment?

Mr. Williams: The situation seems to be very in-house, to put it mildly. It is a closed shop for ex-civil servants. There have been three appointments since 1977 and everyone appointed has been an ex-civil servant. The individual who is due—no doubt quite justifiably—to take the fourth appointment next December is also an ex-civil servant.

It concerns me that there is no formal arrangement or facility for the CAG even to be consulted. The nature of the job is such that it has a near-sinecure status. Once appointed, the individual can be dismissed only by the European Court of Justice, and even then, only at the invitation or request of the Court of Auditors.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Ecclesiastical Stipends

34. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What the changes in real terms have been in stipends and other salary payments paid to *(a)* bishops, *(b)* parish priests and *(c)* archbishops since 1986. [10054]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Between 1986 and 2001, stipends for diocesan bishops, parish priests of incumbent status and the two archbishops have increased on average by 110 per cent., 119 per cent. and 106 per cent. respectively. I am happy to say that parish priests have come off best.

Paul Flynn: That is reassuring news. The definition of a stipend in the Church is that it should allow the priest to live without financial difficulty and be able to maintain his family in a state that cannot be described as poverty or riches. However, the majority of the clergy—75 per cent.—make no investment in a home of their own, which causes difficulties in retirement, and a quarter of them have made applications to charities in the past year. Does that not suggest that the parish priest is a long way from a state of riches but dangerously close to a state of poverty?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that particular point.

The central stipends authority of the Archbishops Council is looking carefully at clergy stipends. Its criteria are that the stipends should be adequate for clergy to discharge their duties without undue financial anxiety, that there should be flexibility to allow the Church to pay its clergy where they can best be deployed, and that there should be equity, with stipend levels being broadly convergent and not constituting an impediment to clergy mobility.

My hon. Friend's points will be taken into account carefully in all consultations.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that a considerable proportion of the commissioners expenditure goes towards clergy stipends and pensions? If they are to be encouraged to do more, is it not essential for them to receive the maximum return on their assets—within, of course, the code of ethics to which they subscribe?

Mr. Bell: The commissioners must indeed obtain the best possible return on their assets, because one of their responsibilities is to meet the stipends of their clergy. A great deal of time and effort is being put into clergy

stipends. A document entitled "Generosity and Sacrifice", which is in the Library, lists a number of benchmarks for clergy to observe in future, and is well worth a read.

Clergy Poverty

35. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What plans the commissioners have for dealing with poverty among the clergy. [10055]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The review group on stipends, to which I just referred, has expressed a number of aspirations, one of which is to introduce an incumbent's stipend guideline equivalent—with housing included—amounting to approximately 80 per cent. of the starting salary of a head teacher of a large primary school.

Mr. Bryant: Is my hon. Friend aware that according to the Church of England's own report "Generosity and Sacrifice", more than one in 10 clergy say that they struggle to pay bills every year and, indeed, regularly go into debt? As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) pointed out, many fail to acquire enough money to buy a home to which to retire. Is it not time that, first, Church of England clergy had proper employment rights, and secondly, that the tied cottage concept was abolished?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for widening the issue to encompass employment rights and the tied cottage. As he may know, in addition to their stipends based on a national stipends benchmark of £16,910 from April 2001, clergy of incumbent status receive free accommodation or a housing allowance, and membership of a non-contributory pension scheme. Moreover, their working expenses should be fully reimbursed. I nevertheless congratulate my hon. Friend on having already read "Generosity and Sacrifice".

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The hon. Gentleman will know that the Church Commissioners are responsible for dealing with the poverty of clergy, but does he accept that, as a landlord, they are also responsible for dealing with that of their tenants? Will he convey to them the anger, frustration and dissatisfaction caused by the September decision of their assets committee, as a result of which there is less housing for the poor in London? Is that not compatible with a doctrine that states, "We will look after our own if they are clergy, but not if they are tenants"?

Mr. Bell: I expected the hon. Gentleman to widen the question to cover the Octavia estates. I can tell him, however, that the commissioners paid £90.60 million for clergy pensions and a further £11.7 million to offset the cost of contributions payable under the new pension scheme. The Octavia Hill issue is another question for another day, but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, it is part of the Church Commissioners overall responsibility to obtain the best possible return on investments in order to put more money into the cure of souls.

Flooding

36. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What steps are being taken to ensure the safety of church records and artefacts in those buildings that are susceptible to flooding. [10056]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Church builders have always been conscious of the need to build in places that do not flood. Church records and artefacts are generally, although regrettably not always, at relatively low risk.

Mr. Prentice: Is that not a complacent reply? We all remember, one year ago, photographs of the Archbishop of York paddling about the cellars of his palace in York in his wellies. Is there not a case for the Government to examine the issue further and perhaps to give the Church of England emergency funding to ensure that our national treasures, such as the bishop's palace in York, are not susceptible to flooding? I do not want to see the palace in York flooded in a few weeks time; that would be just too embarrassing.

Mr. Bell: Whether the Government should help the minster at York is, of course, a matter for the Government and not for the Second Church Estates Commissioner. However, the Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978 places on individual parishes a duty to ensure that registers and records are not kept in places where there is at least a risk of damage from flooding.

Bishops' Work Load

37. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on the progress of the commissioners deliberations on alleviating the work load of bishops. [10058]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): A review group has given the view that, on the evidence presented to it, bishops are very hard working, perhaps excessively so; that the pressures on them are increasing; and that they do not have lavish lifestyles. How the hard work and pressure can be alleviated is the subject of on-going consultations.

Michael Fabricant: Those on-going consultations were on-going when I raised this issue before the previous general election. The hon. Gentleman will recall that there was some discussion by the commissioners of the appointment of a third archbishop. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that there is a precedent in Lichfield where, in the seventh century, there was a third archbishop? May I say that if there is going to be a third archbishop, he should be in Lichfield? May I also say that, contrary to the ideas of certain sketchwriters, I am not offering myself for that position?

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman might well be aware of the phrase that he who goes in a pope comes out a cardinal. Should there be a third archbishop, the same might be said for the bishop of Lichfield.

Railtrack

3.32 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead)(*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the process of consultation and decision taking that led to Railtrack being put into administration.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): On 2 April 2001, Railtrack asked the Government for help because of its pressing financial difficulties. The Government brought forward £1.5 billion of investment from the period beyond 2006 to the five-year period starting on 1 April 2001. The first instalment of that deal was paid on 1 October 2001 in full—£337 million.

At the time of the April agreement, the Government felt that we should make it clear that our role was to support the railway network but that we should not be seen as acting as guarantor of individual companies or their shareholders. We therefore agreed with Railtrack a statement of principles. The first point in the statement states:

"The Government stands behind the rail system but not individual rail companies and their shareholders who need to be fully aware of the projected liabilities of the companies in which they invest and the performance risks they face".

In May, June and July, Railtrack's position worsened dramatically. On 25 July, at a meeting in my office, the chairman said that the position was far worse than had been thought in April, and that it was clear that, unless extra financial assistance from the Government was provided, on 8 November, when Railtrack was due to give its interim results, it would be unable to make the critical statement that it was "a going concern." The effect of that would have been disastrous. Immediately I ordered intensive discussions with Railtrack.

In August, Railtrack's advisers came back to the Department and said simply that there were three options available; restructuring, renationalisation or, as they described it, receivership. Thus it was Railtrack's advisers who first raised the possibility of insolvency if no additional funding was made available by the Government. I immediately asked my officials to investigate the restructuring option, which involved the provision of more funding to Railtrack. Railtrack asked for funding from the Government to cover all its costs, plus a profit and a four-year suspension of regulation. Those were Railtrack's proposals.

Given the company's demands, we began to prepare for the possibility that we might be unable to provide additional funding and that, as a consequence, Railtrack would be insolvent. As I told the House on 15 October, in order to protect passengers' interests, it was clearly right to explore the need for railway administration on a contingency basis.

As part of this contingency planning, draft railway administration orders were drawn up. A draft of the rules was printed by The Stationery Office on 28 September. The rules were made when a copy of that document was signed by me on 6 October to indicate that I concurred in the making of the rules. They came into force on 7 October.

The allegedly leaked rules, as some have described them, were produced to the court as evidence on 7 October and laid before Parliament on 8 October. They formed part of the bundle of documents placed before the court and have been deposited in the Library of the House.

As regards the printing of the draft rules on 28 September, I have already made it clear to the House that since Railtrack plc's view was that administration was the likely outcome if the Government refused to provide further funding, I had to consider, on a contingency basis, how, if Railtrack plc were proved to be insolvent, I could ensure an orderly process resulting from administration without disruption of the railways. The drafting of the rules was finalised as part of this contingency exercise and a print of them was obtained from The Stationery Office, in case they should be needed. The order runs to some 71 pages. It could not be drawn up overnight once a decision had been taken. It had to be prepared on a contingency basis.

As I reported to the House on 15 October, we carried on discussions with Railtrack until 3 October, but there was no way out of the dilemma; either we gave a guarantee on money, or the company became insolvent. So, on Friday 5 October, I reviewed all the relevant papers and considered all the options, including Railtrack's proposed rescue package, and I decided that no further Government funding should be made available to Railtrack. I decided that we could no longer give Railtrack a blank cheque.

I informed John Robinson, the chairman of Railtrack, immediately of my decision, and of my decision to petition the High Court for a railway administration order if the company were insolvent. The order was granted on 7 October. Railtrack was taken into administration because it was, or was likely to become, unable to pay its debts. Our petition to the High Court showed that there would be a deficit of £700 million by 8 December this year, rising to £1.7 billion by the end of March next year.

Railtrack was a creation of the Conservative party. Clearly, the Conservative party cannot come to terms with the fact that a failed Tory privatisation has been brought to an end by this Government. Railtrack represents much that was wrong with the Tory privatisation of the railways, with the travelling public seen as an inconvenience, getting in the way of the interests of shareholders. The time has come to put delivery to passengers before dividends to shareholders. That is what the Government have done.

Mrs. May: Although I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his response, we had heard most of it before. He has signally failed to answer adequately many questions that remain in the minds of passengers, staff and shareholders about the Government's handling of winding up Railtrack.

On 15 October, the Secretary of State made a statement in which he claimed that he had decided to put Railtrack into administration on Friday 5 October. Since then, as he has just confirmed, it has become clear that the relevant statutory instrument had been prepared in September and was published on 28 September—at least a week before the Secretary of State claims he made his decision.

There is a wealth of difference between assessing the implications of a decision, ascertaining what is necessary to make it and implementing it by using parliamentary

draftsmen and others. The information calls into question the timing of the Secretary of State's decision to wind up Railtrack and the validity of his statement to the House on 15 October. It suggests that staff and shareholders were misled.

Sadly, when the Secretary of State had already decided to wind up Railtrack, thousands of its employees were investing more of their hard-earned savings in the company. For the Government to allow people to invest their annual dividend while they signed away the railways' future is at least morally questionable. It is now open to legal challenge, and staff and passengers face months of uncertainty.

The Secretary of State prays in aid the statement of principles that was agreed between the Government and Railtrack. I suggest that he considers the third principle, which makes it clear that the Government agreed that

"The company . . . needs to receive sufficient Government funding, as determined by the Regulator."

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government threatened the regulator with legislation if he used his powers to intervene in Railtrack?

There are other signs that the Government's decision was taken before 5 October. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the arrangement for the chairman of Railtrack to attend a meeting with him at 4.45 pm on Friday 5 October was made on the afternoon of the previous day, Thursday 4 October, and that Railtrack was told that the time of the meeting could not be changed and had to be after the market had closed? Does he agree that that means that Lord Falconer was wrong in his statement in another place on 31 October that

"during the course of the afternoon the Secretary of State reviewed the papers, made up his mind and called immediately for the chairman of the board of the company"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 31 October 2001; Vol. 627, c. 1486.]?

In the light of the fact that the Secretary of State's private office had arranged the meeting on the previous day, will he reconsider his statement of a few minutes ago that the chairman of the board was called in immediately after he had reviewed the papers on 5 October? If he did not know on 4 October that he was going to put Railtrack into administration, why was the meeting called and why was its timing so critical?

The Secretary of State has admitted that administrators were first approached on 23 August. Will he publish the instructions that they were given then, and any changes to them that the Department subsequently made? When he decided that Railtrack was insolvent, did he take any account of the value of the stations that the company owns? Will he confirm that he was not able to proceed with winding up Railtrack without the authority of the Treasury and other Cabinet colleagues? When did he receive that authority? When was the Prime Minister's office made aware of his intention to put Railtrack into administration?

Will the Secretary of State confirm once and for all when he decided in principle to put Railtrack into administration? All the evidence suggests that the Secretary of State had decided to wind up Railtrack before the decision was announced to the company and the markets, and that the decision of 5 October related to the timing of the announcement and not to whether the company should be wound up.

We are not simply considering the Secretary of State's job but the credibility of the Government. Will the Secretary of State lay all anxieties to rest by agreeing to an independent public inquiry into the Government's handling of Railtrack?

As the pieces of the jigsaw come together, it appears that, far from the decision being made on the afternoon of 5 October, it was a drawn-out act of wilful destruction by the Secretary of State. It is clear that he has been bent on destroying Railtrack from the start. As a result, schemes will be delayed, investment postponed and the industry placed in a protracted period of stagnation. There is a huge obstacle in the way of future investment in the railways. That obstacle is the Secretary of State. He must go.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) raised several specific questions and I am more than pleased to answer them, because it is right that the House should be made aware of the facts and not allegations that have no substance. The first relates to the railway administration order. That document is 71 pages long and could hardly be drawn up overnight.

As I said to the House on 15 October, in order to protect passengers' interests, it was clearly right to explore the need for railway administration on a contingency basis. That was part of sensible contingency planning. That is the reality and it is as simple as that. There is no way that a railway administration order running to 71 pages could have been produced after I had had the conversation with Mr. Robinson on the afternoon of 5 October. It was therefore prepared on a contingency basis—as I said to the House on 15 October, before that issue was raised—in case railway administration was necessary.

The second issue relates to the chairman of Railtrack being invited to a meeting in my office on the afternoon of 5 October, after the markets had closed. The hon. Lady should be aware from my statement on 15 October that the Government were considering two clear issues. One was whether to go for railway administration and the other was whether to agree to the request from Railtrack for further Government funding. I said to the House on 15 October that I took the decision—just after midday, I think it was—on 5 October that we could not afford any further Government money to bail out Railtrack. Had I made the other decision—to provide additional Government funding for Railtrack—my advice was that it would also have been market-sensitive information. Whatever decision I took had to be communicated to Railtrack when the markets had closed, whichever the option was. The meeting was set up for 4.45 pm on the Friday, because whatever decision I took—and we did not know when it was arranged—would have been market-sensitive and had to be communicated.

In relation to the involvement of the Treasury and the Prime Minister, the decision was taken in the normal way. It was a Government decision which I took on behalf of the Government. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] It was taken on Friday 5 October. That is the 20th time I have told the House that and it is the truth of the situation.

In relation to the value of stations, those issues were considered by the High Court judge when he decided whether to agree to the petition. He agreed, because he realised the difficult situation faced by Railtrack. In terms of threats, there was no threat. In terms of the use of the

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regulator or denying the regulator his position, I was clear that the first people to raise the issue of suspending the regime of regulation were the advisers to Railtrack in August, when they produced the information. Of course, in my conversations with the chairman of Railtrack on 5 October, we covered the issue of how the regulator would deal with those matters, but the position was made clear at that time.

In terms of the responsibilities, surely the question that shareholders should be asking concerns the responsibility of the directors of Railtrack. They knew the financial situation of Railtrack—that without additional Government funding, they would be unable to make a going concern statement on 8 November—so why did not the directors, who have a legal responsibility to their shareholders, tell them about the financial situation? The directors failed to do so.

On the point that the hon. Lady raises about the demand now interestingly being made from the Conservative Benches for compensation to Railtrack shareholders, let us be clear what that would mean.

Mrs. May: I did not mention it.

Mr. Byers: If the hon. Lady is not arguing for compensation for Railtrack shareholders, she should say that clearly. It was not clear in her question. The argument was clear—that £3.60, the claim that they are making, is reasonable. It would mean over £1 billion of extra taxpayers' money going to the interests of the shareholders.

On the issue of the stations, the value of the stations was a matter for the High Court judge when he considered the petition on the Sunday afternoon.

That is the sequence of events. The Opposition may not like it. When the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) was in government, he was a sponsor of Railtrack. We have destroyed one of his better ideas, which says a lot about the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Railtrack had its time under the Conservatives. This Government have rightly brought it to an end.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, if anyone has set out in this sad sorry saga of incompetence to destroy Railtrack, it is the directors and the managing directors, who have made it clear to the market, which has responded by making a clear judgment on the worth of the shares, that they were not capable of continuing to meet their obligation? Is he aware that it was Railtrack's figures that put it in the difficulty where it was not able to meet the costs of the modernisation of the west coast main line? Will he give an undertaking that, whatever comes into being as a result of this appalling incompetence, the new organisation will not only be transparent and responsible to the passenger and taxpayer, but very different in kind from Railtrack?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point from her experience as the Chairman of the Transport Committee. I think that we now have an opportunity to look at how to restructure the railway industry to put the interests of the travelling public first. What most commentators recognise is that the way in which Railtrack was constructed originally denied it the opportunity to put the interests of the travelling public first. We have overcome that. It was because of Railtrack being unable to meet its debts that the High Court allowed the petition for railway administration. Now we can move forward and put in place a structure whereby, because it will be a not-for-profit organisation, any operating surpluses can be used for the interests of the railway network. At last we can make progress towards providing a railway network that is fit for the fourth largest economy in the world, which simply is not the case at the moment.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Although the way in which the Secretary of State has handled the Railtrack issue has led to some confusion, not least in relation to the ownership of various assets, I believe that he has broadly followed the right way. Does he not agree that it was absolutely sensible to work up in detail the various proposals before making a final decision, and that today's effort by the Conservative party is basically nothing more than whingeing on behalf of the shareholders, who since May 1996 have received £700 million in dividends and who, incidentally, obtained Railtrack plc in the first instance for a knock-down price, undervalued by £6 billion?

Does the Secretary of State not agree that what the vast majority of the travelling public are interested in is ensuring that we have a safe, reliable and affordable railway system? To that end, on the question of decision taking, having specifically promised an end to the self-defeating system of penalties and compensation, can my right hon. Friend tell us what action he has taken and what decisions he intends to make? Having promised greater co-operation and collaboration between rail and track, can he tell us what decisions he has taken on that issue?

Finally, may I ask the Secretary of State this: having promised a not-for-profit public interest company, limited by guarantee, can he once again give the House an absolute assurance that the new body that he will allow to come into being will categorically not see the recreation of that obscene conflict, in a monopoly, between shareholder profit and passenger safety?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman's figures are right: since 1996, the shareholders of Railtrack have received about £700 million in dividends. His figures are also right in relation to the knock-down price for which the Railtrack shares were sold. In fact, the current chairman of the Conservative party, when he was Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, conducted a most useful investigation into the circumstances of the privatisation of Railtrack. As Chairman of the Select Committee, he concluded that the shares sold by the Conservative Government at that time were undervalued by about £6 billion. That was taxpayers' money that could have been put to useful purposes. It is helpful that the current chairman of the Conservative party was able to provide that information for the benefit of the House.

Some of the confusion has been caused by the fact that there are two companies: Railtrack plc, which holds the licence to operate the network and which is in administration; and Railtrack Group, which is not in administration and is still run by the directors of Railtrack.

Any value in Railtrack Group can be made available to shareholders. That will be a decision for the directors of Railtrack Group—rightly so.

We are looking at penalties and compensation—as I think I noted in my statement on 15 October. We shall set out proposals and ideas to the House later on.

In relation to moving forward, I believe that the appointment of Richard Bowker as the new chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority has been widely welcomed. He will bring renewed vigour to the work of the authority and will give a real sense of direction and purpose.

Finally, yes, I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman that whatever structure is put in place—as is made clear in the guidelines that I announced last week—we do not want to repeat the structural mistakes that were made in relation to Railtrack and privatisation.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that when someone invests in that gambling den, the stock market, shares are likely to go up and then to fall again? When we consider Railtrack, it is almost incredible that the company made a hash of it. Now the Tories and their friends are worried about the money in their pockets. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House that when he discussed the three options the first was the present course; the second was to carry on handing over tons of money; and the third, which he has skimmed over very quickly, was renationalisation—I assume, without compensation? My right hon. Friend should not dismiss that option so lightly. When we consider the whole mess of British Rail and its 20-odd different pieces, at some time or other we shall have to come back to the question of a fully, publicly owned rail system in Britain.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes a case that some of us have heard before about the need to nationalise the railway industry. That was one of the three Rs put to us by the advisers to Railtrack: receivership, renationalisation or restructuring. I hate to disappoint my hon. Friend, but it was not an option that we pursued with a lot of vigour. However, the options before us as a result of going for railway administration will give us the chance to provide a railway network fit for our country.

My hon. Friend is right to say that shares can go up or down. What is interesting about Railtrack—uniquely for a private sector company—is that fully two thirds of all its income came directly by Government grant. That was the real problem for Railtrack. Of course, the company always depended on the Government to bail it out and sign the cheque but in the end it came once too often and the Government had to say no.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): The right hon. Gentleman talks about market-sensitive information. How can anyone have confidence in the integrity of his proposals when he stood back and allowed employees and the public to invest in Railtrack shares while he was working behind the scenes to devalue those shares? Does he not understand that he may retain the title for the time being, but that he is in grave danger of losing the moral authority that underpins it?

Mr. Byers: I can understand the anger that the right hon. Gentleman expresses because, of course, he was a member of the Government who put Railtrack in place. It is as simple as that, and the position is very clear.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: Shareholders.

Mr. Byers: Shares in Railtrack were devalued because of the actions of Railtrack directors, and the right hon. Gentleman needs to consider the fact that the price of Railtrack shares dropped dramatically over the years because of the way in which the company was run. As a former Secretary of State for Transport, he will know that there is no obligation on a Secretary of State who receives information in confidence from a company to give the details to shareholders. He knows very well where that responsibility lies: in law, it lies with the directors of Railtrack. They knew the financial situation that they faced and that the chairman had come to me on 25 July and said, "If you don't give me more money, I cannot make a statement on the 8th of November that we are a going concern." What did he tell his shareholders?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): Nothing.

Mr. Byers: That is right—nothing. He said not a word to his shareholders. I discharged my responsibilities, but did the directors and the chairman of Railtrack discharge theirs?

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): My right hon. Friend must be aware that a substantial number of rail passengers support his action because of the problems and difficulties that they have witnessed during the years of privatisation. He will also be aware that there are still a number of issues to be addressed on the east coast main line. Will the new authority undertake to complete the outstanding phases to bring the east coast main line up to standard? Even today, we experienced a 90-minute delay in services between Leeds and King's Cross, and passengers are complaining about that kind of service. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the new authority will continue to maintain and improve the east coast main line?

Mr. Byers: One of the benefits of the new proposals is that the operator of the licence will no longer be responsible for major upgrades to the network. One of the great difficulties that Railtrack faced with the west coast main line was the fact that the cost was originally estimated at a little more than £2 billion, whereas the estimates are now £6 billion or £7 billion, perhaps even more. That crippled Railtrack's finances. Under the new structure that we want to put in place, the network operator will be responsible for renewals, operations and maintenance of the network, but not for major infrastructure work.

We propose a special-purpose vehicle, whereby the Government, the Strategic Rail Authority and the private sector will work together to ensure that major projects can be completed. I am confident that the east coast main line

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could provide us with one of the first opportunities to use a special-purpose vehicle to carry out the work that I, as a user of that line, know will be so important in future.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): What advice on the timing of the Railtrack announcement did the Secretary of State receive from his special adviser, Jo Moore?

Mr. Byers: No advice.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Does my right hon. Friend accept that he would have been irresponsible if he had not put in train the detailed contingency work required to deal with the incompetence of the gang of feckless mendicants that was put together by the Conservative party? The fact that Conservative Members are unaware of the need for such contingency plans shows how far away they now are from the responsibility of government. If they continue with such absurd and pointless antics, it will be far longer before they can even form a credible Opposition.

Mr. Byers: It is noticeable that, since Railtrack was put into administration, no great difficulties have arisen. I want to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate all the workers in Railtrack. While the company has been in administration, they have turned up daily and worked in a dedicated and highly motivated fashion: they are railway people, putting the interests of the railways first.

In taking the decision to go for railway administration, we had to prepare for a range of issues, of which the railway administration orders are an example. The House would rightly have been critical if we had not been able to act on our decision to go for railway administration because we had not put the contingency arrangements in place. We had to make such arrangements—it was one of the options available to me. Therefore, when I took the decision on Friday 5 October, I had to make a judgment between railway administration or additional Government funding for the proposals from Railtrack. I took the decision that no further Government money would be made available, and we had the appropriate contingency planning in place for that decision.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): The Secretary of State ended his rather partisan statement by saying that privatisation had prevented money from being invested in services for passengers, and that instead it had been paid out in dividends. Will he confirm the answer that a junior Minister gave me: that the total invested by private investors in Railtrack exceeds by a factor of nearly three the amount paid out in dividends? Will the Secretary of State explain how people are to be persuaded to invest in other public-private finance initiatives when they know that the Government, having pocketed their money, may suddenly cease to pay dividends or to return any of it to them?

Mr. Byers: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Government made crystal clear our response in relation to Railtrack on 2 April, but I shall repeat that important statement for the benefit of the House. When we agreed on 2 April to make available £1.5 billion to Railtrack—£337 million of which was paid on 1 October—we wanted our approach to Railtrack and to other companies in the railway sector to be made clear to shareholders. That is why we said:

> "The Government stands behind the rail system but not individual rail companies and their shareholders".

Nothing could be clearer. Railtrack's shareholders should have seen that and asked whether the Government were going to continue to bail out the company. In the end, we decided that no further Government funds should be made available.

The right hon. Gentleman will also be aware that the City knows that Railtrack is a unique being. The City is still interested in public-private partnerships because it knows that they are quite different from the privatisation of the railways that he so enthusiastically supported.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I thank my right hon. Friend for the helpful statement that he will put the travelling public first. That is more than we hear from Conservative Members, who seem to be interested only in shareholders.

My right hon. Friend will be only too well aware that the channel tunnel rail link phase 2 will not just benefit the travelling public but will be enormously important to the economy of this country. It will bring huge regeneration opportunities to north Kent, east London and all points north. Will he therefore assure the House that major projects such as the rail link will go ahead on target? That would reassure my constituents in Dartford that it is business as usual and that we will have the economic development that we badly need.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to point out the importance of the channel tunnel rail link phase 2. He will be aware that it is a good example of how a special-purpose vehicle can be used effectively. The project is on time and is under budget, and we are confident that it will proceed. It will be unaffected by the changes made as a result of Railtrack going into administration.

My hon. Friend asked me to give assurances to the people of north Kent and east London who want the channel tunnel rail link to proceed. I can give them the commitment that they want: the project is moving ahead; it is on time and on schedule; and we look forward to receiving the benefits of that investment.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): As co-chairman of the all-party railways group, I put it to the Secretary of State that in all his statements on this sorry fiasco he has sought to define three separate categories. He has mentioned the travelling public and employees, and has exhibited his and his Back Benchers' visceral hatred of shareholders and the private sector. However, he has failed to understand that much of the travelling public and an even greater proportion of the employees are shareholders. Will he answer the specific allegation that his inaction between the end of July and early October created a false market in Railtrack shares? He misled shareholders and, in particular, did not discharge his responsibilities in the last week? Having talked about his three Rs, he should add a fourth—his resignation.

Mr. Byers: The decision was taken on 5 October not to provide additional funding for Railtrack. As a

consequence, Railtrack could not cover its debts because it could not control its costs. It would be interesting to know what approach the hon. Gentleman would have taken. On 25 July, I received information in confidence from Railtrack's chairman that unless it received more Government money it would not be able to make a going-concern statement on 8 November. Would the hon. Gentleman have expected me to tell Railtrack's shareholders of that on Monday? Clearly not.

There is a conflict in the Conservatives' approach. Information is given to a Secretary of State in confidence, which he abides by and respects, and he discharges his legal duties up to 5 October. Why did not the chairman of Railtrack ensure that his shareholders knew that without extra Government money he would not be able to make a going-concern statement? That is what the hon. Gentleman needs to answer.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Should not my right hon. Friend be grateful to the Opposition for raising this subject? It constantly reminds the public of the disastrous privatisation of the industry, the misery that has flowed from it and the vast sums of public money that have gone into private pockets. If I were Secretary of State, I would suggest that the Opposition continue to raise it time and again.

Mr. Byers: I am more than happy to discuss the way forward for the railway industry. As I think I said in my statement on 15 October, the circumstances of Railtrack going into administration are regrettable, and no one will celebrate them. However, now that it has happened, we have a golden opportunity to create a railway network fit for the 21st century. The real challenges lie ahead. We have to put in place changes to franchising, the structure and regulation to ensure that the railway system can respond to the new pressures and demands of the time. That is exactly what we intend to do with the new opportunities that are available to us.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must move on.

Orders of the Day

Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

4.13 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Chamber is slightly quieter and less crowded than when I addressed it a couple of weeks ago.

The Bill is straightforward. It has a single specific purpose—to equalise the entitlement to concessionary travel for men and women at the age of 60. It will bring to some 8 million the number of people who benefit from the Government's statutory requirements for travel concessions.

Concessionary fare schemes offer cheaper travel on public transport for people who are economically disadvantaged, and demonstrate our commitment to fighting social exclusion. The Government are committed to ensuring that bus travel in particular remains within the means of those on limited incomes and those who have mobility difficulties.

Legislation requiring local authorities to offer a minimum of 50 per cent. reductions for elderly and disabled people on local buses came into force earlier this year. Those changes are benefiting 5.5 million pensioners and 1.5 million disabled people across England and Wales. With this Bill, a further 1 million men aged between 60 and 64 will be able to share the benefits of concessionary travel, bringing the total number of people who benefit to about 8 million.

The provision for travel concessions is at present in the Transport Act 1985, the Greater London Authority Act 1999 and the Transport Act 2000. As I said, local authorities in England and Wales must arrange for elderly and disabled people living in their areas to receive a half-fare concession or better on local bus services—those within the local authority's area—subject to the person obtaining a permit, which must be given free of charge.

Local authorities also have discretion to offer further concessions on bus and other public passenger transport services, such as local trains, metros, ferries or the London underground. They may also provide concessionary travel outside their boundaries if they wish. Indeed, many local authorities offer concessions on other modes of public transport and fares cheaper than half price, or they join to offer an area-wide scheme—an obvious example of that is London. However, authorities must not offer a scheme providing less than the half-fare statutory minimum.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): The Bill raises an important point for the west midlands. I certainly welcome what my right hon. Friend is introducing, but as he knows, since he is a fellow west midlands Member of Parliament, the region has a totally free bus scheme, which pensioners are keen to keep. We hope—I am sure that he agrees—that there will be no undermining of that scheme, which has been in operation for some time?

Mr. Spellar: As my hon. Friend is aware, all that the legislation provides, which is important in many areas of

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the country, is the statutory minimum. It is open to local authorities to provide more than that, and, as he rightly says, the west midlands has been doing so for a considerable period. I know that he has been an extremely worthy exponent of the advantages of the scheme and the mobility that it gives elderly and disabled people in the region. He is aware of the commitment of local authorities in the west midlands to maintaining that scheme.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I was a little surprised to hear the Minister mention ferries. I understand that there is an issue concerning any crossing of the Solent except by jobseekers and some hospital patients. Will he clarify that specific matter?

Mr. Spellar: It is open to local authorities to offer further concessions. The matter raised by the hon. Gentleman may need to be discussed with the local authorities involved—presumably, Isle of Wight unitary council and Hampshire county council—but, following his intervention, I am certainly happy to have a look at it.

At the moment, entitlement to travel concessions for elderly people is linked to pensionable age, as defined in the Pensions Act 1995. That means that women may take advantage of concessionary travel schemes offered by their local authority at 60, but men must wait until their 65th birthday to do so. There is of course no age barrier to entitlement to concessionary fare schemes for disabled people. Given the opposition to current legislation, which discriminates on the ground of gender, we have decided to end the anomaly. In this Bill, we are therefore legislating to equalise entitlement at 60. We expect the provisions to take effect from April 2003 at the latest.

Under the provisions of the Pensions Act, pensionable age will start to equalise from 2010, so that by 2020 both men and women will receive state pensions at age 65. Clause 1(4) provides reserve powers for the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales to restore the link to entitlement to concessionary fares with that to state pensions. Should orders be made under that power—in 2010 at the earliest—the age of entitlement to concessionary travel for both men and women would similarly rise to 65 by 2020.

The Bill will not create new concessionary fare schemes. Local authorities will have to adjust their concessionary fare schemes to broaden entitlement to men aged between 60 and 64, but we envisage that the additional administrative burden on local authorities of issuing passes will be minimal.

Reimbursement arrangements under existing legislative provisions mean that the financial impact on transport operators will be neutral. Operators are reimbursed for revenue forgone so that they are financially no better and no worse off than if they did not participate in the concessionary fares scheme. Calculation of the level of reimbursement by local authorities may take into account increases in the number of passengers travelling—the so-called generation factor. Those reimbursement arrangements are well tried and tested, and we do not foresee any difficulty in administering or operating the increased entitlement.

There is no doubt that concessionary fares are expensive. In England, local authorities currently spend £440 million each year on their schemes, and extending eligibility to men aged 60 to 64 might cost an additional £50 million a year in England. That will be a new cost to local authorities and additional funding will be made available through the revenue support grant in the normal way as part of the local government finance settlement.

In terms of territorial extent, the Bill applies to England and Wales. The National Assembly for Wales has its own commencement powers. Concessionary travel is devolved to Scotland and separate legislation to equalise entitlement is making progress there. In Northern Ireland, entitlement is already equalised at 65.

As a further measure to tackle social exclusion, I take this opportunity to announce our agreement in principle to a proposal under which coach operators would offer half-price fares to older and disabled passengers on long-distance scheduled coaches in England; in return for the fare concessions, operators would, for the first time, receive fuel duty rebate. That was recommended by the Commission for Integrated Transport. After discussions with the Treasury, we are responding to that recommendation. Many older and disabled people rely on coaches to travel long distances, especially to maintain family links, so I am sure that they will welcome a free pass entitling them to half-price fares.

The Bill is a small but important measure that will ensure that men and women receive the benefits of concessionary travel without discrimination. That will be welcomed by an additional 1 million elderly people and, I hope, by the whole House.

4.22 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): The Minister is right to describe the Bill as a small and modest piece of legislation, but on a personal level it is frightening, because it reminds us of our own mortality. I noted with considerable shock that should we make the decision in 2010 to phase in the concessions to reflect the arrangements for the state pension, I will become a beneficiary in June 2014, and my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) in June 2016. The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), looks at me inquiringly, but I was far too gallant to look up in "Vacher's" the information needed for me to state the relevant date for her.

We shall not oppose the Bill, but we have some reservations which are founded on the law of unintended consequences. We are worried that the Bill might adversely affect some discretionary schemes such that some other groups have their rights withdrawn—the Minister had a taste of that concern courtesy of his hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick)—or existing beneficiaries of age-related schemes get a poorer deal.

The worst that could happen is that the scheme becomes bogged down in arguments about the formula, so we must be sure that it is correct and not based on false assumptions. The Minister is aware that the Local Government Association, of which I, with many others, have the honour to be a vice-president, believes that his Department might have underestimated the effects.

Agreement was reached on an increased aggregate revenue support grant. Provision of £54 million—slightly more than the original estimate of £47 million—was made for the cost of the proposals. I understand that the

Department estimates that the additional requirements under the Bill will cost about £50 million. The basis of those calculations will have to be carefully considered during the Bill's passage through Parliament.

The principal difference resulting from the reduction in the qualifying age for men is that many of the recipients will be in full-time employment; their transportation usage is likely to be greater than that of a retired person. I note that, in another place, assurances of full consultation were given by the Government; I hope that they will be honoured.

Mr. Spellar *indicated assent.*

Mr. Pickles: The right hon. Gentleman is nodding, which is reassuring.

Making estimates, both nationally and locally, of the consequences of the Bill is difficult, as operators have not produced a body of evidence for revenue that will be forgone by current public transport users in that economically active category. I am not entirely sure—I am not pushing this aggressively—that we are on tried and tested ground.

Mr. Spellar: In a similarly co-operative way, may I help the hon. Gentleman? Of course, he will be aware that concessionary fare schemes start at 9.30 am. Therefore, allowing for the fact that some people work shifts, a considerable number of those in work would not be able to use their pass because the rush hour is already excluded. We believe that that will tend to minimise the additional costs, but I recognise that there may be an issue, on which we shall consult.

Mr. Pickles: That is fair and reasonable but, by way of an attempted rebuttal, the situation will be continuing for a period of years. The Government are actively encouraging flexi-working and public transport companies are actively offering inducements to take up spare capacity outside peak hours. I therefore hope that the Minister will forgive me for saying that I am not entirely sure that we are using tried and tested methods.

The LGA said:

"the imposition of this specific new burden with its widely varying local consequences requires an innovative look at whether there can be transitional measures to ease the particular problems which some authorities may face."

That is reasonable. After all, this is the second large review that transport authorities have had to undertake within a relatively short period. We do not know how concessions will be bedded in. Ministers involved with the Transport Act 2000 talked about the way in which the measures would be bedded in. It will be several years before concessions are on-stream. It would be a mistake to embark on a fundamental review of the formula, but we should look most carefully at the transitional arrangements.

For example, £15 million was allocated to the London boroughs to cover the cost of equalisation for the freedom pass. Because of the way in which the grant system and the mechanism works, they received only £11 million, leaving the council taxpayer to fill the hole. There was a time when I could recite the formula for the allocation but, I am pleased to tell the House, I have forgotten it and have no desire to learn it again. Nevertheless, it illustrates the point that these things are complicated; we can come up with a simple intention with which we all agree, but find ourselves leaving local authorities materially worse off.

We have already heard from the hon. Member for Walsall, North, the Minister's friend and neighbour from the west midlands, who expressed worries similar to those of the Royal National Institute for the Blind. In a briefing document prepared for our debate, it says that there are concerns that

"need to be carefully considered as the Bill proceeds if there are not to be further cuts in the provision of concessionary fares for blind and partially sighted people and other disabled"

groups.

The Minister conceded that some earlier discretionary schemes are much better than existing schemes. The failure to match funding and reality has already created problems in a number of authorities. The Local Government Association has identified about 20 local authorities that have made amendments to existing alternative schemes which might be taken as reductions. The hon. Member for Walsall, North referred to the West Midlands passenger transport authority. Many authorities have removed a previous 100 per cent. concession for all modes of transport and replaced it with the choice of a free bus pass allowing half-price travel on buses, or the option of paying for a pass giving bigger reductions.

In Birmingham a scheme that had been in place since just before the first world war was ended without consultation with blind and partially sighted people. Redress was made following the intervention of local Members of Parliament, but I understand that the chairman of the passenger transport authority says that unless there is a substantial increase in grant, the process will be reversed. I hope that I am wrong about that, but the chairman is on public record as saying so.

Lancashire county council proposes to stop issuing passes to blind people allowing them to travel for a flat 30p fare. Existing passes will be maintained, but in future blind people will be issued with a statutory half-price pass for buses only. The RNIB highlights the problem of blind and partially sighted people having the right change, the possibility that people with white sticks or guide dogs may be targets for muggers, and the social inconvenience of blind people delaying other passengers.

The RNIB has anecdotal evidence that other local authorities have reduced their concessionary fares to the 50 per cent. statutory minimum, even before they incur the costs of the Bill when it is enacted. I do not believe for a moment that that is what the Government want. I also know of the long discussions and the brinkmanship in which everyone in local authorities engages with Government in respect of funding. That is why I refer to the law of unintended consequences.

We are not likely to get primary legislation such as the Bill very often. We have made a number of comments in relation to the Transport Act 2000 and the Greater London Authority Act 1999. We are missing an opportunity to pull together all the concessionary fares and put them on a unified footing. We should decide, for example, whether schemes are to be available to young people. The LGA believes that the Bill may provide an opportunity for statutory eligibility in respect of certain persons to be inserted in the Transport Act 1985 or the Transport Act

[Mr. Pickles]

2000, perhaps by applying the statutory minimum scheme or other schemes to schoolchildren and/or young persons in full-time education.

The Minister spoke about coaches. Some operators offer a 33 per cent. discount to people of pensionable age, which is welcome. When the Under-Secretary replies, it would be helpful if she could spell out the kind of sum envisaged. Will that be in addition to the £12 million coach concessionary fare scheme? Can she also clarify whether the money will come from the unallocated Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions funds in the spending plans for the next three years under the 10-year transport plan?

It would be helpful if the Minister could respond on another matter that causes all kinds of problems, particularly for authorities that border large conurbations. The problem is particularly acute when that large conurbation is London. It concerns journeys that start in one local authority area and finish in another. I have difficulty explaining to pensioners in my constituency why they experience problems when they undertake journeys outside the Brentwood area and into Romford. It is a serious problem for my constituents because all our hospital services are outside the local authority area, which causes confusion and resentment.

Help the Aged said of the Bill:

"Our ultimate goal is for all over 60 in the United Kingdom to have a freedom pass to travel by bus when and where they like in their locality. Only then will older people nationally feel that they have been given a fair deal."

Earlier this year, my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) introduced a private Member's Bill that sought to amend section 145 of the Transport Act 2000 so that it covered neighbouring authorities. That tidying up might be helpful. It may not be possible to do so, but it would be appropriate to examine the possibility in Committee. Only in that way will we be able to iron out that major anomaly in the scheme.

Obviously, we shall not oppose the Bill. We require some scrutiny of it, principally of the measures that I have outlined. We believe that the Bill should answer many of the questions left unanswered in the course of proceedings on the Transport Act 2000. Above all, we must guard against the law of unintended consequences.

4.37 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Like the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), Liberal Democrats welcome the Bill and will not seek to divide the House this evening, or whenever the opportunity arises.

Let me begin by saying in a friendly way to the Minister that it is a pity, given the crowded legislative programme, to have this legislation before us. The Government were given an opportunity in February of last year to put this matter right. During the Committee stage of the Transport Bill I moved amendments that would have had the same effect as this Bill. When I did that on 29 February, the then Minister, the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), said that he recognised the strength of feeling about the issue and claimed that his ministerial postbag

"has made me well aware of the issue, so I have thought hard about it"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 29 February 2000; c. 818.].

Unfortunately, having thought hard about it, he decided to do nothing and the problem remains.

The Government had a further opportunity to act before drafting this Bill. As a result of the endeavours of the excellent organisation, Parity, a case was brought before the European Court of Human Rights. The Government were told that Mr. Matthews case had been deemed to be admissible and they had to decide what to do. I was a bit disappointed in the Government's treatment of the issue. I looked back in *Hansard* and saw that on 13 February this year, when I asked the Government what they would do about it the same then Minister said:

"The Government are certainly aware of the Matthews case, which is before the European Court, to which the hon. Gentleman alludes. We are considering the implementation of that case and our response."—[*Official Report*, 13 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 144.]

I was delighted that they did not think very long about it. Only three days later, at the Labour party conference in Glasgow, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"I have also received representations saying 'why shouldn't men and women qualify at the same age?' I agree.

I can announce today that in a second term we will equalise the age for concessionary fares, benefiting an extra one million people over 60 years of age. That's good for transport and it's good for social justice, too."

It is slightly odd that the Deputy Prime Minister did not point out that this was being forced on the Government. It was not something that they had done of their own volition and could have done several months earlier. Notwithstanding all that, I am delighted that at last the Government have seen sense, many months later than might have been the case.

Like the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, I, too, have concerns about three issues, and I hope that we will have an opportunity to debate them in Committee. First, the Minister will be aware of concerns among local government associations that the Government's current estimates of the likely additional cost of this measure may be inadequate. I am delighted that the Government have given assurances that there will continue to be consultation on these issues. Like the hon. Gentleman, I accept that there is a problem in that we do not have an effective set of data to use as a starting base from which to make comparisons of future costs. However, it is vital that the Government stick to their assurance and allow for continuing consultation on costs.

The hon. Gentleman said very eloquently that there are many examples of local authorities having to make cuts in other concessionary fare schemes as a result of introducing new ones. He referred to examples in London, the west midlands and Lancashire. I am sure that many hon. Members will have seen those and other examples in the briefs that have been prepared in advance of this debate. Introducing one set of concessionary fare schemes must not lead to the abandonment of others that have been considered very necessary in supporting people of various groups.

Secondly, there is the opportunity to widen the scope of the categories of people who could be helped through concessionary fare schemes. Like many other people on both sides of the House, I am concerned about the situation in our educational system. One in two young people at the age of 16 gives up the opportunity to continue with any further education and, when questioned, a large proportion of them cite the cost of transport as

one of the key reasons for giving up further educational opportunities. Given that we are all desperately keen to see an increase in educational opportunities for that age group, I hope that we will use the Bill to address one of the barriers—the cost of transport—to opportunities for further education.

The third issue, raised by the hon. Gentleman, is cross-boundary travel. I received a briefing from Age Concern which expresses the problem succinctly. It says:

"The government's present limitation seems to expect that elderly and disabled people should keep all their family and friends, all their health care providers, all their shopping, entertainment and recreations, all their places of worship—indeed all their possible reasons for travel—in the same local authority area as themselves. The government may believe in strong local neighbourhoods, but this seems to be carrying the principle a little too far. Age Concern England believes in a minimum travel concession scheme which is truly national."

I recognise that the Government, too, wish to make progress in developing a national scheme, examining all the various schemes that currently exist and finding ways of establishing more integration between them.

I welcome the Minister's announcement that we have at last found a way forward in respect of national coach travel. He said that there would be a Government quid pro quo in relation to availability of a fuel duty rebate to fund that, but I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will tell us a little more about how she expects the scheme to operate. To whom, for instance, should an individual apply? I am not talking just about applications for tickets; what will be the source of the recompense? Will it come from local authorities, or will there be a nationally funded scheme whereby individual coach operators go directly to the Department for any recompense that is not covered by the availability of fuel duty rebate? This is, however, a move in the right direction.

I feel that there is further work to be done in Committee on the three issues of funding, the widening of the scheme to other groups—particularly young people—and its extension to cross individual council boundaries. Nevertheless, like the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, we welcome the proposals and look forward to making more progress in Committee.

4.46 pm

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): I welcome the Bill with open arms. I can tell the Minister that many of my constituents who have been writing to me about the issue for some months will also welcome it, as, no doubt, will others throughout the country.

Will the Minister clarify one point? If the National Assembly for Wales wants to bring the scheme forward to, say, April 2002, will it be able to do so? That is important, because the Assembly may want to introduce such schemes before other parts of the country. That is what devolution means.

4.47 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) in confirming that Her Majesty's Opposition strongly support this relatively straightforward measure, which arises from the Matthews case, which was taken to the European Court of Human Rights.

Like the hon. Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams), I should like to know when the Minister expects the measure to come into force. That is important, especially in relation to London. As she knows, the two-yearly scheme in London must be renegotiated at the beginning of 2002, and that poses a particular problem for the capital. If the Bill comes into operation before the end of this year, London will be able to incorporate it into the new scheme that starts in 2002; otherwise, it will have two options. Either it must pay for the additional scheme for a year, or the operation of the scheme will be delayed until 2004. I hope that she can clear that up. It is in everyone's interests for the Government to push the Bill through so that it can come into force by the end of this year, and the additional 1 million or so people who will benefit can do so in 2002 rather than 2003.

I calculate that the Government already invest, or propose to invest, some £571 million in concessionary schemes of one kind or another. Under the Transport Act 1985, which gives local authorities quite wide powers of discretion, they spend £440 million, and £54 million under the Transport Act 2000. As I understand it, this Bill will cost £50 million in England alone, and another £15 million in Scotland and Wales. With the fuel rebate scheme that the Minister for Transport mentioned today, which has an estimated cost of £12 million, the total Government spend on concessionary travel is £571 million. As I understand it, 7 million people—5.5 million pensioners and 1.5 million disabled people—benefit from concessionary travel, and the Bill's proposed scheme will make another 1 million people eligible. The Government are therefore operating a very considerable concession.

I should like to examine commuting, who will benefit from the new concession and when they will benefit from it. Last year, my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) promoted his Road Transport Bill which, had the Government accepted it, would have allowed one local authority's concession scheme to operate in another local authority's area. Such an arrangement seems only fair. If the Bill is to establish a national scheme, each local authority's scheme should operate in other local authorities' systems. I hope that the Minister will address that.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) asked about the scope of the Bill, which will clearly apply only to those who travel between 9 am and 11 pm. It seems likely that those who work flexi-hours and particularly those who have reached more senior posts towards the end of their working lives will be able to take advantage of the scheme. Will the Minister therefore say something about reimbursement of local authorities, such as those in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar, that face a burden because of considerably increased usage? I am glad that Ministers will consult the Local Government Association and the Association of London Government, but will they consider that issue carefully?

We all know about the anomalies that arise when any grant is distributed through the standard spending assessment via the rate support grant. Although I know that the Government are committed to distributing the concession outlined in the Bill by means of those mechanisms, I do not know why they cannot directly reimburse local authorities on the basis of concessionary journeys made, tickets issued or schemes implemented, so

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

that no local authority will be out of pocket. What do the Government plan to do if a local authority can prove—clearly, it would have to do so retrospectively—that it is considerably out of pocket because of the skewing effect of the SSA system?

Further to my hon. Friend's comments on the law of unintended consequences, will the Minister tackle the postal code lottery? On the Bill's Second Reading in the other place—I believe that this is precisely the type of example that my hon. Friend had in mind—in describing the situation for visually impaired people in Birmingham, Baroness Wilkins said:

"people in Birmingham have enjoyed free travel on public transport since 1913, but that is to end this August. Instead of a free off-peak travel pass, covering train, metro and all bus travel, or a pass costing £18.70 for free travel at all hours, they will be entitled to half-price bus travel only. If they want to continue to have the freedom to travel on the bus, rail and metro, they will have to buy extra tickets costing £232 per year for off-peak and £265 a year for 24-hour travel."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 July 2001; Vol. 626, c. 944.]

Instead of having something for a relatively nominal fee of £18.70, they face considerably increased costs. She went on to say that, not surprisingly, blind, deaf and partially sighted people living in Birmingham had been much distressed by the move. I hope that the Government will encourage local authorities to use their discretion and ensure that existing schemes can continue.

It is high time that we in this House ended the postcode lottery of Government money. If the Government offer a scheme on transport concessions, health or anything else, it should be offered to everybody in the country equally, and not on the basis of postcode.

Mr. Spellar: What about the council?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Who one elects to one's council is also important, and local authorities have discretion. Here we have a Government scheme that is fettering local authorities' discretion because councils will not have the money to offer such schemes in the future.

Are the Government happy that the scheme will absolve Northern Ireland, which, as the Minister mentioned, will equalise the age for the scheme at 65? That seems to be unfair to women. If women in Great Britain can take advantage of the scheme at 60, why must the women of Northern Ireland wait until they are 65?

It was unfortunate that Mr. Matthews had to go to the European Court of Human Rights to bring about this proposal. We are living in an age of increased equality and I hope that, in future, the Government will think more clearly and get the elementary things right before they rush legislation through the House. The hon. Member for Bath was right to point out that Liberal Democrat amendments tabled on a previous occasion would have avoided the need for us to discuss this measure this afternoon. When Opposition parties table amendments, I hope that the Government will consider our opposition with the depth and purpose that it deserves.

Nevertheless, 1 million people will benefit from the proposal and will be grateful to the Government for what has happened in the House today. I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure us that the scheme will come into operation at the end of this year, so that those 1 million people will be able to benefit next year instead of in 2003.

4.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I welcome this brief yet interesting debate on this short but important Bill. The level of interest in the Bill in the Chamber does not reflect that outside the House. I agree with the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) that given the gender and age profile of Members of Parliament, one might have thought that the Bill would have been of more interest to them. I assure him that I will be up with him collecting my pass.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall get into trouble with the Register of Members' Interests if I do not declare that I will collect my pass in 2013.

Ms Keeble: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

Concessionary fares are of major interest to a wide range of people outside the House, as is reflected in the constant letters and queries on the subject. Some controversies have been discussed this afternoon, such as the concerns raised by people from the Isle of Wight, Birmingham and the west midlands and elsewhere.

The Government have made it clear that local authorities' discretion is not fettered by previous legislation. We strongly encouraged local authorities to maintain their existing programmes and not to reduce their schemes because of legislation. Reductions in Birmingham and the west midlands have been discussed, but I understand that Birmingham city council has agreed to revert to its original scheme and pay for free travel through a free bus pass for blind residents, although other disabled residents receive a slightly less generous concession.

Anxieties have also been raised about Greater Manchester. The Department's advice makes it clear that it can continue with its previous schemes. Representatives from the area will meet me to discuss some of their concerns. We are anxious to ensure that councils maintain their existing schemes.

Mr. Pickles: Will the Minister confirm that the holder of the social services portfolio in Birmingham's cabinet is so worried about lack of adequate funding for the concessionary fare scheme in Birmingham that he fears that he may be forced to cut blind people's free travel again?

Ms Keeble: As we progress with the scheme, we will consult all the local authorities, and I am sure that Birmingham city council will want to raise the matter.

Hon. Members asked several other questions, which I shall try to answer before concluding with some general remarks. We were asked about cost. The total cost of implementing the Bill is expected to be approximately £50 million, but there will be careful discussions with local authorities about that. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar is right that the way in which the grant is provided to local authorities will have to be carefully calculated.

Earlier, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport announced a concessionary coach travel scheme, which will be implemented through the coach industry.

Discussions about that will take place with the industry. The scheme is expected to cost approximately £10 million.

Mr. Don Foster: What is its likely starting date?

Ms Keeble: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman that because we must sort out the exact details of its operation so that it is effected in an orderly way.

Hon. Members asked about cross-border travel. Again, it is up to local authorities to work together to provide schemes that are valuable to local residents. Nothing prevents them from making arrangements with each other to fulfil the travel requirements of their local residents. We urge them to do that.

The hon. Gentleman claimed that he thought of the scheme first and that we could have implemented it some time ago. He has made such comments before. For many years, entitlement to concessionary fares has been linked to the state pension age: 60 for women but 65 for men. It was expected that the age would gradually equalise at 65 by 2020 under the Pensions Act 1995. Parliament has therefore already legislated on age equalisation.

During the progress of the Transport Act 2000, we were aware of claims that entitlement to concessionary travel was unfair on the ground of gender. However, given that age entitlement for concessionary fares has been questioned again, and the strength of feeling about the matter, it is right to introduce this small but important Bill to equalise the age of entitlement earlier than 2020. I hope that hon. Members, including the hon. Gentleman, will accept the measure in the spirit in which it is intended.

Mr. Foster: I do.

Ms Keeble: Good.

Several hon. Members raised the serious issue of why concessions cannot be provided for everyone, but it is not possible; they must be targeted. Bus transport is one of the main means of overcoming barriers to work or attending hospital appointments and we need to ensure that people are not disadvantaged because of lack of access to it. The Government are especially concerned about that issue, and that is why we recently introduced the urban bus challenge, following the introduction of the rural bus challenge programme, so that we can find ways to target bus services at those people who need them. The lack of bus transport must not prevent people from leading normal lives or, especially, young unemployed people from finding work.

Several hon. Members asked about schemes in the devolved areas. In Wales, a half-fare scheme was introduced on 1 April 2001. The intention is to follow that with a Wales-wide free travel scheme, funded by the Welsh Assembly, at a further cost of £21 million a year, starting in April 2002. Equalisation for eligibility for travel concessions is expected to start at the same time as in England in April 2003, and I hope that that information satisfies my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams).

In Northern Ireland, a Province-wide scheme is run by the Government. It allows half-fare travel for elderly and disabled people on bus and rail services, with no charge for the pass. It is also intended to introduce free travel for pass holders from April 2002.

Mrs. Betty Williams: I seek further clarification on the situation in Wales. If the Assembly chooses to have a scheme that will equalise provision for men and women from April 2002, would it be possible for the Government to make provision in the Bill to allow it to do so, so that men in Wales will not have to wait until 2003?

Ms Keeble: Decisions of that sort are for the Assembly to make. One of the consequences of the devolved Assemblies is that they will on occasion take decisions that differ from the ones that we take here. In Northern Ireland, eligibility for travel concessions is already equalised at 65.

I think that I have answered most of the questions raised in the debate. The Government are committed to fighting social exclusion and to ensuring that all elderly people can take advantage of discounted travel. Extending the advantages to men aged 60 to 64 will help to achieve that goal. The Bill is a straightforward measure that will enable a further 1 million men to take advantage of concessionary travel on top of the 7 million elderly and disabled people who are already entitled to cheaper fares. The Bill will bring to 8 million the number of people who will benefit from statutory travel concessions, which means that at a minimum they will pay half-price bus fares with no charges for the pass. It will be a big help to many pensioners.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is it the Government's intention that the Bill should come into operation by 31 December this year to enable men aged between 60 and 64 to benefit next year instead of in 2003?

Ms Keeble: I have already dealt with some of those issues. The Bill first has to go through Parliament, and we are in the hands of various people—including the Conservatives—when it comes to the passage of legislation. We must also resolve several issues with local authorities about the implementation and costs of the scheme. However, whenever it comes in, it will be a big help to the many pensioners who cannot afford to use public transport to get out, to visit friends and relatives, to go shopping or to get to medical appointments.

The Bill underlines the Government's commitment to fighting social exclusion, promoting equality and, in particular, improving the lives of older people. I believe that it will be widely welcomed by people throughout the country. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

TRAVEL CONCESSIONS (ELIGIBILITY) BILL
[*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Question agreed to.

Education

5.10 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move,

That the draft Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, which was laid before this House on 23rd October, be approved.

Regulations made under the Education Act 1996, which were laid before the House on 23 October and referred to in the draft code of practice, provide the detail of the statutory requirements for assessments, statements and reviews of statements of special educational needs in England. Those consolidate the Education (Special Educational Needs) (England) Regulations 2001, the Education (Special Educational Needs) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2001, and the Education (Special Educational Needs) (England) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2001, which themselves replaced the 1994 regulations.

We have been here before. On 10 July, I stood at the Dispatch Box to open a debate to consider a draft of the revised SEN code of practice. We had a lively and informative debate. Hon. Members will recall that, in closing it, I promised that the Government would reflect very carefully on the concerns that were expressed by a number of those who contributed, many on behalf of parents, about the guidance in that draft on quantifying the provision in children's statements of SEN.

As hon. Members will know, following the debate, we withdrew the then draft code of practice from Parliament to reflect on those concerns, and the concerns raised by Members in another place. We have made changes to deal with those concerns in the draft now before the House.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Can the Minister explain why he was voting for this measure and we were voting against it at the same time as his Department withdrew it?

Mr. Timms: In closing the debate last time, I made it clear that we would listen very carefully and consider very carefully the points that were made to us. That is what we have done. The version of the code of practice that is before us reflects the results of our deliberations.

In the debate on 10 July, it was clear that a number of hon. Members were concerned that the guidance on quantifying the provision in children's statements of SEN could be interpreted as encouraging vague statements. Let me make it clear that it was never the Government's intention to weaken the position of children with statements. The guidance in the previous draft made it clear that a statement should describe all the child's special educational needs clearly and in full; set out the main objectives that the special educational provision aims to meet; specify clearly and in detail appropriate provision to meet each of the child's needs; and describe the arrangements for setting shorter-term objectives for the child and any special arrangements for the annual review of the statement. It stressed the importance of the school's monitoring and evaluating the child's progress during the year. It placed new emphasis on the importance of the local education authority monitoring with the school the child's progress towards identified outcomes.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): As the Minister knows, I have had a certain passing interest in these matters. Is it not in fact only because many local authorities' practice fell far short of the ideal prescribed or encouraged by all Governments that the argument and the controversy in relation to which he has now conceded the point has taken place? Is it not the fact that many local authorities either could not—or in certain cases would not—make adequate and specific provision that has brought this debate about?

Mr. Timms: First, I pay tribute to the close interest that the hon. Gentleman has taken in this matter over a long period and to the contributions that he has made to previous debates. Certainly, concerns have been expressed as to how the system has worked, although not exclusively in the aspects to which he alludes, and they have led to the need to revise the code of practice—hence the version that we are considering this evening.

All the advice in the earlier version of the code, to which I have drawn attention, is also included in the current version. The draft code, which we debated in July, advised that appropriate provision for each identified need should always be specified in clear, specific and detailed terms. It made it absolutely clear that LEAs must not have blanket policies such that provision is never quantified in statements—there have been some difficulties in that regard. Following helpful interventions during the debates in another place on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, the section in the draft code on assessments was strengthened to make it clear that professionals giving advice can comment on the amount of provision that they consider appropriate for a child, and that LEAs must not have blanket policies that would prevent that.

The draft code makes it clear that provision in statements should normally be quantified in terms of hours and of starting arrangements, for example.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): While the Minister is dealing with paragraph 8:37 of the draft code, can he give the House an example to show where provision should not be quantified?

Mr. Timms: In a moment, I will give the House an example of when such provision might not be appropriate.

The draft code also recognises—as does the current code of practice—that there will be cases where some flexibility is required to meet the changing needs of the child concerned. A code of practice can never dictate the precise details of the provision to be made for each and every child. There must be some flexibility so as to respond specifically to the individual needs and circumstances of different children.

The hon. Gentleman asked me for an example. In the case of a visually impaired child in a mainstream school—an example to which I have referred in a previous debate—it may be that the child or the school require advice or help from a specialist teacher of the visually impaired, but it may make no sense to specify the number of hours in the statement. Alternatively, a minimum number of hours may suffice, if the time needs to fluctuate with the changing needs of the child, or their teachers, for support. Similarly, the child may need low-vision aids and information and communication technology equipment. As the child matures or curriculum requirements change, that provision might become out of date, in which case the specialist teacher, with the school, will identify more

appropriate aids. I hope that that example enables the hon. Gentleman to see that there will be cases where it makes sense to be flexible about precisely how needs are specified in the statement.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Will the Minister confirm that that example represents an exception, not the rule, and that there will be flexibility only in exceptional cases?

Mr. Timms: I can confirm that we would normally expect the quantification to be in the statement. So that there is no confusion on that point, I reiterate the comments made last week in another place by my noble Friend Baroness Ashton: she pointed out that the word "normally" means that, in the majority of circumstances, we would expect to see provision in a statement quantified. In some circumstances there needs to be flexibility but normally we expect LEAs to quantify.

It is clear from the wording in paragraphs 8:36 and 8:37 of the draft code that LEAs should normally quantify provision in statements, but that there will be cases where some flexibility is required. It is equally clear that decisions must be taken on an individual basis by a careful assessment of the individual child's difficulties and the educational setting in which the child may be taught.

I have spoken first about quantification as it was the issue that most concerned the House, and I hope that I have provided reassurance on that point. However, changes have also been made that address other issues raised by hon. Members in July. First, the advice in chapter 7 of the draft code relating to children with medical needs clarifies that, where a child has medical needs that impact on his or her access to education, LEAs should consider whether there is a need for a statutory assessment by reference to the detailed guidance set out earlier in that chapter under four broad areas of need.

Secondly, the advice on school placements in chapter 8 now makes it clear that school governing bodies cannot refuse their school being named in a child's statement, but can only argue against it. The changes that we have made to schedule 27 to the Education Act 1996 ensure that schools are always sent copies of proposed statements before decisions are made about placement. That will place LEAs, schools and parents in a better position to consider and discuss placements at an early stage.

Thirdly, the draft code of practice and the associated regulations clarify that those who give advice can comment on the type of provision they consider appropriate if they wish, but they cannot, as now, give the name of a school. The draft code makes it clear that that should not, of course, pre-empt the parent's statement of a preference for a particular school or the LEA's eventual decision about the school, type of school or education otherwise that it considers appropriate.

Issues were also raised in the earlier debate about the advice in the draft code of practice on LEAs' duties to identify children with special educational needs who may need statements. The draft code is clear on that. Indeed, it sets out new requirements for LEAs to publish their arrangements for identifying children with special educational needs from July 2002.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): The hon. Gentleman refers to LEAs taking the decision and parents expressing a preference, but will he confirm that the LEA has the same obligation to take into account the preferences of the parents as it has in any case involving a parent whose child does not have special educational needs?

Mr. Timms: Certainly, the LEA needs to give great weight to the representations received from parents. I am not quite sure what specific point the hon. Gentleman wishes to make, but perhaps he will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we can return to the issue later, when I may be able to help further.

Mr. Willis: The issue should be dealt with the other way round. Will the Minister confirm that applications from students with statements of special educational need who transfer, for example, from year 6 to year 7 will be given preference over those of other children who may have selected a particular school as their first choice? In other words, is there an assumption that children with statements of special educational need will be necessarily given places in their first-choice school in preference to children without statements?

Mr. Timms: Yes, that is the case, although the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) was right to suggest that LEAs will need to take a decision that follows parents' preferences—but perhaps we can explore that issue further during the debate.

The draft code makes it clear that schools are expected to keep appropriate individual and whole-school records of children with special educational needs, including those with and without statements. Parents of children without statements have always been able to request assessments. Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, schools will be able to request assessments and have their requests considered in the same six-week time scale as requests from parents. Educational psychologists regularly liaise with schools about children who receive school-based provision for their special educational needs and alert LEAs to any child who may need an assessment. In practice, LEAs can fulfil their duty without the need for additional bureaucratic burdens to be placed on schools.

From January 2003, we will collect additional data, by LEA, on children with statements who are excluded from schools, so LEAs will know about those children. From September 2002, we shall ensure that any child who is excluded from school for 15 weeks will receive suitable full-time education. We expect LEAs to ensure that children with special educational needs who are excluded from school receive provision appropriate to their special educational needs.

The current code of practice has done much to improve the identification and assessment of special educational needs, but it can be improved. Teachers and LEAs have told us that the current code is too bureaucratic, that it does not focus enough on teaching and learning and that it does not reflect recent important developments in education.

We consulted widely on a draft code of practice last year, and most people favoured the main changes that we proposed, but further concerns were raised. We listened carefully to people's views on those issues and made a number of changes to the draft. In chapter 1, we have brought together the strategic planning functions of school

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governing bodies and local education authorities for SEN to make it easier for parents and others to know who is responsible for what.

In chapter 2, we have provided fuller guidance for LEAs on the services that they are expected to provide to parents through parent-partnership services and the authorities' arrangements for resolving disagreements with schools and parents. The guidance also sets out minimum standards.

In chapter 3, we have strengthened considerably the guidance on seeking and taking account of the views of children with SEN. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 now give stronger support for the role of the SEN co-ordinator in helping governing bodies and head teachers to raise the standards of achievement for children with SEN and to recognise their need for support within the school.

The guidance on assessments in chapter 7 has been strengthened to clarify the terms on which LEAs should seek advice. It makes it clear that they should seek the views of the child. We have also enhanced chapter 8 on statements to highlight the accountability that schools and LEAs share for children with statements when funds are delegated.

The draft code of practice is intended to remove barriers to participation and learning and to raise the attainment of all children. Its key principle—that children with SEN should have their needs met—reflects the Government's view that providing effective support for such children is an essential feature of an effective school.

We support the greater emphasis in the draft code of practice on the early identification of children's SEN. Some £25 million will be available over three years to help LEAs and their early years development and child care partnerships to improve local provision for young children with SEN. A multi-agency working party will also develop guidance for health and education practitioners on a coherent approach to the early identification of need. It will provide support for children under two with special needs and for their families.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): The Minister mentioned a figure that was pitifully low. He is aware that many of us think that a doctrinaire attitude is taken towards the placement of children in mainstream schools. That means that they may get a worse education at a higher price. Kent county council has calculated that, as a result of these provisions, it is likely to be able to pay for the identification of needs, but not to fund the meeting of the needs themselves. How on earth will local authorities pay for that?

Mr. Timms: I shall come to the point about inclusion shortly. It is an important matter, but I am confident that the Government's approach is right.

We support the greater emphasis on early identification. With the Department of Health, we are considering the educational implications of the introduction of newborn hearing screening where we are supporting a bank of training materials, activity in the next tranche of early excellence centres and support through SEN standards funds for 2002-03 to help early intervention. As children can have SEN at different stages of their school career—not just in their early years—the guidance in the draft code of practice on school-based intervention focuses less on procedures and more on improving teaching and learning.

We have reduced the number of school-based elements from three to two and cut the paperwork on individual education plans and annual reviews to free up time for teachers to concentrate on helping children to learn. That will be widely welcomed.

We have placed the voice of the child at the heart of draft code of practice. LEAs and schools are expected to seek and take account of the views and wishes of children with SEN throughout their school lives.

Partnership with parents is given a fresh impetus and greater emphasis in the draft code, which makes it clear that the parent-partnership and disagreement resolution services that LEAs are expected to provide following the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 should be of high quality. They will, of course, in no way affect the rights of parents to appeal to the SEN tribunal.

To come to the pointed raised by the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), essential guidance on the key features of the new statutory framework for inclusion that was introduced by the 2001 Act is set out in the draft code of practice. However, we have also consulted teachers, governors, local education authorities, teacher associations, voluntary groups, parents and others on separate statutory guidance on the new arrangements for inclusion. Copies of this guidance have been placed in the Library and we aim to publish it alongside the revised SEN code of practice.

The guidance provides practical advice on how the inclusion framework interacts with other provisions within the Education Act 1996; the reasonable steps that maintained schools and LEAs should consider taking to prevent inclusion from being incompatible with the efficient education of other children, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for North Thanet; instances when it may not be possible to include specific children; and the safeguards that protect the interests of individual children with special educational needs.

Inclusion can certainly improve the education experience of all children, but we have always been clear that one size does not fit all and that there is a continuing and essential role for special schools in an inclusive education system. The essential principle of our inclusion policy is to safeguard the interests of all children.

The hon. Member for North Thanet asked about resources. The principle is backed with substantial resources. Last week we announced an additional £9 million in the SEN standards fund for the coming year, taking the total available funds for SEN to £91 million. That will help to support training on the code of practice and give direct practical support to inclusion. Governing bodies can also, of course, deploy resources provided through a school's budget share to support additional training. The increase in the standards funds is only one part of a major investment in education in which we will have increased overall funding per pupil by nearly £750 in real terms between 1997–98 and 2003–04.

Hon. Members will appreciate that we have taken very seriously all the views that were put to us. We have acted on them and addressed them in the draft code of practice. I am pleased with the response to the revised proposals by those outside the House who follow such matters, and I commend the draft code to the House.

5.32 pm

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): A casual observer looking around the House at the peak time of 5.30 in the afternoon would think that we were discussing a peripheral issue of little consequence. We are not. The code of practice directly affects thousands of the most vulnerable among us, yet there are six interested Labour Members and the Minister and no interested Liberal Democrats other than the party's spokesman. Many of my colleagues are, of course, here because we have—

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Count them!

Mrs. Laing: I cannot because they are behind me, but I know that there are far more Conservative Members present than Labour Members. *[Interruption.]* Proportionally, there are considerably more.

As ever, it is not quantity that counts, but quality. As the Minister just admitted, it is the quality of our arguments on this extremely important subject of special educational needs that has prevailed. How could the Minister stand at the Dispatch Box and talk about consultation and listening when he has come here to do a huge U-turn?

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Many Labour Members made the same points during the consultation process as those made by the Opposition and in the other place. It is the result of the total wisdom of all those who were interested that has brought about the changes.

Mrs. Laing: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman makes that point. I pay tribute to the Labour Members who were brave enough to defy their terrifying Chief Whip and stand up for what they, and we, believed was the correct approach. The Minister did not think that we were right, but he has now changed his mind. Like the hon. Gentleman, we are pleased that the Minister has presented yet another draft of the special educational needs code of practice.

Sadly, it is typical of the Government to have tried to implement policy without having thought it through. I hope that the Minister will join me in thanking my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) and my noble Friend Baroness Blatch, who have shown the Minister the error of his ways and whose arguments he has accepted. He has been saved from making the wrong decision by their arguments and persistence. He and his Government owe them a debt of gratitude.

It is typical that this Government have dogmatically stuck to their original position while ignoring the advice and views of many acknowledged experts on the subject—not Conservative Members but members of outside bodies who devote their lives to trying to improve the plight of children in need of special education, and who ought to have been listened to earlier.

Implementing this code of practice soon is not the same as implementing a code of practice six months or a year ago; more children would have benefited if it had been implemented sooner. So, moving today's motion is not the same as accepting our arguments months or, indeed, years ago—or simply leaving alone the 1994 code of practice, which was implemented by the previous Government.

It was hard to keep a straight face while watching the Minister. I compliment him on managing to do so while he spoke about consulting and how, from now on, the Government will consult on other matters in the area. I am sure that the Minister now realises that there is no point in consulting if, following the consultation procedure, everything that was said to the Government is totally ignored.

It is a matter of record that the previous version of the code of practice was eventually laid before the House in June after nearly a year of dithering following its publication. On 10 July, a debate took place, in which the Minister ignored the comments of my hon. Friends and some Labour Members.

As my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) has just pointed out, because of our system of deferred voting, about which I suppose I had better not make any particular criticism—hon. Members may well infer it—Labour Members were being whipped into the Lobby to vote for the code of practice at the very moment on 11 July that the Government were withdrawing the motion, just before it was to be put before the other place. We had the farce of Labour Members putting their crosses in the box, voting in favour of a code of practice that at that very moment was being withdrawn. To say that that is inconsistent is an understatement.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Joined-up government?

Mrs. Laing: It certainly is not joined-up government; the Minister does not know what he is doing. However, a sinner's repentance is always welcome. We welcome the withdrawal of the previous code of practice and the Minister's courage in coming before the House yet again on this subject to introduce a much better one.

It is hard to understand why the previous Secretary of State was so keen to downgrade the need for specificity in the drafting of statements. We did not understand it then, nor do we now. Many of the organisations representing children with special educational needs have long fought to have statements written clearly, without any room for misrepresentation. That is the least that parents of children with special educational needs can reasonably expect. They deserve far better than a woolly, vague statement.

We welcome the fact that the new code of practice requires that a statement contain details of hours of provision, staffing arrangements and any additional equipment that might be necessary. We supported those changes previously and we welcome them now. If only the Minister's colleagues were as brave as he has been in making a U-turn after listening to the better arguments voiced by my hon. Friends. However, I do not take credit for the changes solely for my hon. Friends; I take it for the many groups outside the place—including the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the Independent Panel for Special Education Advice—which argued that the Government were not doing their best for children in great need.

The Government have realised that they were wrong. We are glad to see that they are now almost right. We will not oppose the code of practice, but I feel obliged to point out that it is still not perfect. The RNIB has pointed out that the code includes neither provision for mobility

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education for children with sight impairment, nor provisions on early detection of visual impairment. We share the RNIB's concerns: we agree that, to a child with impaired sight, mobility is as essential as language skills are to any other child. I will give way to the Minister if he would like to respond on that point.

Mr. Timms *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Laing: No, the Minister does not wish to respond. Perhaps he will respond in writing later, or perhaps he will take the code of practice away again for redrafting and reintroduction at some future date—although I hasten to add that I do not encourage him to do that. We want the code of practice to pass now. Although we hope that further improvement will be made in future, we do not want to delay the implementation of the code any longer. The Government's dogmatic attitude has caused it to be delayed for long enough.

Mr. Gale: My hon. Friend is being characteristically generous to the Government in applauding the changes to the code of practice. It is all very well to will the ends, but where are the means? I understood the Minister to say that there is to be £25 million over three years for early years provision, presumably spread between approximately 100 local education authorities. Where is the beef?

Mrs. Laing: My hon. Friend, as usual, makes an excellent point. The Minister spoke, as he and his colleagues always do, in vague terms about funding per child throughout the country. He repeated an announcement that was made earlier this week about additional funding—but additional to what?

It is hard to know what Ministers mean when they talk about additional funding, because we can never be sure how often they have already added in the chunk that they are talking about. The Minister explained that the money he mentioned at the end of his speech was in addition to another sum, and he admitted that it had previously been announced. I will give way to the Minister if he wants to provide clarification, but it appears that he does not want to intervene. If the money is additional, to what is it additional? How often has it been announced? Sometimes, we have difficulty interpreting the figures correctly, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) said, because we can never be sure how many times an announcement has been made.

As I said, we welcome the return to the principle of the clear and precise wording of statements in the 1994 code of practice. We are pleased that the Minister has come to the House to restore the specificity and quantification provisions, as it was vital to do so. Nevertheless, we still doubt the Government's commitment to special educational needs.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Shame.

Mrs. Laing: The hon. Gentleman has responded to what I am saying, but the Minister still has not. I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman really thinks about the Government's commitment, he will join me in doubting it.

I have a letter from Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard, whose daughter Claire needs special educational provision. They are just one example of many thousands of parents who are not certain about what will be done for their children, what they can rely on and what sort of plans they can make for their daughter and the rest of their family because they are not certain that they can trust the Government to do what they say they intend or hope to do for children with special educational needs.

In my constituency, I regularly meet the head teacher of Oak View school, an excellent special school. He came to see me recently and explained that, although it is well known that the teacher shortage in our Essex area is critical in schools in general, the position for special schools is very much worse. He told me that a teacher in a special school in Loughton receives approximately £1,000 a year less than a similar teacher who works in outer London, only one mile way away. It is hard enough to recruit teachers to special schools without specific provisions that make it more difficult. Here is a case where teachers are suffering discrimination in the very area—SENs—where we desperately need to recruit them.

I wrote to the Secretary of State's predecessor on 14 December 2000 about that important issue, but I have yet to receive a reply. How can anyone doubt my concern about the Government's commitment if the Secretary of State, in all these months, has not even replied to my letter?

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Nor mine.

Mrs. Laing: Nor, indeed, to my hon. Friend's letter. If the Secretary of State has not even responded to a simple question about salaries, how can the Minister doubt why I should be concerned about his commitment and that of his Government to special educational needs?

Does the Minister know just how many special schools throughout the country are currently under threat of closure? Oak View school in my constituency is under threat of closure because of funding problems and the enormous bureaucracy heaped on it. How many more schools are in a similar position? I will happily give way to the Minister if he wants to respond. I understand why he does not want to respond when I ask how many schools—perhaps he does not have that information at his fingertips—but will he tell the House whether he has any plans for stopping special schools closing? He clearly does not want to respond. I understand that. I take it to mean that he has no plans.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): On special needs schools, Brook Farm school in my constituency closed, despite a year's stay of execution following many appeals and representations to the former Minister. Its closure has added to the deep anxiety felt by parents of children who require special needs education. Not only have school places gone, necessitating longer journeys, but the introduction of the initial code caused great anxiety about certainty and quantification, particularly in respect of respite opportunities. For at least a year, and in my constituency for two years, parents and children have lived in a state of deep and unnecessary anxiety, because the situation was not handled by Government in a timely and more responsible manner.

Mrs. Laing: As usual, my hon. Friend is correct. Children in need of special education provision are not

statistics. They are not numbers on a pie chart. They are individual people who are part of a family. Their parents have to plan not only for the children who are in need of special education provision, but for other children in the family. That is why they need to know the precise quantification of care that is to be provided, and why they need certainty for the future.

The Government have not provided certainty. The Minister's presence in the House today to introduce a different code of practice from the one introduced only four months ago shows clearly that certainty has not been provided by the Government. It is not surprising that parents of children who attended the school described by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) are more than concerned. Of course they do not trust what the Government say, because the Government change their mind this way and that. If a Government can change their mind right in the middle of a vote that is still taking place on an order laid before the House, they can change their mind any time and in any way.

If the Minister wants to show real commitment to special education needs, we will have to be convinced that he and his colleagues intend to provide the right funding for their plans, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet said. They will have to convince us that their plans are consistent and that they will do what they say they will do.

In this area more than any other—there are many, many others in which the Government say one thing and do another—we have a striking example of the Government saying one thing and doing another. On this occasion, we are pleased that they are doing what they said they would not do, as they are now doing the right thing. The Minister gestures as if he is confused by what I am saying. I am not confused. The people who are confused are the parents of children who require special educational provision. They are among the most vulnerable in our society. They should not be confused. They should be able to depend on the Government's word, and they should know that if the Minister says something in the House, he means it.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way to me a second time. She is making a powerful point. Our welcome for the Government's U-turn on the code does not diminish the unnecessary and untimely suffering and deep concern caused to families by the terms of the original draft order. They immediately recognised that it would throw into great uncertainty the care that they had already arranged. There was a deep suspicion that that was being done on financial grounds, rather than being motivated by concern for children and their needs.

Mrs. Laing: Once again, my hon. Friend is correct. Those parents have had more than a year of anxiety, not knowing what would happen to their children, what the Government would do, or whether the Government would listen to their concerns, as expressed by organisations such as the RNIB and IPSEA. At first, the Government did not listen, but now they have listened, at least in part. Parents have nothing on which to rely. That is wrong. Their children are among the most vulnerable people in our society and they deserve better.

We accept the order. I am not calling on my hon. Friends to oppose it, but we hope that it will not be withdrawn again tomorrow.

5.56 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): It was incredibly sad to hear the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) use her first major contribution at the Dispatch Box to deliver a party political attack on the Government on an issue of such importance and sensitivity. The fact that she had nothing whatever to say about some of the core issues relating to the code demonstrates the lack of integrity of an Opposition who have clearly not come to grips with the fact that unless—

Mrs. Laing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: I will not give way. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] There is no doubt that, in respect of schools, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 was an important landmark on the journey towards a more inclusive society. The work of previous Conservative Governments on the matter dates back to the Education Act 1981—the first major education Act which introduced statements. Today's performance does a disservice to past Secretaries of State who did an enormous amount to establish inclusive education in our schools. Baroness Blatch needs a special mention for the work that she has done on the issue, together with my hon. Friends in both Houses.

This morning, I accepted a cheque, presented by Abbey National, on behalf of Barnados, which operates a restaurant employing young adults with learning disabilities in Harrogate. Virtually half of the young trainees who work in that commercial restaurant have Down's syndrome. When I met them this morning, I was reminded of the comment made by Lord Rix in another place when the code of practice was debated. He mentioned that he had just spent a wonderful day with his grandson, who is a Down's syndrome child. Lord Rix, peers like him and others who have fought for an inclusive society will have their dreams brought one stage nearer. We hope that in years to come, Lord Rix's grandson will enjoy the fruits of the code of practice, if the Government implement it in its entirety.

We welcome the U-turn by the Government, if that is what it is. There was a vicious attack on the Government in the House, and there would have been a similar attack in another place, over the code of practice that failed to include the quantity of resources attached to statements.

When one looks back to 1981 and to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, one sees that the great deficiency in special needs provision in schools was the quantifying of statements. Previous Governments did not achieve that. I worked in schools that pioneered inclusive education for children with physical difficulties, sensory impairments and severe learning difficulties. As a headmaster, I never had sufficient resources to deliver what parents, children and teachers needed. We should seek to move a stage further towards delivering that. I do not criticise previous Governments, who made noble efforts in that direction, but we must keep that constantly in mind.

The code of practice does many good things. It is absolutely right to reduce from five to three the steps to be taken before statements are issued. I agree that there should be two steps for schools, and most schools will welcome more simplicity in respect of record keeping. However, Liberal Democrats particularly welcome placing parents at the heart of this issue and establishing, through local education authorities, proper parent panels and discussion forums to ensure that problems do not arise in the schools but are sorted out beforehand.

[Mr. Willis]

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) made two interventions with which I absolutely agreed. The issue of parents is crucial. LEAs do not have sufficient resources to do what they are expected to do and they are now being given new responsibilities. How are they supposed to set up the new organisations under paragraph 2:17 and run them efficiently unless they have additional resources?

Mr. Gale: As the hon. Gentleman has come thus far with me, perhaps he would come a little further. Does he agree that, given that we shall lose good special schools because of the doctrinaire approach that will force children into mainstream education, that mainstream education and support will be even more expensive, so we shall need even more resources?

Mr. Willis: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, I shall come to that point and meet him some of the way, but not all the way. I disagree with his premise that we shall see the end of special schools. The hon. Gentleman, who has a great deal of integrity in this area, will accept that the number of special schools that have closed in the past 10 years is extremely small. Virtually the same number of children are in special schools now as when he was a junior Minister in a previous Government. It is wrong to say that special schools are closing all the time.

Let me deal with the key issue of resources. The Minister rightly said—indeed, the code of practice says so—that the whole issue of inclusion depends on schools themselves being inclusive. Making a school inclusive is a costly business. It is not simply a matter of providing resources for an individual child, or a few children, with special needs. Paragraph 6:2 of the code of practice clearly states:

"All teachers are teachers of pupils with special educational needs."

If inclusion is to work, it cannot be done on the cheap; it must be done with sufficient resources to enable schools to work as a community.

The hon. Member for Epping Forest was correct to say that the Government constantly reannounce funds. I have just looked at the £91 million that the Government have aggregated, which is about £4,000 per school. It is absolute nonsense to expect schools to put in place an inclusive SEN policy with that sum. The reason why so many teachers, heads and governors are fed up to the back teeth with an inclusion policy without the necessary resources is that, to deal with children with behavioural difficulties—an increasing number have severe behavioural difficulties—they need to train the whole staff. That is of paramount importance.

A child who is partially sighted or has a severe hearing disability cannot simply be put into a class where a particular teacher or SEN co-ordinator has been trained; the whole staff need training in managing such children. That cannot be done on £4,000 per school. It needs a significant investment in training. Will the Minister press the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State to recognise that special education provision is at a crucial point? The code of practice can make a real difference, but we must have the necessary resources.

Sadly, the code of practice scarcely mentions special schools, which are important. It is as if they simply offer a different route in meeting special educational needs. They do not. Special schools provide not just an alternative route but must be at the very centre in dealing with special needs children. Unless we regard special schools as centres of excellence, and resource and research centres, we shall make no progress. I hope that the Minister will encourage his colleagues to do that.

The whole House is delighted that the Government changed their tune on quantifiable provision in paragraphs 8:35 to 8:39 of the code of practice. We do not want blanket policies, but LEAs were often forced to have blanket policies because they had meagre resources to apply to special needs. We want those policies to be specific, clear and detailed and we welcome the Minister's commitment in that respect, but Liberal Democrats do not accept that provision should "normally" be quantified, as stated in paragraph 8:37 of the code. I challenged the Minister to give an example and, to be fair to him, he gave the example of a visually impaired child whose needs would change. That is a cop-out. Provision should not normally be quantified; it should always be quantified. There is no reason whatever why a statement could not be altered to meet different needs during the year. In that way, the child and his needs, rather than the resource implications, would be central. I hope that the Minister will accept that and put in place ways of allowing those concerned to look carefully at statements that are not quantified under the code of practice.

Will the Minister say in his summing up whether the new statements that are quantified will then be mandatory on the school and the LEA? If they are not, they are not worth the paper on which they are written. That is the crux of this debate. Once a statement is made that a child with speech problems, for instance, must have four hours' provision a week, who is liable if that is not delivered? Is it the school, the LEA or the Government?

Where a child with a statement of special needs moves into the independent sector, as will increasingly happen as parents choose the provision for their child, do the resources that go with that provision move into the private sector with the child, or must the private sector seek those resources separately?

There is a point of principle here, and that is the child. The parents may decide that they want a particular type of provision for their child, such as very small classes, which cannot be provided by the LEA. Given the additional resources needed to meet their statement, will that provision continue to be met in that area?

We welcome the issue of identification. The code of practice goes a long way towards saying at early years, primary and secondary stages which conditions should apply for identification. That is a huge leap forward in thinking. I also welcome the announcement of hearing screening for newborns. The hon. Member for Epping Forest referred to screening carried out by the Royal National Institute for the Blind. To have it written into the code that those two tests will be given to children at an early age will make a huge difference.

Paragraph 1:29 of the code of practice refers to SEN co-ordinators in early years settings. In my constituency and many others, particularly rural ones, some of the settings are very small because of the size of the village. Indeed, many children are looked after by child minders.

It is nonsense to think that a child minder would employ a SENCO, and I know that the Minister does not intend that to happen. The code says that they can join together and employ a SENCO. They cannot—most child minders and early years settings work at a loss. They do it because it is part of social giving in most communities. They are embarrassed even taking the minimum wage from parents. Will the Minister consider whether the early years and child care partnerships could be obliged to employ SENCOs to deal with small settings and child care placements? In that way, a professional person would be employed by the local education authority whose job it was to ensure that special needs provision was delivered at a local child-based level across all the early years settings. That is a legitimate job for the LEA. If the Minister wants to privatise the service and give it to someone else, that is his decision. However, this issue needs to be considered.

The other area of weakness is special groups; the issue of excluded children is mentioned. However, a child is seven times more likely to be excluded from school if he has a statement of special needs than if he is within any other category. It is a huge problem. On the whole, children with behavioural difficulties such as autism and dyspraxia are the most affected. We must regard them as a special group. Along with local authorities and school settings, we must ensure that the infrastructure is in place to deal specifically with children who have behavioural difficulties. Travellers' children often have special needs that need to be met in a much more entrepreneurial way, and the same is true of immigrant children, particularly children of asylum seekers.

We welcome much in the code of practice, such as the changes with regard to naming a specific school. We are delighted that schools cannot refuse to take children simply because they have special needs. That was not right, and it is good to see a change of heart. It is good, too, that there will be more discussions about the placement of a child between the LEA, parents and other professionals. However, at the heart of the code is what happens in school and the people who organise and work with children with special needs, particularly SENCOs. Paragraphs 5:33 and 6:36 make it clear that SENCOs should have more time. All Members who have asked a SENCO, "Do you have enough time to do the job?" will know that the answer is no. In some schools, the amount of time SENCOs have is derisory. I hope that the Minister will instruct Ofsted to ensure that when it inspects a school, those who provide the infrastructure to deliver special education needs have the time to do it. We have gone a long way in training SENCOs and professionalising the special needs provision, and we need to do it even more.

There are two ways in which we could help schools immediately. First, there could be standard pro formas for individual education plans. The idea that all schools should devise their own is nonsense. I hope that model IEPs could be put on the internet or the website of the Department for Education and Skills. We should encourage such provision. Secondly, to enable schools, particularly large ones, to track all children with special needs—not just those with statements—needs sophisticated software. The Government can commission that on behalf of our schools.

This is a major step forward. If the code of practice can have the necessary resources, the Government will go down in history as having taken a quantum leap for youngsters who are born without the advantages that many of us have.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The Front-Bench speeches have taken 66 minutes out of the 90 available, leaving very little time for Back Benchers. I hope that those hon. Members will be mindful of each other's needs if all are to make a contribution.

6.17 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I was one of the Members who voted against the Government last time, solely on the basis of the wording of paragraph 8:37. Admittedly, it was one of the shortest rebellions in parliamentary history when it was withdrawn within two hours—a form of "codus interruptus", I suppose.

I was concerned about quantification, and I remain anxious about the ability of local authorities to exert flexibility. The Minister's example was not reassuring because I should have thought that the change in circumstances would have been picked up at the annual review. The system proposed already covers that flexibility. However, I am open to persuasion.

When the Minister replies, it would be worth while if he made an explicit statement that could be used by people in defending their rights if there were any possibility of flexibility being abused by local authorities. He could say that flexibility should not be used as a device for avoiding clarity of quantification of a pupil's needs and that any attempt to use it as such would be contrary to the spirit of the guidance.

How will the Minister monitor the use of the flexibility? We have been assured that provision should normally be quantified, but I hope that the flexibility will be used only in very rare and exceptional cases, and that a report would be made to the House if it were believed that an abuse had occurred. That would require a monitoring system.

6.19 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I am grateful for the chance to ask the Minister about the number of statemented children in Herefordshire. The current figure is 4 per cent. and I believe that it is due to be cut to 2 per cent. That is of particular concern to me because Wigmore primary school in my constituency has a special educational class with 12 places. It received a gold award from Ofsted for its excellent special educational needs teaching. Since then, I have been told that the number of places is due to be cut to six. That is awkward, because there are seven statemented children in the school. One full-time staff member is expected to go part-time. In a city that is understandable, but in a rural area close to the Welsh border, it is not practical. It means that that person will lose half their salary.

The extra pupil may or may not be able to fit into the school, and the family are deeply concerned. Moreover, we cannot know how many statemented pupils there will be next year or, indeed, in the year after that, which is worrying. It seems that children with special educational needs are being forced into pigeonholes to suit policy enforced by the local education authority. Although the

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matter is still under consultation, the staff in question seem to believe that most of the decisions have already been made.

I hope that the Minister will consider the problem in rural areas, where flexibility does not exist. I also hope that in a school whose excellence has been identified and praised by Ofsted, the present position will be preserved. I am worried by paragraph 1:14, which states that LEAs must

"publish their general arrangements, including any plans setting out objectives, targets and timescales covering local arrangements for"—

this is the last requirement in the paragraph, and I hope that the House will forgive the grammar, for which I am not responsible—

"explaining that element of provision for children with SEN (but without statements) which the LEA expects normally to be met from maintained schools' budget shares and that element of such provision that the authority expects normally to be met from funds which it holds centrally."

If the LEA explains that it cannot meet those special requirements because it has no funds, what will happen to children with special educational needs?

6.21 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I first met a child suffering from autism during my second term as a probationary teacher. He had a learning support assistant and was in the fourth form, as we called it then.

I had no idea what autism was; I was never told. I knew nothing about the child's needs. He was in, shall I say, a "lower order" class, which for a probationary teacher was not always the easiest environment in which to maintain discipline. It must also have been very difficult for him. Fortunately, that was a long time ago and things have moved on—partly, at least, thanks to my noble Friend Lady Young, who introduced and worked hard on provisions for pupils with SEN following the Warnock report.

The Government's amendment to the code of practice is welcome—I say that unconditionally—but much work remains to be done. Local authorities must be persuaded to recognise and assist the parents of pupils with SEN. I owe a lot to Claire Franklin—one of the parents of autistic pupils on the Isle of Wight who contributes much to supporting others in the same position—and to Jimmy Spence, a former Isle of Wight councillor, who brought the issue to my attention two or three years ago. I also owe a lot to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), who has done much work for youngsters with autism spectrum disorders. She kindly visited the island, and met Claire and Jimmy and many other mothers and fathers of pupils with special needs.

It is not enough to write things down. It is essential for local authorities, whatever their political complexion, to show a commitment—a genuine determination—to meet the requirements of SEN pupils. Let me a give a few examples. In doing so, I do not criticise my local authority particularly, nor do I make a political point.

Mothers—it usually is mothers—with other children to look after may have to spend hours attending, say, a council meeting before they can even ask, in public question time, a question that frustration has driven them to go and ask, let alone receive an answer. If they get an answer, it will be read out rather less effectively than things are read out by the Minister. If they must then correspond at length with the local authority and receive no answers, they are not being given the treatment and support that they deserve from the authority.

Such people may subsequently have to go to tribunals and seek support from IPSEA, the National Autistic Society or other outside organisations, in the face of a local authority funded from the public purse—whether or not it considers itself to be fully funded—that may employ solicitors. Many authorities employ solicitors to challenge parents at tribunals, although I am pleased to say that Isle of Wight council does not. If that happens, we are not giving parents the recognition and justice that they seek and need for their children.

I shall concentrate on autism spectrum disorders, but local authorities simply do not seem to understand a huge number of issues. For example, such children cannot travel on a bus unaccompanied because they might get off and wander away—and, if they wander away between leaving home in the morning and arriving at school, who would be responsible? The same applies when children are on the way home. If conditions on the bus are not perfect for children with challenging needs such as autism—and they seldom are—such children will become upset, and be more likely to wander. If conditions in the school playground, let alone the classroom, are not perfect, children may go AWOL and no one may notice until the beginning of the next lesson or, in some cases, the one after that.

Such things are not necessarily written down in statements. A local education authority may make a school responsible for providing a learning support assistant, but the school may not recognise that an autistic child needs constant encouragement from a figure whom he or she recognises. It is no good for such a child to have half an hour from Mrs. X in the morning and three hours from Mrs. Y in the afternoon. It is no good writing things down in a statement if the local authority or the school—or, in some instances, the health authority—cannot deliver. For instance, speech and language therapy are all too often specified in statements and then treated more as hope than expectation because the health service cannot provide them.

I echo the request of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), and ask the Minister to make clear who is legally liable. Is it the school, the LEA, the Government or, as I fear, no one? Who is liable if what is demanded in a statement is not provided, month after month?

There are a number of issues relating to respite care, which I will not go into now, but there is also the issue of social services' support for parents of pupils with autism disorders, and for the youngsters themselves. Parents' preferences should be recognised. I thank the Minister for his reply to my earlier intervention. My point was that when a statement does not name a particular school, does the fact that a child has been statemented prevent the LEA from having to recognise and, wherever practicable, give effect to, the parents' preference for placement in a particular LEA school? I understand the point made by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, but I am talking about cases in which the school has not been named. Are parents in such cases given genuine opportunities to consider independent schools, or are their

hands tied behind their backs? Is it sometimes implied that considering an independent school implies a lack of faith in the maintained system, which does not deserve to be taken into account by the LEA?

When children transfer from school to school—we have a three-tier system on the island, so there are two transfers for every child—is the review of their needs undertaken in good time not only for the transfer, but for parents to express a preference? If it is not undertaken in the September before transfer, the parent will not be able to express one.

There is great need for those matters to be understood by local authorities and schools. That is why I so strongly support maintenance of the existing special school provision. I pay tribute to Medina House school and Watergate school, in Newport, and to St. Catherine's, which is an independent school in Ventnor, all of which very effectively serve pupils with special educational needs.

The Minister mentioned, and I welcome, work on the early identification of need. However, it is no good identifying need if it then takes three years to create a statement. I hope that all local authorities and all those who cater for pupils with special needs will recognise the urgency of providing them with statements as quickly and effectively as possible, and with not only quantified measures—although I welcome those—but qualitative ones. Parents see the need for that, but we must all see it if those children are to receive the education that they deserve.

6.31 pm

Mr. Timms: I listened with great interest to many of the points that have been made and shall attempt to respond to as many as I can in the few minutes available.

Although I know that the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) is new to her Front-Bench role, I am sorry that she chose to attempt to score some party points. I do not think that that approach will commend itself to people of all parties or of none who follow the debate. Her attempt was ill-judged. I am glad, however, that some serious points were made by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I shall try to respond to them.

The hon. Member for Epping Forest mentioned a U-turn. In closing our debate in July, I emphasised that I would reflect on the points that had been made on quantification. We have made changes accordingly. I should have thought that she would welcome them, as she sort of did. Nevertheless, we have retained in this draft code almost all the advice that was included in the June draft.

Mrs. Laing: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I shall do so only briefly as I do not have much time to reply to the other points that have been made.

Mrs. Laing: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I should like to clarify that I most certainly welcome the proposals and congratulate him on his courage in coming back to the House and making them.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention.

I agreed with much of what the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) said, and I should like particularly to join in his tribute to Lord Rix. The hon. Gentleman has long followed the issue, and he has made a very substantial contribution not only in relation to education but to other aspects of the Government's work on the issue.

The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members legitimately expressed concerns about funding for inclusion. I emphasise that we have made great progress on that front in recent years. In 1996–97, for example, funding for the schools access initiative, which is intended to improve accessibility for people with disabilities to mainstream schools, amounted to £10 million; this year, it amounts to £50 million; next year, it will increase to £70 million, and the year after to £100 million. The sums for investment in improving access to mainstream schools have increased very substantially. Furthermore, in 1996–97, the special educational needs element of the standards fund was £24 million; this year, it is £82 million.

We are seeing unprecedented increases in spending on education not only this year, but next year and the year after. Moreover, a substantial chunk of those extra resources will be spent on meeting concerns that have been expressed in this debate. The total size of the inclusion block in the current financial year is £330 million, much of which is delegated to schools. So, although it is right to express concerns about resources in our debate, I emphasise that we have made great progress and that more progress will be made next year and the year after.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough was also concerned about funding for parent partnership and disagreement resolution services. We envision that those duties on local education authorities will, as intended, come into force on 1 January. In the current financial year, LEAs have been able to use their standards fund allocation for SEN to establish those services in advance of the legal obligation to do so. From next financial year, however, as they will be a statutory duty, funding will be provided using the usual SSA system. Given the increase that LEAs will receive next year, we hope that those duties will be carried out effectively.

Various hon. Members expressed concerns about special schools. I emphasise that inclusion does not amount to a drive to close special schools. I thought that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough made that point well. There will of course continue to be changes to local provision to reflect local circumstances. Those are decisions that will be made locally either by local school organisation committees or by the adjudicator, as has always been the case. However, as we made clear in the debates on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, we do not envisage that the size of the special school sector will change dramatically. The latest figures on pupil numbers support that belief. Indeed, 42 special schools have opened since May 1997. I therefore think that there is some confusion on that issue.

Mrs. Laing: What plans do the Government have to stop the closure of special schools that are under threat? Does he know how many are under threat of closure?

Mr. Timms: As I said, those are matters for local decision. There will undoubtedly have to be changes in

[Mr. Timms]

some areas in response to local circumstances, just as there has been a need for new schools to be opened. Indeed, some new schools have opened.

It is not true either that the code is written only for mainstream schools. It provides guidance for all maintained schools, including maintained special schools. We have encouraged all special schools to become centres of excellence, as we were urged to do in this debate. I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough to the example of Norfolk Park school, in Sheffield, which is highlighted in the inclusion guidance as a very good example of what he was calling for and of what we are starting to see.

The hon. Members for Harrogate and Knaresborough and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) asked about the status of statements and whether they are mandatory. The answer is that they are mandatory. If a statement is not delivered, the LEA is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the provision in a statement is made. I hope that that makes the position very clear.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): That may not apply to under-fives. One of my younger constituents, Francesca Norman, is entitled to five sessions per week but is being provided with only three by Kent county council. Can my hon. Friend give any hope to the parents of under-fives that their children will have the same entitlement as other children?

Mr. Timms: Certainly the concern about the early identification of special educational needs is an increasingly important theme. Consequently, we have announced extra funding to help LEAs in their early years development and child care partnerships to improve local provision for young children, and we have a working party joining different agencies together to develop guidance for health and education practitioners on a coherent approach to the early identification of needs and the provision of support. I certainly should expect my hon. Friend's constituent and many other people to start to benefit from that. In response to his specific question, the code does apply to under-fives.

Mr. Gale: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I cannot give way, given the late stage of the debate. I was asked what we were doing about special educational needs co-ordinators—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 16.*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, which was laid before this House on 23rd October, be approved.

Liaison Committee

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Before I call the Leader of the House to move the motion on the Liaison Committee, I should announce that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

6.40 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I beg to move,

That,

(1) With effect for the current Parliament, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 121 (Nomination of Select Committees), the Chairman for the time being of each of the Select Committees listed in paragraph (2) below shall be a member of the Liaison Committee;

(2) The Committees to which paragraph (1) above applies are:

Accommodation and Works

Administration

Broadcasting

Catering

Culture, Media and Sport

Defence

Deregulation and Regulatory Reform

Education and Skills

Environmental Audit

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

European Scrutiny

Finance and Services

Foreign Affairs

Health

Home Affairs

Joint Committee on Human Rights (the Chairman being a Member of this House)

Information

International Development

Northern Ireland Affairs

Procedure

Public Accounts

Public Administration

Science and Technology

Scottish Affairs

Selection

Standards and Privileges

Statutory Instruments

Trade and Industry

Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Treasury

Welsh Affairs

Work and Pensions; and

(3) Mr. Alan Williams shall also be a Member of the Liaison Committee.

I need not detain the House for long because I imagine—I hope not wrongly—that it is common ground across the House that we want the Liaison Committee set up, and that is the purpose of the motion. Only a couple of weeks ago, I received a letter signed by many of the Chairs of the new Select Committees urging us to make progress in setting up the Liaison Committee. I responded to that in the motion that is before the House.

For myself, I did not need urging to set up the Liaison Committee. I am keen to see it in existence soon. One of the reasons for that is that the Modernisation Committee is making good progress towards a report to the House on Select Committees and their valuable role in scrutiny. Obviously, we cannot hope to complete that report until we have a Liaison Committee from which we can take evidence on our proposals.

Perhaps I can say a couple of words about the terms of the motion. First, the motion takes the form of listing the 32 Select Committees that are relevant to the Liaison Committee and stating that the Chairs of those Select Committees will be members of the Liaison Committee.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): For the sake of complete accuracy, will the Leader of the House confirm that, happily, the motion refers to

"the Chairman for the time being of each of the Select Committees"?

Would he perhaps like to use the correct wording instead of the nonsense that he has just used?

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Nonsense?

Mr. Robin Cook: As my hon. Friend demonstrates, there are different views on whether it is I or the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) who is being nonsensical on this matter. It is a matter of fact that the Standing Orders refer to Chairmen, and that is why the motion before the House uses that term. If the right hon. Gentleman will allow me, I will use a gender-neutral term that I have been using for several years, on the whole without causing the offence that it has caused the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Forth: It caused derision.

Mr. Cook: Given the choice between offending some of my hon. Friends who are members of another gender and causing offence to the right hon. Gentleman, there is no contest; it has to be the right hon. Gentleman whom I offend.

To return to the matter of substance, the motion takes a different form in the sense that it lists the Chairs, rather than the names of individuals. Had I tabled a motion that listed those eligible by name, there would have been further delay because two Select Committee do not yet exist, so I do not yet have the names of their Chairs. Had we proceeded differently, we would have had to find time to amend the motion as the Chairs changed. We had to amend the 1997 motion four times during the Session because of changes in personnel. The particular format that we have tonight does not require any such change. If there are changes in the Chairs of Select Committees, there will automatically be changes in the Liaison Committee without our having to trouble the House further.

The motion proposes to include in the membership of the Liaison Committee my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams). There is a precedent for appointing a senior Member to the Liaison Committee. In 1992, the previous Administration appointed Sir Terence Higgins to the Liaison Committee. So successful was that precedent that, at the end of the Parliament, and before the 1997 general election, the Liaison Committee recommended that, in future, it should include a senior Member.

I do not think that there is any dispute on either side of the House that my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West is a senior Member. He has given distinguished service to the House and to its senior Committees. He is a longstanding member of the Public Accounts Committee and the Committee on Standards and Privileges, and he also served on the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege. He has a wealth of experience of the proceedings of the House and the work of its Committees. It is right that that experience should be available to the Liaison Committee to be drawn on in whatever way it wishes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have indicated that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment to the motion. I have had no overtures about the amendment, which is perfectly respectable; there is no reason why any overtures should be made to me on the completion of the tabling of an amendment. However, in the circumstances, I will want to hear the case for the amendment before I respond to it.

I hope that the House will not be sidetracked from the central issue. We need this motion to set up the Liaison Committee. We moved quickly after the general election to set up the Select Committees; indeed, they were set up in record time. Tonight's motion maintains that momentum.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The Leader of the House said that he was listing the Committees by name because two had yet to be set up. Given that he has just described the welcome momentum towards setting up the Committees, can he explain why the Committee on Science and Technology has yet to be appointed?

Mr. Cook: The sole reason is that we have been looking for nominations to make sure that we have full membership. I hope that, in the course of this week, we may be able to take that forward. I can assure the House and the hon. Gentleman that we will make progress as soon as we can because I want a full slate of Select Committees.

As I said, the motion is necessary if we are to have the Liaison Committee. We are all agreed that we need the Liaison Committee and we all want the Committee to be set up. I hope that the House will agree to the motion tonight.

6.46 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I very much welcome the motion and join the Leader of the House in recognising the vital role that the Liaison Committee plays in the proceedings of the House. I accept completely the point—an important one for the smooth running of our affairs—that the motion should be worded as it is, referring to Chairmen of Select Committees, both departmental and domestic, rather than named individuals, because that eases our procedures in an acceptable way.

There is a paradox in the motion, but it emphasises that the Liaison Committee traditionally has been composed of the Chairmen of the Select Committees, departmental and domestic. That is well understood by members of the House, and those who wish to envisage a greater role for the Liaison Committee are content with that. That much is common ground.

[Mr. Eric Forth]

Having said that, neither my colleagues nor I have any difficulty with the suggestion that the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) be made a member of the Liaison Committee, for the reasons that the Leader of the House has given. The right hon. Gentleman, whom I know well and respect greatly, brings to the House, and will bring to the Committee, experience and wisdom that are well appreciated. However, were the right hon. Gentleman to be thought eligible to be the Chairman of the Liaison Committee—I should have thought that that was a distinct possibility—it would raise the question whether such a position should be filled by a Government or an Opposition Back Bencher.

It may be that, in the wider consideration of the role of the Liaison Committee and of Select Committees generally, that sort of issue may be pondered in the future. I am not saying that it will necessarily affect immediate decisions, and I am not in any way seeking to interfere with or influence the decisions of the Liaison Committee. However, something that has bothered me for some time about the role of Select Committees is that they have tended historically to be dominated by Government Members. That is something to which the House may wish to return at some stage.

Having said that, I must confess that I am less happy with the idea contained within the amendment; that we start appointing other additional members to the Liaison Committee, apparently on an ad hominem basis. Whatever the virtues of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan)—I have no doubt that they are many—I cannot avoid stating a fact into which I hope hon. Members will not read too much. The extent to which the right hon. Member for Swansea, West has enormous experience and knowledge of this House is clear; he has been a Government Minister and has served with great distinction on Select Committees. The same can hardly be said of the hon. Gentleman referred to in the amendment. Like the Leader of the House, I am waiting with bated breath to hear from Liberal Democrat Members the reasons for the amendment and why they believe that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam would add lustre to the Liaison Committee. I remain to be convinced about that.

I may take some convincing. We have been on solid ground until now in acknowledging that the Liaison Committee will consist of Select Committee Chairmen and, for the reasons given, the right hon. Member for Swansea, West. However, if we create a precedent by adding other members willy nilly, we could be at the top of the legendary slippery slope or at the thin end of the legendary wedge. That could lead us in directions that none of us can foresee. I fear that the influence and standing of the Liaison Committee could thus be diluted. I put it no more strongly than that.

I welcome the motion and its reference to Chairmen rather than named hon. Members. I am content with the suggested addition of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West, but I have yet to be convinced about any other changes to the traditional shape and structure of the Committee.

6.51 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I beg to move as an amendment to the motion, in paragraph (3), leave out

"shall also be a Member"

and insert

"and Mr. Richard Allan shall also be Members".

I join hon. Members in welcoming the fact that we are making progress on appointing members of the Liaison Committee. However, perhaps the Leader of the House would like to comment on the time scale. It is curious that we are examining the role of the Liaison Committee in our discussions in the Modernisation Committee, yet we are appointing the members of the former without completing our review. That seems to be the way we tend to do things in Parliament: we appoint people before deciding the role that they should play.

The Committee is large and in due course we shall probably consider whether the departmental Select Committees are properly represented when they are diluted to some extent by Domestic Committees.

I welcome the flexibility that is implicit in the nomination of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams). I endorse the words of the Leader of the House and the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) about the capacity and skills that he will bring to the Committee. He has considerable experience; I have served with him on Select Committees and I respect his judgment.

However, the precedent to which the Leader of the House referred is not precise. Sir Terence Higgins had previously been a Chairman; he returned to the Liaison Committee because of the need for continuity. A good case was made at the time and his appointment was worth while. However, that precedent does not apply in the case that we are considering. Although I greatly admire the right hon. Member for Swansea, West, I have heard the suspicion expressed in Labour circles that his appointment is a consolation prize for not getting something else. That is unfortunate, and I hope that the Leader of the House will dispel that rumour.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): The hon. Gentleman is not exactly right. Sir Terence was Chairman of a Special Select Committee that was set up for one Parliament and died with it.

Mr. Tyler: That underlines my point that Sir Terence's special skills from previous experience were believed to be desirable.

There are two good reasons for the amendment, which is not the thin end of a slippery slope, as the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst appeared to suggest. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) chaired the Information Committee with distinction and special expertise in the previous Parliament. Continuity of the work of that Committee affects every aspect of the work of the House. His expertise and experience recommended him as a good addition to the Liaison Committee.

Mr. Forth: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman is revealing one of his reasons for tabling the amendment. However, the knowledge and expertise of the current Chairman of the Information Committee is legendary, and

he will be a member of the Liaison Committee. Why do we need two e-people on the Committee? Is not one expert enough?

Mr. Tyler: That is a matter for the House. I share the view of those who are more expert than the right hon. Gentleman in such matters. He declares himself a philistine and has frequently expressed doubts about whether we should spend any time or resources on the e-revolution.

There is a better precedent for the inclusion of my hon. Friend rather than for the inclusion of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West on the Committee—the need for continuity. My hon. Friend served not only on the Information Committee but on House Committees that dealt with such matters.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): The hon. Gentleman suggests that the inclusion of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) on the Committee is justified by his previous chairmanship of a Select Committee and the need for continuity. Is the hon. Gentleman implying that every former Select Committee chairman would qualify on the same ground? How would he manage the size of the Committee?

Mr. Tyler: The House will have to decide the matter. Failure to consult about additional members of the Liaison Committee has caused anxiety about the criteria on the basis of which they can be included. The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) nods. When we heard that the reason for the inclusion of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West was the precedent of Sir Terence Higgins, we believed that we had a good case for proposing my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam.

However, we have a second good reason. As the Leader of the House said, the Liaison Committee will have 32 members. The arithmetic of the House should be used as a guide to ensure a proper balance on every Committee. There is only one Liberal Democrat Member on the Liaison Committee because of a neat little carve-up between the Whips Offices of the Conservative and Labour parties and the removal of one of our Chairmen from a Committee.

To enable the House to do what it must do under Standing Orders, as my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) has said, we should maintain proportionality and ensure continuity of experience, thus following the precedent created by Sir Terence Higgins.

6.58 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) gave some convoluted reasoning for adding another Liberal Democrat to the Committee. He ultimately reached the real reason for the amendment—to bump up the number of Liberal Democrats on Select Committees. The Liberal Democrats are already over-represented on Select Committees, whereas the minority parties, or the smaller parties, as I would describe them, are under-represented.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Other parties.

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman is right; the other parties are under-represented on Select Committees. I am not making a pitch for a member of Plaid Cymru or the Scottish National party or any other party to serve on the Committee. However, if it grows much larger, we shall certainly be entitled to a member on it.

In the discussions that take place in the dark or through the usual channels, the Liberal Democrats supposedly represent the interests of the other parties. On this occasion, and some others, that has not happened. We were not consulted—

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Neither were we.

Mr. Thomas: Indeed, but we were not consulted about whether we would wish to put forward an alternative name for the Liaison Committee.

The Committee should be set up speedily, because it is important for the modernisation of the House. We must accept, however, that a precedent—small though it is—has been set by the appointment of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), however undoubted his virtues. This debate should open the eyes of all hon. Members to the reality of the way in which Select Committee membership is allocated; who is chosen by the byzantine means of the Committee of Selection; and who speaks up for whom in the selection of members and of the Chairs who then form the Liaison Committee. Those procedures should be brought into the open and changed so that all Members, from all parties, feel that they have a share and a stake in the House's work.

7.1 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) said, and I have made similar points behind the scenes since I became the Liberal Democrat Chief Whip. The minority parties and the Liberal Democrats face considerable difficulties because of the method by which the places on Select Committees are decided. Those are on top of the difficulties that all hon. Members perceive when the nominations reach the Committee of Selection. The House instructed the Modernisation Committee to make proposals to put that right and I hope that it will soon do so, because the present situation imposes an unfair burden on those who have to adjudicate such matters—and on this occasion and in relation to Select Committees, that is me.

The minority parties are also disadvantaged, because they are not directly represented on the Committee of Selection. I have made that point explicitly on every occasion when it has been necessary. All I can say to the hon. Member for Ceredigion is that his party is not treated unfairly in mathematical terms. The dispute between his party and the Liberal Democrats is not the mathematics, but the actual selection of individual Select Committee memberships. Unavoidably, political choices have to be made under the current mechanism. I agree with his concerns about the present system and I want the House to reform it, but the amendment attempts to address a different fault in the system.

When the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) was taken off the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the House was able to insist that the Government reconsider the decision. The hon. Lady was put back on the Committee,

[Mr. Andrew Stunell]

and the decision was made through the Committee of Selection, which is answerable to the House. However, the decision on which party should offer a Chairman for a Select Committee is not the responsibility of the Committee of Selection, and it cannot be recalled or rectified by the House. Whatever problems were caused by the Committee's decision in June, the issue today is currently beyond the reach of even the Committee, never mind the whole House.

The Liaison Committee has 32 members and the Government seek to add another. Of those 33 members, one will be a Liberal Democrat and none—as the hon. Member for Ceredigion pointed out—will come from the minority parties. The House must wake up to the democratic deficit at the centre of its workings. I do not mean the elected dictatorships about which the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) has written his book, and I am not talking about whether the Prime Minister has too much power. My point is whether the House has the appropriate sense of fairness and urgency to put right its procedures by the simple but crucial step of ensuring that the Liaison Committee reflects the views and opinions in the House.

I remind the House that we expect the Liaison Committee to be a senior representative body for Back Benchers. Indeed, the Committee's report to the House has been a landmark in the House's fight to assert its rights over the Executive, and it has been much quoted. It came from a Liaison Committee whose legitimacy depends on it being seen as representative and able to balance the views of hon. Members. If the legitimacy of the Committee is to be upheld in this Parliament, it needs to take more account in its membership of the outlook, experiences and perspectives of those Members of Parliament who have been denied a reasonable share of its membership.

The amendment would not advance the case I am making. If my case were accepted, there would be four places on the Liaison Committee for the Liberal Democrats and the minority parties. However, the amendment would at least prevent the position from being worse than it was in the last Parliament. We had two representatives on the Liaison Committee in that Parliament, but it is now down to one. Our amendment would simply restore the position to two members, as in the last Parliament.

I urge the House to support the amendment, not only for the sake of the Liberal Democrats and minority Members and not even on behalf of Opposition Back Benchers, but for the sake of the Liaison Committee itself and the role that it seeks to play on behalf of the House. I urge the House to support the amendment because it would be for the benefit of the whole House.

7.8 pm

Mr. Robin Cook: In responding to the debate, I shall not intrude on the private debate between the nationalists and the Liberal Democrats, however enjoyable it was for the rest of us. I would say to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) that I hope that the Modernisation Committee's report will propose making the departmental Select Committees marginally larger, because that will do much to resolve the problem that the hon. Gentleman identified.

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) for his support for the terms of the motion. Between us, we have made a modest step towards modernisation this evening and I hope that the future holds many further such steps. He raised the question of whether the Chair of the Liaison Committee should be a Government supporter. For what it is worth, all the precedents support that. Sir Terence Higgins was the Chair of the Committee through two Parliaments when the Conservatives were in office and Lord Sheldon was the Chair in the last Parliament. However, it would be wrong for us to start to weigh up the relative merits of a potential Chair of the Committee by considering whether he or she is a supporter of the Government. The important question is whether we have found a senior Member with an independent cast of mind, and I am confident that that is what the Liaison Committee will look for.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) expressed some concern about the size of the Committee. That seemed rather at tension with his argument that those who were Chairs of Committees in the previous Parliament should also be members in this Parliament. That could increase its membership to more than 50, rather than 30, so I am not persuaded on that count.

If I may just mildly raise an eyebrow, I was a bit upset to be accused of offering a place to a distinguished colleague as a consolation prize. If any offer of a consolation prize was being made, it sounded to me as though it came from the Liberal Democrat Benches, not from this Dispatch Box.

Nevertheless, I take on board the point that on the basis of the present chairmanships of Select Committees—I seek consensus on this—the Liberal Democrats would be left with only one member of the Liaison Committee. It is important that we do not start to think of the Liaison Committee as one of those Committees to which we appoint Members pro rata, by representation in the House. Strictly speaking, the Liberal Democrats would be entitled to four members on that basis, but I would not accept that as a case for changing the composition of the Committee. However, I recognise that to drop from two to one is an unkind thrust when the membership of the House has not changed for the Liberal Democrats. I am keen to maximise support for the motion. Therefore, in a spirit of ensuring the maximum support, I am willing to accept the amendment.

I hope that that will not cause too much distress to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst. It is not at any cost to his party, which will continue to retain all the members who were on the Committee at the start of this debate. I hope that on that basis we can all agree to set up the Committee.

Amendment agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That,

(1) With effect for the current Parliament, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 121 (Nomination of Select Committees), the Chairman for the time being of each of the Select Committees listed in paragraph (2) below shall be a member of the Liaison Committee;

(2) The Committees to which paragraph (1) above applies are:

Accommodation and Works

Administration

Broadcasting

Catering
Culture, Media and Sport
Defence
Deregulation and Regulatory Reform
Education and Skills
Environmental Audit
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
European Scrutiny
Finance and Services
Foreign Affairs
Health
Home Affairs
Joint Committee on Human Rights (the Chairman being a Member of this House)
Information
International Development
Northern Ireland Affairs
Procedure
Public Accounts
Public Administration
Science and Technology
Scottish Affairs
Selection
Standards and Privileges
Statutory Instruments
Trade and Industry
Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Treasury
Welsh Affairs
Work and Pensions; and

(3) Mr. Alan Williams and Mr. Richard Allan shall also be Members of the Liaison Committee.

COMMITTEES

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With permission, I shall put together the remaining motions.

Ordered,

Administration

That Julie Morgan be discharged from the Administration Committee and Mr. Iain Luke be added to the Committee.

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

That Mr. Paul Stinchcombe be discharged from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and Paddy Tipping be added to the Committee.

International Development

That Mr. Nigel Jones be discharged from the International Development Committee and Mr. Alistair Carmichael be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Public Accounts

That Mr. Nick Gibb be added to the Committee of Public Accounts.

Environmental Audit

That Tim Loughton be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Mr. Gregory Barker be added to the Committee.

Standards and Privileges

That Tony Baldry and Mr. David Chidgey be discharged from the Committee on Standards and Privileges and Richard Ottaway and Mr. David Heath be added to the Committee.

Modernisation of the House of Commons

That Mrs. Angela Browning be discharged from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons and Mr. John Taylor be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Aviation Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

7.13 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Because of the nature of this debate and the wide-ranging interest, other hon. Members may wish to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would welcome the exercise of your discretion to enable that to take place because of the scale of the problem that we are dealing with.

Heathrow airport is the national centre of the United Kingdom's aviation industry and is located in my constituency. I have sought the debate to discuss the current crisis in the aviation industry. I do not wish to be alarmist, but I do not use the term "crisis" lightly.

Prior to 11 September, the aviation industry, airport operators and all the associated companies were experiencing a cyclical downturn associated with the overall downturn of the world economy, especially the American market. That was nothing unusual. We have been through downturns before. To use an appropriate expression, we expected a soft landing when the downturn bottomed out, after which the markets would begin to pick up again.

Prior to 11 September, several firms had announced a tightening of their belts and associated voluntary redundancies. Again, it was nothing that we had not experienced before. The aim was to get through the downturn with the least pain possible and to prepare for the upturn in demand, estimated to occur within about 12 months. September 11 and the horrific attack on the World Trade Centre changed all that.

The pre-existing downturn was exacerbated dramatically by the terrorist attack. A predictable fall in demand, the impact of which was generally assessed as lasting 12 months and which was thought manageable, was immediately transformed into a crisis of significant proportions for those working in the aviation industry and for communities heavily dependent on airport operations, including communities in my constituency and others located around Heathrow.

I run through just some of the public announcements that have been made since 11 September by airport operators and the aviation industry which will result in job losses. Since 11 September, British Airways has announced that 5,200 jobs are to go, on top of the 1,800 previously announced due to the economic slow-down. Virgin has recently announced 1,200 redundancies. British Midland, which has a lower exposure to the transatlantic impact, is nevertheless grounding eight aircraft and cutting 600 jobs.

European airlines have been similarly affected. Swissair has filed for bankruptcy. Lufthansa has cut one United States route, grounded four aircraft and shelved orders for new aircraft. KLM has cut capacity by 5 per cent. Alitalia has cut staff by 12 per cent. Aer Lingus has cut scheduled services by 25 per cent. Austrian Airlines has cut capacity by 10 per cent. Air France has removed 17 aircraft from service and Sabena has filed for bankruptcy.

United States airlines have been hit equally hard, if not more so. United Airlines has announced 20,000 job losses worldwide and a 20 per cent. cut in flight schedules. American Airlines has laid off at least 20,000 employees in order to survive and reduced capacity by 15 per cent. Continental Airlines will lay off 12,000 employees. Northwest Airlines has cut 10,000 jobs.

Aircraft manufacturers are also feeling the impact of 11 September. Boeing has announced cuts in jobs of 20,000 to 30,000. The impact on passenger traffic through Heathrow has been around 20 per cent. Air traffic control has experienced a 20 per cent. reduction in support staff, as was announced recently: initially, it was announced that 1,100 jobs would go, but over the weekend we read that that could go up to 2,000.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Does not my hon. Friend recall that many of us who were extremely unhappy at the proposed part-privatisation of National Air Traffic Services received assurances that it would not lead to cuts in the standard of service, nor indeed, in the support infrastructure upon which air traffic controllers depend? Given the cataclysmic events of 11 September, the contraction in the industry, the decision recently announced by the Government to put on hold the second Scottish air traffic control centre, and that a number of the airlines that he listed that are making substantial job cuts are members of the Airline Group, the consortium that is the Government's strategic partner, does he not think that now is an excellent time for Ministers to show the same pragmatism and realism towards NATS that they showed towards Railtrack, before it is too late?

John McDonnell: I fully concur with my hon. Friend's views. The NATS privatised business plan is now unworkable. It is time to rethink the whole proposal and introduce the trust option that was put forward by me and my hon. Friend in the debate on the privatisation of NATS. In fact, the trust route is being used for Railtrack itself.

Mr. Salter: I thank my hon. Friend for being so generous in giving way, although he has some time at his disposal. If it is right and proper—I believe that it is—for the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to say that there is an essential contradiction between the interests of the travelling public and the interests of the shareholders vis-à-vis what was formerly Railtrack—that botched and barmy privatisation as we have called it—does not the same logic apply to the very service that we depend upon to ensure that aircraft are kept apart and that the travelling public can continue to use the airline industry with confidence and safety?

John McDonnell: There is a need for consistency from the Government on transport overall, and that consistency must apply to air traffic. In the current difficult circumstances for the aviation industry, we could do without the problems associated with air traffic control and the inherent dangers of the system that has been proposed. I agree that there should be a complete rethink; we should go back to the drawing board and reconsider the trust option.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that NATS was to have funded its business plan with investment of £1 billion, but that

because of the problems of the airline partners that funding will almost certainly no longer be forthcoming? Will not the Government have to rethink the whole NATS privatisation plan?

John McDonnell: A rethink of the overall proposal is inevitable. We are not talking only of future investment but of future solvency: that is my main concern. The job losses already announced and future possible job losses will put the whole system at risk.

The announcements that I listed are based on staff lay-offs—often worldwide—throughout the companies involved. However, because Heathrow airport is a focus for the operations of many of those companies, a significant proportion of the job losses will fall on Heathrow and its communities. Even the job losses announced by European and American airlines will have a major impact at Heathrow, because most of those companies maintain substantial operations at the airport.

The impact is being felt not only by the airline operators but throughout the lengthy supply chain of the aviation industry. It is estimated that about 180,000 people are directly employed in the aviation industry, but that about 200,000 people work in its immediate supply chain, providing goods and services to the industry. Evidence is appearing that depicts the impact of the combination of the already existing downturn and 11 September on the multitude of supply firms. Orders are not coming through, bookings are falling and telephones no longer ring in offices with the usual demand for service delivery. Many of those firms are small and are those that employ the lowest-paid staff. Such companies are least able to provide reasonable redundancy packages and support measures for staff leaving their employment.

A large proportion of the staff affected by the current crisis—especially the lower-paid staff—live in the communities surrounding Heathrow airport. According to figures published last year, direct employment at Heathrow is about 68,000. For every person directly employed at the airport, it is estimated that there are three in the supply chain. Eighty per cent. of the workers directly employed at Heathrow live in the surrounding local authority areas, putting about £2 billion into the local economy. More than 25,000 directly employed workers live in the three immediate boroughs of Hillingdon, Ealing and Hounslow.

There is a paradox in that although the development of a massive airport such as Heathrow brings with it the advantage of large-scale employment, it also has the disadvantage of increasing demand for land, thereby raising land prices and providing other sectors of industry with an incentive to sell their sites and move to cheaper locations, thus squeezing out those sectors. Local economies have become heavily dependent on Heathrow so when the aviation industry catches a cold, our communities risk pneumonia.

Mr. Salter: Will my hon. Friend share with the House his view as to the effect of this dramatic decline in the industry on the plans for Heathrow terminal 5? Those plans have given rise to some controversy across the whole Thames valley.

John McDonnell: There is an argument that the current problems might bring the terminal into existence more swiftly. I would argue that we should stand back and consider the future demand for a fifth terminal, and that we should adopt a more planned approach to aviation development in the south-east. For example, there is a proposal to develop Marinair, rather than building a fifth terminal. That would give us greater long-term capacity as well as some breathing space. However, I await the announcement about terminal 5 and I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will not want to comment on that issue tonight.

I have lived in my community for more than 25 years, representing it on the Greater London council and in Parliament. I went through the three recessions under the previous Conservative Government and witnessed the effects of unemployment on my community. That Government's commitment to market-oriented, non-interventionist policies meant that they failed to act to assist my community during that period. We lost most of our manufacturing base, and only after four years of Labour Government are we beginning to get back on our feet. That is why I am asking—pleading—for an interventionist approach from the Government.

It has been suggested that the current problems faced by the aviation industry will be as temporary as those experienced during the Gulf war or in previous downturns. I differ strongly from that view. The fact that civilian aircraft were used as a weapon in the 11 September attack and that the present war is predicated on a long-haul approach to tackling terrorism means, in the view of many people, that the current recession in the industry will be deeper and longer lasting. In that situation, the Government cannot stand back or fail to intervene.

Today at Heathrow, I convened a meeting with the airport community partners—the airport operators, the British Airports Authority, trade unions, community leaders and local MPs—and the Minister for Transport. We held a useful discussion and agreed to form an airport community task group to prepare a programme—an agenda—for a co-ordinated approach to tackle the recession that faces us, considering short and long-term measures to address the crisis.

The proposals include, first, support for individuals. We want to establish a form of early-warning system to predict the announcement of lay-offs. We want to provide a co-ordinated system of advice and assistance on issues such as welfare benefits, redundancy payments, retraining and employment opportunities for those workers threatened with unemployment as a result of the crisis. We want to bring together local advice agencies, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Employment Service to provide that facility for people threatened with, or experiencing, the loss of their job.

We want to consider advice and assistance for alternative employment through the Employment Service, which has already established an initiative as a result of previous crises in other industries. That could be valuable in our area.

We want to examine how to set up retraining options through the Learning and Skills Council, working with local colleges and training agencies to ensure the reskilling of people who will be displaced from their existing jobs. Some of them may return to the aviation industry, but we want to make sure that they have updated skills, thus giving them greater employability.

[John McDonnell]

Secondly, we considered support for the industry itself—for the companies. We are concerned about the additional costs that they are bearing as a result of the crisis and examined several measures to assist them. That is not a soft option; it is not backing losers: it is about finding short-term support to help to tide us over the current crisis. Some of the proposals included the following: to extend

"at no cost to the industry the period in which Her Majesty's Government acts as insurer of last resort from 30 to a minimum of 180 days";

to secure

"rapid agreement from other governments to achieve a uniform worldwide limit on third party liability and the corresponding insurance indemnification requirements";

to provide

"allowable financial assistance for tour operators"—

and airline companies—

"to cover the exceptional costs incurred and revenues lost as a direct result of the four day closure of North American and other affected airspace";

and to ensure

"that airlines do not incur additional costs in meeting the enhanced security".

The protection of the public demands assistance from the Government to ensure the highest levels of security.

Another proposal was for a promotional programme to get people flying again—to renew their confidence in the aviation industry. Historically, flying is the safest form of travel and we should remind people of that, and that we are working together to ensure that it continues to be so.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman has touched on the issue of confidence, which is extremely important in encouraging people to travel by air. As we are losing a great deal of transatlantic business, our airlines—among all the European airlines—are particularly badly hit, so does the hon. Gentleman agree that the British and American Governments must do all they can to work together? In that connection, does he endorse the fact that the French have come up with a bilateral agreement with the United States—whereas our Government have still not been able to do so? Does he agree that we should put every possible effort into concluding such a bilateral agreement?

John McDonnell: Those at this morning's meeting argued that there should be a level playing field across Europe and the United States and that those negotiations should continue apace. I believe that Ministers are visiting America this week to hold discussions to enable that to happen.

Several of company and trade union representatives at the meeting made the point that George Bush's Administration has sunk £6 billion of support into the airline operators to ensure that they get through this period. We shall look for some form of assistance—again, on a selective basis and in response to real need—to get through this crisis.

Security and the restoration of confidence were critical to our discussions. There have been continued security lapses at some of our airports, which we do not want to highlight too much because, in general, the security is good, but there is still a need to tighten it up. We must be firm with those companies that avoid their responsibilities by allowing unvetted staff to operate air-side and, as was said this morning, by preventing their staff from discussing security problems with the inspectors.

The third issue discussed was support for the communities affected by the aviation crisis, because it was felt that we need to reappraise existing regeneration initiatives to take account of the latest situation. For example, many of the single regeneration budget programmes around Heathrow will end in the next 18 months. Community leaders argued this morning that additional funds are needed to support regeneration initiatives, for example, training, retraining, new enterprise promotion and development in the airport community areas.

The fact that the SRB is running out at a critical time, just as our communities need it, is unfortunate, so there is a need to examine whether additional resources can be provided, possibly through the central pool that the Mayor of London will hold at the end of the SRB period. However, because of competing demands on that central pool, there is an argument that additional resources should come from the Treasury direct to London to help us to tackle the current problems.

The other issue raised in this morning's discussion was the problem that local authorities around Heathrow have in bidding for additional funds under other regeneration schemes. The problem is that with high levels of employment around Heathrow, the local authorities do not necessarily score well in the deprivation indices because unemployment has a great influence on those indices. However, those indices do not take into account the quality of employment, so we may have high levels of employment, but, unfortunately, there are also high levels of low pay. The deprivation indices must be reshaped to ensure that moneys are awarded according to the quality of life of the local people in those communities.

We felt that all those matters should be open to negotiation with central Government to reflect the current crisis. We want the work of the existing agencies, such as the London development agency and the Learning and Skills Council, to be co-ordinated to assist in the short term and to consider the longer-term problems, so that we can rebalance our local economies to avoid overdependence on the airport if a further downturn occurs.

The long-term solutions were the fourth issue discussed. Obviously, there is a strong argument for continued investment in the infrastructure to keep ahead in such a competitive market. Apart from terminal 5, crossrail was also mentioned as one of the key projects needed to keep Heathrow at the forefront of the world's aviation industry. However, all the operators recognised that the airport must be a good neighbour to its surrounding communities and that the environmental impact of such measures should be addressed.

As a result of this morning's discussions, we have agreed that we will convene the task group and aim to submit a briefing paper to Ministers, including those at the Treasury, within weeks. There is a real sense of urgency about the matter. We aim to identify a programme of readily available and implementable measures for the Government. We want to work together

to get our own communities through the current crisis and to return to the stable economic climate that we have experienced in recent years.

Heathrow is the logistical centre for this country; it is also a logistical centre for Europe and for the world. We must not allow the current crisis to undermine its pre-eminence in that role. On Thursday, the Transport and General Workers Union will lobby the House. Many workers from Heathrow will come here to express their concerns about the threat to their livelihoods. We need to give them a clear view that we appreciate their concerns and will stand by them, so that we can see them through the current crisis.

7.34 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who is my constituency neighbour, not only on obtaining this debate but on managing to ensure, by good fortune, that we have more time than the half an hour normally permitted on many of these occasions, which has allowed other hon. Members to contribute.

My constituency borders Heathrow, and many of the problems that the hon. Gentleman has outlined affect my constituency, especially in the southern half around West Drayton and Yiewsley. However, as he said, such issues do not just affect the aviation industry; there is a huge knock-on effect locally—for example, on the hotels and some of the other service industries in the area. I declare an interest: I am still a director of retail outlet in Uxbridge, so I know that consumer confidence is also affected. A new shopping centre has opened in Uxbridge, and the viability of such developments is also dependent on the confidence of the local economy. I am pleased to report that consumer confidence is holding up in the pre-Christmas rush.

Without repeating too much of what the hon. Gentleman said, there is another knock-on effect. Many of the local organisations connected with the airport—in particular, the British Airports Authority and British Airways—contribute to the local economy by being involved in voluntary schemes, such as the Hillingdon Partnership Trust. When they begin to feel the pinch, there will be a knock-on effect on many of our community projects.

One or two controversial issues have cropped up at the same time as the crisis in the aviation industry. The ruling on night flights will put some hon. Members in a difficult position. Although we advocate help for the aviation industry and want people to have confidence, we are pleased that the ruling might, if the Government take it on board, provide relief for many of our constituents. However, we have to consider the economic effect that that will have on the airlines.

I should also like to echo the comments made about NATS, because those services must be reconsidered in the light of recent events.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington referred to the TGWU's lobby on Thursday this week, and I am pleased to say that it has been very active—I was even accosted at half-term at the excellent match between Uxbridge and Cirencester Town. My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) will be delighted to know that that match ended in a three-all draw, with the replay tomorrow. A great deal of local concern has been expressed about the impact of all the job losses and their effect on people's perception of the local economy.

As the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington said, we have been very lucky in many respects. We have felt the benefits of the airport, but, as he said, we have put all our eggs in one basket. Now that that basket has been severely rattled, we are very concerned that, as he said so eloquently, when the aviation industry sneezes, we shall end up with pneumonia. That view is widely held in the local area.

Our overarching desire is to try to ensure that our aviation industry has a level playing field, to which the hon. Gentleman also referred. I should also like to congratulate him on convening the meeting that he mentioned and the Minister for Transport for agreeing to be involved with the taskforce. I am sorry that I could not attend this morning because of previous engagements, but I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on acting quickly.

The TGWU is looking for other measures, and I am sure that the Treasury has its own ideas, as, I suspect, has the shadow Treasury team. The TGWU is looking for an immediate freeze on air passenger duty and, particularly, for compensation for the lost four days in the immediate aftermath of 11 September when many flights did not take off. A great deal of money was lost.

The hon. Gentleman referred to security, and I agree that the issue must be considered. There will be additional security costs and the aviation industry and the airlines, in particular, might find them to be what might be described as a burden. Although we all want further security measures to be introduced, they will create extra costs at a time when airlines' income is falling.

The hon. Gentleman and I might slightly disagree about terminal 5. I think that an early statement would restore local confidence in the airline industry. I have strong environmental concerns, but the construction of the terminal might provide opportunities that would benefit the local economy. We have had many discussions on that point in the past, and I accept that we might have to agree to differ on it.

It is not my job or that of anyone in the House to tell businesses how to run their enterprises, but it is interesting to note that some airlines have not suffered the same impact recently. I understand that the transatlantic routes of airlines such as British Airways are a particular problem, but I wonder whether the airlines have been as quick in promoting confidence in air travel as they might have been. Perhaps they could have been a bit more generous in discounting flights in the way that some of the low-cost airlines have done. Those airlines have been quick off the mark and that fact has been reflected in their figures.

I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman about the continuation of the regeneration budgets. Perhaps we could extend the single regeneration budget beyond the next 18 months or we could look to the Mayor of London for help. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, we are constantly told that we are in for a long haul and that might mean that the aviation industry will not emerge from its current problems as quickly as we would like.

The hon. Gentleman referred to crossrail, and we have always accepted the need to be good neighbours. The aviation industry provides jobs even though some of them are low paid. Therefore, if we expect it to be a good

[Mr. John Randall]

neighbour to our constituents, it is beholden on our communities to be good neighbours to the industry in times of trouble. Even the people who are not directly affected by job losses in the industry recognise that we need to ensure that the local economy does not suffer the consequences that some of us fear that it might. I therefore urge the Minister to consult his colleagues to ensure that the problems that I have described are tackled urgently.

7.43 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The House knows that I am used to being adaptable. Within days of my appointment to the Opposition Front-Bench team, I was shuffled from my responsibilities for matters involving the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to those relating to the DLTR. However, you, Madam Deputy Speaker, have advised me that I should not speak from the Front Bench in this debate because it might create a precedent even in these exceptional circumstances. I am therefore delighted to take part from the Back Benches in the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell).

The debate is timely, and the hon. Gentleman covered the issues in a measured and constructive tone. The last thing that anyone would want to do is exacerbate the situation by causing further alarm. Unless we can instil confidence in the general public that they should continue to travel by air, the terrorists will, in a sense, have won. We therefore need to move forward in a constructive fashion.

The hon. Gentleman described many of the lay-offs that have taken place and I do not want to add to the list. However, they are a sign of the pressure that has been put on the airline industry—I use the term in its widest sense—since 11 September. However, the problems do not all result from then; a certain amount of restructuring was due to happen in any case.

It is not all bad news. For example, this evening's *Evening Standard* reports that Ryanair has just announced increased profits. They have risen by 30 per cent. to 102 million euros in the six months ending in September compared with analysts' expectations of 89 million euros. In addition, revenues were up by 29 per cent. The newspaper quotes Ryanair's chief executive, Mr. O'Leary. Describing his rivals, he said:

"'Many have used the events of 11 September as an excuse to cover their continuing losses but they were loss making well before then and will continue to be so.'

He praised European Transport Commissioner Loyola de Palacio for 'doing a fine job' preventing 'basket cases' from receiving more State aid."

That may sound pejorative, but Ryanair has shown that there is still hope in the airline industry.

Ryanair is talking about purchasing more second-hand planes. The *Evening Standard* reports:

"It is also talking to owners of 600 second-hand 737s as well as planemaker Boeing about buying 50 more aircraft."

There is some good news about, and we want to spread it. Anything that the Government can do to encourage the future of the airline industry would be welcome.

I strongly echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). I hope that there will be an announcement on terminal 5 very shortly and that, when it comes, it will not follow the precedents that the Government have set recently. I hope that a full statement will be made to the House before the press is informed, so that we may play a full part in scrutinising the announcement first. Will the Minister take that point on board? I know that there has been controversy about terminal 5, but the industry will gain confidence if it knows where it is going.

The infrastructure of London's airports has been mentioned. The number of job losses at Heathrow is likely to be substantial, but the Government could consider a number of options. Last week in Westminster Hall, I made the point that we need to consider the infrastructure used for travelling between London's airports. There is still a poor service between the two major airports of Heathrow and Gatwick, but surely we could consider providing fast rail systems or improving the M25 so that bus travel is quicker and more predictable.

In Westminster Hall, attention was drawn to the Thameslink rail link between Luton and King's Cross. I travelled on it recently and it is still a relatively poor service. It stops at every little station when we want a high-speed rail link between King's Cross and Luton. In fact, as on the link between Paddington and Heathrow, one should be able to check in one's baggage at King's Cross. Even in the current security situation, the ability to check in baggage could be used at more of the terminals that link central London with major London airports, and in respect of links between airports. That would make travel easier for people changing from domestic to international flights.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington mentioned the NATS privatisation programme. The debate on that will have to be reopened in light of today's uncertain circumstances. We need to be clear about the direction that our airspace control is taking. If the second planned airspace terminal at Prestwick is not going ahead—the Minister is shaking his head—he needs to explain where the investment for Prestwick and West Drayton is coming from and where he expects it to go. As I said, if the £1 billion investment from the consortiums is not forthcoming, where will the money come from to fund those two improvements? We need to know that fairly shortly.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the Government's role as insurer of last resort. They could provide stability for the industry. The first offer to be insurer of last resort was only a day or two away from running out when the Government announced that they would pay the premiums for another 30 days. We need to know the Government's plans. They should not leave it until the day when the arrangement runs out. Let us try to provide certainty.

The hon. Gentleman said that we should extend the period from 30 days to 180. As I have no technical expertise, I do not know whether that is right, but it seems to me that a longer period would be of great benefit to the industry. Unless there is another terrorist outbreak, I do not think that that would be too expensive. If there is another terrorist outbreak, they will spend a lot more on unemployment benefit and so on. It would surely pay to keep some stability in the industry, and that is one way of doing it.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned negotiating with the European Union on what specific help can be provided when the single regeneration bid ends, because that is

causing uncertainty. Conversations with the relevant directorates general in the EU on what could be done to the state aid rules in such exceptional circumstances would pay dividends. There is a significant threat of job lay-offs, and a number of jobs have already gone. The Government could talk to the EU about that.

While the Government are finding out what can be provided for the airline industry, they should consider targeted help for security measures. We know that they are receiving more than £1 billion in airport passenger levy. The Government have increased the rate and are now bringing in that substantial sum. Although that is going into the general Treasury coffers, it would be wrong in such exceptional circumstances for the cost of increased security measures to fall on an individual airline. Carefully targeted measures would be helpful. Again, I do not think that that would be too expensive.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's eminently sensible initiative to bring everyone together in a taskforce, especially members of the TGWU. I was not aware that it was going to lobby the House on Thursday, and the debate is timely. Many of its members must be apprehensive. It is incumbent on all hon. Members to see what can be done to ensure that as many jobs are preserved as possible and to bring all Government agencies together to decide what can be done to help people who are going to lose their jobs. I was especially impressed with the hon. Gentleman's idea about the Learning and Skills Council. That is a positive initiative to retrain people who lose their jobs, perhaps to re-enter the industry with new qualifications and skills when it revives and expands.

I do not want to detain the House. The Minister can do a great deal to reassure the industry. That would be tremendously helpful. We all need to chart a way through the crisis so that we shorten the recession as much as possible. Every measure will help, including talking to the European and American authorities. We know from tonight's *Evening Standard* that British Airways is about to drop out of the FTSE 100, which is a serious development. Its profits and share price have plunged. No one wants that. We all want it to recover quickly. One reason why it has taken such a dive is that of all European airlines, it is one of the most dependent on the transatlantic trade. Anything that the Government can do, including concluding a bilateral agreement, would be beneficial.

7.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) on securing the debate and providing the House with an opportunity to discuss this important subject. I thank him for making so many vital points, and for the calm and measured way in which he raised them on behalf of his constituents.

I want to respond in full to many of my hon. Friend's concerns, but I shall deal first with the comments made by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). I am glad that consumer confidence is still high in Uxbridge. I am sure that the good people there are delighted to have a Labour Government who have enabled that to be the case. The hon. Gentleman raised a number of important issues, which I shall address.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) is temporarily on the Back Benches. I look forward to seeing him on the Front Bench again. He said that he had been assigned to the DLTR; I think he meant the DTLR—the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. That is my Department, and I hope that he is shadow spokesman for it. The hon. Gentleman made the important point, which needs to be made, that some airlines are doing well. Tonight we are discussing some of the industry's problems, however.

The hon. Gentleman will not have to wait long for an announcement on terminal 5, but I cannot tell him what it will contain. He also mentioned National Air Traffic Services, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter), who has a long history of raising that subject. We have not received a request for financial assistance from NATS. We have agreed only a pause in the building programme at the Scottish centre, which we had to do following the events of 11 September. We are firmly committed to the two-centre strategy.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister confirm that, when we finally have an announcement on terminal 5, it will be made first to this House and not to the media?

Mr. Jamieson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that this House will be fore-informed of any announcement that we make.

The Government recognise the great importance of the aviation industry to the United Kingdom economy and are therefore paying close attention to the industry's current problems, as so well articulated by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington. We acted quickly in response to the events of 11 September to counteract the failure in the aviation insurance industry market and to enhance security measures at all UK airports. We are actively considering the payment of emergency aid to airlines for the four days when United States airspace was closed, in accordance with European Commission guidelines.

In addition to those practical measures, we are doing what we can to restore confidence in air travel. For example, last week I undertook a programme of visits to UK airports—I went to Gatwick, Edinburgh, Birmingham and Bristol, and a few weeks earlier I had visited Plymouth airport—to help boost morale and encourage consumer confidence in air travel. I pay tribute to people who in recent weeks have worked extremely hard in many of our airports to ensure that they are even safer than before. I know that many of those people have worked under enormous stress and pressure in recent weeks. I give credit to them, especially my hon. Friend's constituents.

Some 180,000 people in the United Kingdom are employed in the aviation industry—an industry with a gross domestic produet similar to that of car manufacturing—with up to three times as many jobs supported indirectly. Moreover, the UK aerospace industry employs around 154,000 people, contributing almost 1 per cent. of GDP. Aviation is particularly important to local economies around major airports. As my hon. Friend said, Heathrow airport accounts directly for 68,000 jobs and is by far the biggest employer on a single site in London.

I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport was able this morning to meet my hon. Friend, fellow Members and representatives of the air transport

[Mr. Jamieson]

industry, trade unions and local communities to discuss the situation of Heathrow airport and its surrounding areas. I understand that the discussion was constructive and wide ranging, and that those present agreed to engage in a regular exchange of information on the state of the industry during this difficult period. I also understand that the employment market in the areas surrounding Heathrow is holding up well at present, but it is obviously important that all concerned should be in a position to react quickly to any deterioration in the situation. I take particular note of my hon. Friend's comments about low pay in his area.

My hon. Friend talked about the task group of the airport's community partners that is being set up, and I was pleased to hear that. As he rightly says, there needs to be a programme for a co-ordinated approach. I certainly look forward to receiving the briefing paper from that group. I know that the Department for Education and Skills is involved and that the Employment Service will be actively involved. I assure my hon. Friend that Departments and particularly the Employment Service will be giving every support to people who may be facing redundancy. I suppose that one good point is that the economy is doing well, and we should be thankful for that, but that is probably small comfort to people who may be losing their jobs in the weeks ahead.

There can be no doubt that the aviation industry has suffered a body-blow as a result of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. Not only was air transport chosen as the instrument of terror in those attacks, but the industry has become the most prominent casualty in the subsequent economic fallout. The International Air Transport Association has predicted a collective industry loss of £7 billion for 2001. Many are saying that the effects will be worse than those experienced following the Gulf war. It is clearly too early to tell precisely how badly the effects will be or how long they will last, but traffic figures published by the Association of European Airlines for the five weeks up to 14 October showed that the north Atlantic market was down by about one third compared with the same period last year, while European traffic was down by about 10 per cent.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister will be aware that the American Government made available selective aid of $15 billion to their industry. Will he confirm that he is urgently talking to his European Commission counterparts to see what selective state aid either the EU or the British Government might be able to give to our airline industry?

Mr. Jamieson: I assure the hon. Gentleman—we made this point the other day in a similar debate in Westminster Hall—that we are having, have had and are still having active discussions with our European Community partners. He will know that the matter is within European Union competence. We are certainly considering how we can ensure that our industry is not disadvantaged.

We must put the crisis into context. European and charter traffic has been less badly affected—I certainly found that when visiting airports around the country—and the low-cost sector continues to register very strong passenger growth. The wider economic picture is far from gloomy. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said that he is "cautiously optimistic" about the future, with UK interest rates and inflation low, and public finances stable. Nevertheless, we appreciate the fact that scheduled long-haul carriers are facing genuine difficulties. I am aware that British Airways has only today announced a 25 per cent. fall in traffic for October compared with the previous year.

The current uncertainties inevitably translate into lost jobs throughout the aviation industry and in the service industries supporting it. Most of the main UK airlines have already announced redundancies. British Airways, for example, has announced that it will shed 7,000 jobs. I know that airlines are making every effort to achieve those cuts by voluntary means, but each lost job can be and will be a personal tragedy affecting families and communities in areas such as my hon. Friend's constituency.

It is important to point out that the aviation industry was, by common consensus, in trouble before the events of 11 September, which was due primarily to the economic downturn and high fuel costs. The European industry in particular has long been overdue for restructuring. For example, it cannot make sense for 17 European carriers to offer scheduled services across the Atlantic, against only seven US carriers. The problems experienced by many European flight carriers stem from long before 11 September, although clearly those events have compounded the problems.

Nevertheless, following the attacks in the United States, the industry has had to face new problems. Initially, US airspace was closed for four days. Then there was the decision by the insurance market to limit its exposure to future terrorist attacks by withdrawing third party war risks cover—a decision that threatened to ground the entire industry. Circumstances dictated that security measures needed to be tightened, and the response of a significant proportion of the travelling public was also predictable—they cancelled their reservations or simply declined to book.

Despite the Government's long-standing policy not to intervene in the aviation market, such exceptional circumstances clearly warranted Government action. The Government took immediate steps to counteract the failure in the insurance market. Within a few days and before the imminent withdrawal of cover had grounded the entire UK fleet, we made available to our airlines and related industry the necessary third party war risks cover. Indeed, so quick off the mark were we and so effective was the remedy that we devised that our lead has been widely followed throughout the world. Although initially for one month, the coverage has recently been extended to 23 November. We shall, of course, reconsider that during our discussions with the airlines, but it might be somewhat premature to extend coverage now in the way suggested by the hon. Member for Cotswold. The situation unfolds further daily and we have to consider our policies on the same basis.

Despite the few deplorable lapses that have been reported in the past few weeks, standards of security in the UK before 11 September were among the highest in the world. During my recent visits to airports, I have seen the extremely high standards of both pre-existing security measures and the enhanced measures implemented since 11 September. Nevertheless, we have enhanced security measures at all UK airports and for airlines leaving this country. In addition, we are carrying out a fundamental review of aviation security to ensure that air travel is as

safe from terrorist attacks as we can make it, while at the same time balancing security with our freedom to travel. I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington welcomes BAA's estimate that 150 extra security staff will be needed at Heathrow. I understand that the response to advertisements placed in the local press has been good.

Aid to airlines is controlled by the European Community, which has exclusive competence for monitoring state aid that distorts or threatens to distort competition in so far as it affects trade between member states. The European Commission acted quickly to address the repercussions of the terrorist attacks for the air transport industry. It issued a communication which reiterates that member states must not depart from Community rules on state aid, but sets out how the Commission will interpret the rules in the current situation. The extra costs of security, losses directly attributable to the closure of US airspace and the provision by Governments of insurance cover are identified as areas where state aid would be justifiable. The Government are currently considering whether further aid to UK airlines should be made available, taking those guidelines into account.

On 16 October, my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Minister for Transport attended the Transport Council in Brussels. They strongly supported the Commission's view that it would not be in the industry's long-term interests to bail out individual airlines that are, by any objective measure, no longer viable. UK airlines have always performed well when they have been able to compete on fair terms in the marketplace. My right hon. Friends made clear our disapproval of proposals by some member states to distort the market by propping up their flag carriers with inappropriate state aid.

UK Ministers also took the opportunity to promote our views on restructuring the industry. We consider it vital that the repercussions of 11 September act as a spur rather than a brake to airline consolidation, but it is not for Governments to engineer consolidation. That is for the airlines, acting on their own commercial judgment, whereas it is our duty to ensure that the regulatory framework facilitates change. One of the obstacles to intra-European Union airline mergers is the attitude of prospective third-country bilateral partners. Strict adherence to outdated ownership and control restrictions on the part of other countries might seriously impede the consolidation that we in Europe need. Looking to the future, we have a successful base on which to build.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does the Minister agree that one of the reasons for the phenomenal growth in the number of air passengers in the past 10 years has been the real-terms decrease in air fares? Will he be vigilant against excessive consolidation in Europe, which might result in competition becoming less intense than it has been in recent years and the fall in air fares being reversed? A real-terms increase in fares would be an additional deterrent to air travel.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that air travel costs have fallen in real terms. It is also true that people have more money in their pockets: our economy and, by and large, the economies of other European countries are doing well, so more people are travelling. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point. We must ensure that there is proper competition in the market.

The UK has a wide range of quality airlines, including a very successful no-frills sector. That is underpinned by some of the most successful airports in the world: Heathrow serves more international passengers than any other airport in the world, with Gatwick sixth on that list. It is impressive to note that travellers to and from the UK account for 25 per cent. of all international air travellers. We want that success story to continue. Some will say that in the current circumstances, it is all a question of survival, not expansion, and that might be true in the short term, but I am confident that the industry is resilient enough to secure future growth.

The Government remain committed to addressing the long-term future of UK aviation. We have a manifesto commitment to publish a new White Paper next year: in it, we intend to set out our plans on aviation and airports for 30 years ahead, and that work continues with energy. Over a 30-year period there are bound to be severe shocks to the industry—the past 30 years has seen its share of such shocks, whether as a result of terrorist action or of increases in the price of oil, but, despite that, world aviation has grown continuously during that period, with declines proving to be but temporary.

Governments around the world will be doing their best to ensure that any pause in economic growth is as small and as short as possible. Our long-term forecasts are based on trends driven largely by growth in national and world GDP, and we are confident that demand for air travel will eventually come back into line with long-term forecasts. Our aim therefore remains to produce a White Paper that provides a framework for the sustainable development of aviation and airports in the UK. It will attempt to balance the social, environmental and economic impacts of the industry while remaining consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

The UK has long been a world leader in aviation, and despite the current difficulties it will remain so. The prognosis for UK aviation is very encouraging, albeit that the current economic difficulties may have wrought permanent changes in the industry. I look to the future with confidence and foresee a stronger European aviation industry, with the UK maintaining its vanguard position.

I am pleased to have been able to set the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington in a broader context tonight. The Government understand the special difficulties facing his constituency; we understand, too, that trade unions and others will be concerned about job losses in the area. However, I assure him that the Government are doing everything we can in difficult and somewhat unpredictable circumstances to ensure that the problems do not last long, and that the situation does not become permanent. I hope that we will in future be able to have a debate in which we can agree that the fortunes of the people in his constituency and of Heathrow have risen as we expect them to.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 6 November 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Scottish Parliament

1. **John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): If she will make a statement on proposed changes to the Scotland Act 1998 to alter the number of Members of the Scottish Parliament. [10309]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): As hon. Members are aware, the Scotland Act is designed to produce a reduction in the number of MSPs in the 2007 election and thereafter, following the anticipated reduction in the number of MPs. The Government have made it clear that we would take into account the experience of the first years of the Scottish Parliament's operation and be pragmatic in our response to that. I can therefore announce today that I shortly intend to launch a consultation exercise on the size of the Scottish Parliament. It will not involve any postponement in the boundary commission's on-going review.

John Robertson: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer and for announcing the consultation exercise, but no change in numbers was envisaged under the Scotland Act—the numbers were built into the Act itself. Although I accept that a review may be necessary, does she not agree that, as a Government, we would leave ourselves open to the charge of the misuse of power? Does she also agree that the Act and the Scottish Parliament should be left alone, so that they have a chance to bed in before any review takes place?

Mrs. Liddell: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but the consultation is open ended. One reason why the devolution settlement has proved so successful to date is that it was built on a spirit of consensus and co-operation, and I shall seek to broker such consensus through the consultation exercise. I will not respond to the specific points that he makes, because that would pre-judge the consultation.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): The Scottish National party welcomes any consultation that might maintain the number of MSPs. Given that Civic Scotland agrees that a minimum of 129 MSPs are required for the Scottish Parliament to function properly, why is this still a vexed question for the Secretary of State? That is puzzling. Does she agree that the Scottish Parliament, like any normal Parliament anywhere in the world, should have the power and responsibility to determine its own numbers? It should certainly not be subject to the machinations of Labour Members or any of their political manoeuvrings.

Mrs. Liddell: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the devolution settlement, which is embodied in the Scotland Act, grew out of a consensus—of which, of course, his party was not a part—that embraced every aspect of Scottish civic life. I wish to proceed in the spirit of that consensus. Obviously, he has a completely different agenda, which Scotland rejected at the last general election.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement on the consultation exercise, but will she widen it to take other opinions into account? For example, many people are worried that defeated Scottish Parliament candidates can lose constituency seats, scuttle around and come in through the back door as list Members. Surely that is wrong. The Scottish Parliament has been up and running for more than two years, so we should consider how it is working. Surely we should be entitled to give our opinion during that consultation and say that things are wrong and that we need to change them.

Mrs. Liddell: The Government have no plans to alter the electoral system for the Scottish Parliament, but I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will continue to press his case on those matters.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement on the consultation exercise; we on the Liberal Democrat Benches look forward to seeing how that will go. Like me, does she consider the undoubted success of the Scottish Parliament to be due in no small measure to the success of the Committee system and to participation and consultation? Now that the Scottish Parliament has been working for two years, does not experience show us that any significant reduction in the number of MSPs would hamper the Committee system and the consultation process? Now is not the right time to change the procedure.

Mrs. Liddell: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. His promotion is rapid after such a short time in the House, although I suppose that he served his apprenticeship in another place.

I do not wish to prejudge the consultation exercise, but one of the great successes of devolution is the spirit of partnership that has developed between the Government and the Scottish Executive and between individual MPs and MSPs. If the consultation exercise concludes that the number of MSPs should remain at 129 or thereabouts, while the number of MPs is reduced, real and practical issues relating to how that relationship works will need to be addressed.

For the anoraks, that issue involves the co-terminosity of constituencies. Those of us who deal with those matters as part of our day-to-day living have a contribution to make. In all seriousness, I urge all Members to turn their

attention to how we can make things work where the boundaries for Westminster constituencies do not match those for Scottish Parliament constituencies.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): My right hon. Friend will agree that there have been two great successes for the Labour Government—the creation of devolution and the reduction of unemployment. However, does not she think that we have more important things to do than pass legislation that will protect, at most, 15 or 20 jobs? Such legislation would be seen as self-serving by the people of Scotland, who have far higher priorities than looking after 129 people in Edinburgh who are doing not too badly at the moment.

Mrs. Liddell: I say to my hon. Friend that the Labour Government have scored rather more than two conspicuous successes. On his other point, I repeat that the success of devolution is down to consensus. Views have been expressed for and against opening up the Scotland Act, but it would be remiss of me to go against the spirit of consensus that we have had for more than 10 years in Scotland and to come to a conclusion without fully consulting all the interested parties. Like any other Member of the House and those beyond, my hon. Friend has an opportunity to make his views known.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): It might be worth your while, Mr. Speaker, to note that that interesting and important announcement was published in today's *Business a.m.* and before Parliament was informed.

As the Secretary of State has said that the consultation is open ended, will she confirm that there is absolutely no question whatever of retaining 72 Scottish Members of Parliament at Westminster and that that is ruled out in the consultation?

Mrs. Liddell: I welcome the hon. Lady to her new responsibilities. It is a very long time since we heard a Scottish voice from the Opposition Dispatch Box at Scottish questions. *[Interruption.]* I apologise to the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing), who has been moved on to other matters. However, it is rare for a shadow Secretary of State for Scotland to have a Scottish accent.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) will bring her usual verve and vigour to the post. She is better qualified to speak than most on the Opposition Benches, because she knows what it feels like to be rejected by the Scottish electorate. Indeed, I voted against her in 1984.

The hon. Lady's substantive point is about the number of Westminster MPs. The boundary commission is considering the matter and will report in due course. There is no reason to postpone its report or to seek to alter the commission's responsibilities. She should know that there have been extensive discussions over the past few months on those matters, so it is not surprising that the press are speculating about them.

Mrs. Lait: I thank the right hon. Lady for her characteristically warm welcome. Had I known that she was one of my prospective constituents in 1984, I would have made a point of knocking on her door. I am sure that I would have converted her.

It is interesting to note that this is the first time, I think, that two women have represented Scotland at the Dispatch Box. The fact that two Strathclyders are facing each other is also unique. Scottish education was good, even in the 1960s. *[Interruption.]* I wear well.

In the light of the consultation, does the right hon. Lady wish that her predecessors had taken the advice of Tory Members of both Houses of Parliament and, in particular, of the late and much lamented Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish to decouple in the Scotland Act the relationship between the number of Westminster and Holyrood Members? Does not she hope, just a little, that the consultation and the boundary commission recommendations will redistribute out from under the Scottish First Minister the boundaries of his constituency?

Mrs. Liddell: No.

Civil Aviation Industry

2. **Jim Sheridan** (West Renfrewshire): If she will make a statement on the impact on the civil aviation industry in Scotland of the terrorist attacks in the United States.

[10310]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The terrorist attacks in the United States have had significant implications for the aviation industry worldwide. It is inevitable that airline operations in Scotland should be similarly affected. The Government have already announced measures to assist airlines in dealing with the immediate implications of the events of 11 September and I maintain contact with the industry to monitor further developments. Indeed, I am calling senior representatives of the industry together on 3 December so that we can have fuller discussions on those matters.

Jim Sheridan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. She may be aware that my constituency, like many in Scotland, is heavily dependent on air and sea transport, so will she assure the House that, following the events of 11 September, the Government will seek improvements in all transport links throughout Scotland and between Scotland, Europe and beyond? That would protect jobs in that vital industry.

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I would expect nothing less from him given the nature of his constituency and its history of shipbuilding. It is important to the economy of Scotland that we have the best possible transport links to our main markets in Europe. I am therefore pleased to announce that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions today agreed in principle to provide £12 million of freight facilities grants to Forth Ports plc and Superfast Ferries SA to establish a ferry link between Rosyth and Zeebrugge in Belgium. The grant is subject to state aid clearance by the European Commission, and that is being sought. The service will save thousands of long-distance lorry journeys on Britain's roads and will be of enormous help to Scotland's exporters.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Labour Government's privatisation of National Air Traffic

Services is predicated on £1 billion of private investment coming from the partner airlines. Following 11 September, it is highly unlikely that that will be forthcoming, which puts in doubt the air traffic control centre at Prestwick. What steps are she and her Department taking to ensure that the project proceeds?

Mrs. Liddell: The events of 11 September have caused much rethinking across the aviation industry and my office is in constant contact with it. Although we are disappointed with the delayed start of the second centre, we are encouraged by the fact that the commitment to it remains in place. I intend to invite representatives of NATS to meet me to discuss how quickly we can get the project up and running again.

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware that Rolls-Royce has announced some 3,800 redundancies in the United Kingdom as a result of 11 September. We are not aware of the extent of redundancies at individual plants, but given that there is a plant at Hillington in my constituency and the likelihood of a knock-on effect, will she use her good offices to do everything she can to assist Rolls-Royce to deal with that blow to Paisley, North?

Mrs. Liddell: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. Indeed, she has articulated it to me before. We are all aware of the importance of Rolls-Royce to the economy of the west of Scotland, but all companies that are involved in the aerospace sector need to balance capacity with demand. Yesterday, however, Emirates Airlines announced a £15 billion plane order that will benefit Rolls-Royce to the tune of at least $50 million. That may not have an immediate impact on the redundancy programme, but it is good news for the company and the industry, as is the Lockheed-Martin joint strike fighter announcement. If my hon. Friend wants to bring representatives of the company and work force to meet me and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, I am happy to afford her that facility.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Is the Secretary of State aware that the consumer confidence barometer—a monthly survey compiled for the European Commission—shows an alarming drop in confidence in the UK, including Scotland? That is bad news for the aerospace industry and jobs, as is the Prestwick announcement. Does she know that the figures show the biggest drop in confidence since last year's fuel crisis? Have not increased taxation, increased red tape and increased burdens on business—all of which were introduced by Labour in Scotland—left the aviation industry less well placed to face a world economic downturn?

Mrs. Liddell: On confidence in the airline sector, in September 2001 BAA released figures on airport usage in Scotland. Compared with the previous year, passenger numbers through Edinburgh have risen by 13.4 per cent., through Glasgow by 6.9 per cent., through Aberdeen by 0.5 per cent. and through Prestwick by a massive 37.9 per cent., so there is still confidence in the airline sector.

On confidence in the economy overall, we are now seeing the sense of the measures taken by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1997 to introduce stability to the economy and move away from the boom and bust of 18 years of Tory rule. It has never been more important for us to have stability in our economy, as a result of which unemployment in Scotland is at its lowest for 40 years and we have historically low interest rates. There are more people in employment than there have been since the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) and I were at Strathclyde university.

Poverty Policies

3. **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): If she will make a statement on the joint work of the Government and the Scottish Executive to combat poverty. [10311]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): We work effectively together on our anti-poverty strategy, as we do on many issues. For example, the Executive played a full part in preparing the UK national action plan on social inclusion, which we recently submitted to the European Commission.

Mr. Luke: I commend my hon. Friend for his evident commitment to the joined-up campaign to banish all aspects of poverty, which afflict both young and old, to the dustbins of Scottish history. Does he agree, however, that despite the progress that has been made, areas such as mine still suffer from high levels of poverty and unemployment? Will he give a commitment to visit Dundee to meet the organisations and agencies involved in the anti-poverty strategy, including the very active pensioners groups, to review what more the Government can do to remove the blight of poverty from my city?

Mr. Foulkes: As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already visited Dundee, but I should like to take up his kind invitation. I want to go up there to say what the Government are doing for pensioners: the minimum income guarantee, the winter fuel allowance and the pension increase, which this year is higher than inflation. [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] We are going to do more. We are introducing the pension credit. I told all that to the Scottish Pensioners Forum, which is led by my old friend Phyllis Heriot, when it visited the Secretary of State and me at Dover house today, and I am willing to go to Dundee, or anywhere else in Scotland, to say what we are doing for pensioners.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Is the Minister aware that poverty in Scotland does not end at Stepps or Abington? With farm incomes declining to new lows—the Government's own figures suggest as low as £30 a week—sub-post offices closing from Wigtownshire to Shetland and rural business closing under the weight of Government red tape, what will the Government do to reverse the decline into devastating poverty of Scotland's rural communities?

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend congratulated her friend from Strathclyde on her appointment. May I commiserate with the hon. Gentleman, because it would have been nice to have a shadow Secretary of State who represents a Scottish constituency and who can speak from personal experience that is current, rather than from the 1960s?

The Government have committed £7 million to help Dumfries and Galloway, because of foot and mouth disease. We have made a pledge that no rural post office will close unnecessarily. *[Laughter.]* None has closed in my constituency in the past four years. If any post office in the hon. Gentleman's constituency has closed, he can come and see me afterwards and I will take the matter on board.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Privilege and special treatment.

Mr. Foulkes: Why not?

Voter Registration

4. **Mr. Tom Harris** (Glasgow, Cathcart): What steps she is taking to encourage people in Scotland to register to vote. [10312]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): In February this year, my right hon. Friend launched a major publicity campaign to encourage people in Scotland to register to vote, following the introduction of rolling registration by the Representation of the People Act 2000. However, from 1 July, encouraging people to participate in the democratic process became the responsibility of the new Electoral Commission.

Mr. Harris: During the general election, I encountered a number of constituents, many of them young people, who had not registered to vote despite being legally obliged to do so. Is my hon. Friend aware that Glasgow city council expects to identify no more than 80 per cent. of all eligible voters for inclusion in next year's electoral register? Given that it is pointless to encourage people to come out and vote unless they are registered in the first place, does he agree that it is about time that we reminded the public that they face individual fines of up to £1,000 for failing to return a completed electoral registration form?

Mr. Foulkes: Low registration certainly depresses me. Glasgow city council aims for 100 per cent. registration, and I encourage people to register. After all, women fought for the vote—they chained themselves to railings and threw themselves in front of race horses to get the vote. When visiting Chile after the dictatorship, I saw people queueing to vote because they recognised the importance of democracy. After 11 September, we, too, ought to recognise the importance of democracy. Young people, above all, should recognise that, register to vote, then vote—and vote Labour.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

The Advocate-General was asked—

Legislation (Amendments)

24. **John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): How many Bills in the Scottish Parliament the Advocate-General has sought to amend since May. [10333]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): Since May, eight Bills have been passed. My legal officials and I considered those Bills during the various procedural stages. If necessary, informal discussions took place about competence issues, to try to resolve them without the use of my powers under section 33 of the Scotland Act 1998 to refer the matter to the Privy Council. Amendments are the responsibility of Members of the Scottish Parliament.

John Robertson: My hon. and learned Friend will be aware that the Scottish Parliament has now passed the International Criminal Court (Scotland) Act 2001. Does the fact that she did not refer that Bill to the Privy Council mean that she will intervene to support that important Scottish legislation if it is challenged in the Scottish courts?

The Advocate-General: That is certainly possible. I intervened to support Scottish Parliament legislation when the Mental Health (Public Safety and Appeals) (Scotland) Act 1999 was challenged. Any challenge to the 2001 Act intimated to me as a devolution issue will be carefully considered on its merits.

Devolution

25. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): What recent discussions she has had on the interrelationship between the Scotland Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998. [10335]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: The inter-relationship of those two important Acts was discussed in the recent case of Kenneth Mills, in which I appeared personally. Questions had arisen as to whether an issue under the Human Rights Act could now be raised directly without raising a devolution issue, even though the question might relate to the powers of the Lord Advocate. My argument, which the court accepted, was that such a matter is a devolution issue under the Scotland Act and must therefore be intimated to me as Advocate-General.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Do my hon. and learned Friend's discussions indicate that there have been any problems in the operation of the Scotland Act since the Human Rights Act came into force?

The Advocate-General: The case of Mills was one solution to a problem that had arisen, but my impression is that the legal profession in Scotland is doing well and is well informed about that important legislation, and citizens are not slow to take advantage of the new rights and remedies that the Government have provided. Through his writings and his expertise in that area, my hon. Friend has done much to raise debate about such matters.

Asylum Seekers

26. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent advice she has given on the application of the Human Rights Act 1998 to asylum cases. [10336]

The Advocate-General for Scotland): I give advice on a range of matters as and when required. I am aware of the Home Secretary's proposals for treatment of asylum seekers and of the need to ensure that their treatment continues to comply with convention rights.

Miss McIntosh: Is the Advocate-General in a position to tell the House this afternoon what her advice would be in a case in which an application was made for the deportation of a person deemed to be a threat to the security of Scotland, and whether there are any contra-indications in the Human Rights Act that might be invoked in defence?

The Advocate-General: The hon. Lady knows, because I have told her on two occasions, if not three, that Law Officers' advice is always confidential. That was the case under previous Administrations and I see no reason to alter that convention.

27. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): What assessment she has made of the adequacy of legal representation available to asylum seekers in Scotland. [10337]

The Advocate-General for Scotland): Legal aid is a matter devolved to the Scottish Ministers, so the provision of legal representation available to asylum seekers in Scotland is a matter for them.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the Advocate-General for yet another interesting almost non-answer, but may I point out that whereas the provision of services, and therefore of legal services, to asylum seekers is a devolved matter, policy on asylum seekers is set by the United Kingdom Government? What additional resources will be made available to the Scottish Executive to meet the costs of implementing UK Government policy in that respect?

The Advocate-General: Perhaps the hon. Lady would like to address that matter to the responsible UK Minister. Scottish legal aid is a matter for the Scottish Executive. It is a policy matter and not a matter for me. I am a Law Officer.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Children and Family Services

28. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What action he is taking in response to the High Court decision relating to self-employed guardians ad litem and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. [10338]

29. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. [10339]

30. **Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of CAFCASS during its first six months of operation. [10340]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): CAFCASS is a new organisation that brings together the Family Court Welfare Service, the Children's Division of the Official Solicitor and the local authority panels of guardians ad litem in one unified service. It began only on 1 April 2001.

Since the inception of CAFCASS, the dispute over the guardians' contractual terms has taken a vast amount of time and effort and has diverted attention from other important issues. In response to the High Court decision relating to self-employed guardians, the Lord Chancellor issued a statutory direction to CAFCASS to begin consultations, and that process has begun. I receive weekly reports from the chairman of CAFCASS and have regular meetings with him.

Despite the problems, the evidence is that the service on the ground has generally continued to be provided as before. We value extremely highly the work of all the guardians and other CAFCASS staff, whether they are employed or self-employed, and I hope that all sides can now move on to develop the child-focused service that I am sure we all want to achieve.

Mr. Speaker: That answer was far too long.

Mr. Kidney: Is my hon. Friend aware that some very effective guardians have been made to feel unwelcome in the new service merely because they are self-employed? What does she say to the managers of the new service: are self-employed guardians welcome or unwelcome?

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend is right to say that there have been difficulties with self-employed guardians. We are consulting every self-employed guardian on the issue of self-employment. He will be interested to know that CAFCASS has accepted the National Association of Guardians Ad Litem and Reporting Officers proposal that the consultation process be led by an independent chairman and that the results be independently assessed. I hope that that gives my hon. Friend some reassurance about the position of self-employed guardians.

Dr. Cable: Does not the Minister accept that the quango has been guilty of extraordinary incompetence, not merely in acting illegally and alienating a crucial profession, but in driving 20 of its 54 regional managers to resignation in six months? As the management appears to be denying its accountability to Parliament through the hon. Lady, will she assert its accountability by having these people dismissed?

Ms Winterton: I reiterate that, throughout, our central concern has been to provide a good service to vulnerable people. All who are involved with CAFCASS share that aim. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that CAFCASS is a non-departmental public body, and as such it is governed by a framework document. Over and above that, it is a publicly funded body. It is fully accountable to the Public Accounts Committee, for example, and subject to regular scrutiny. The evidence from our independent inspections is that the service on the ground is generally being delivered extremely well. That is a tribute to all those who work for the service.

Paddy Tipping: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for accepting that there have been problems—understandable, perhaps—in setting up CAFCASS. Does she share my belief that the resignation of 22 of the 55 panel managers is genuinely worrying? Is the driver behind that an insufficient budget for CAFCASS and, perhaps, poor management? I know that there have been difficulties with management in the organisation. Is my hon. Friend confident that those problems have now been resolved?

Ms Winterton: I know that my hon. Friend is extremely concerned about that situation. He gave figures for panel managers; my figures show that, actually, 16 panel managers will have left the service by the end of December, but that includes a number who will have retired and some who have been promoted. My hon. Friend may be interested to know that of the 729 guardians who were self-employed on 1 April, only 29 have left the service; 175 have now accepted employment contracts. Of course we accept that there have been difficulties in the service. However, I repeat that I am meeting the chairman of the board weekly and am receiving regular reports from him. I am determined that the service will work for the children whom it was set up to look after.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the Minister not recognise that all the problems were entirely predictable? Indeed, they were predicted by Opposition Members. I know that that is not the Minister's fault, because she joined the Department only after the relevant Bill became law. However, if she studies all the debates, both in the House and in Committee, on the Bill that set up CAFCASS, as I hope she will, she will find that my hon. Friends and I repeatedly predicted the problems with CAFCASS that have now occurred.

The Government were arrogant and dismissive, and did not take a blind bit of notice. Having sown the wind, they have now reaped the whirlwind. Will the Minister undertake to look again at those debates and learn the lesson that, in future, she and her new ministerial colleagues need to listen to Opposition Members with experience of this legal field?

Ms Winterton: I will of course listen to representations, particularly from professionals in the field. However, when the service was set up, it was widely accepted that bringing all the disparate groups together in one unified service was the best way forward for vulnerable children. I will of course listen to representations, but evidence from independent assessments shows that, on the ground, the service is generally working well.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I thank my hon. Friend for the encouragement that she has given the guardians in her responses. When will it be possible to fill the substantial number of administrative and legal vacancies at all levels of CAFCASS in Wales, so that the service to vulnerable children to which she referred will not be harmed?

Ms Winterton: I thank my hon. Friend and reiterate the high value that we place on the work done by the guardians. Perhaps she will be reassured to know that, as I said earlier, of 729 guardians who were employed on 1 April, only 29 have left the service; 175 have now accepted employment contracts. In addition, 197 candidates eligible for appointment as guardians have been recruited, which should fill any gaps in the service. Of course, if my hon. Friend has any particular points that she feels we need to look at, I hope that she will write to me; I give her an undertaking that I will look into them.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): In the light of that sorry tale and the High Court proceedings, will the Minister explain why, when CAFCASS made decisions that the guardians found unpalatable, it told them that the Lord Chancellor was responsible? When the Lord Chancellor made inconvenient promises, however, CAFCASS told the court that it was independent of the Lord Chancellor.

Ms Winterton: The hon. Gentleman and I have been together upstairs, but I take this opportunity to welcome him to his new position on the Floor of the House. I quite look forward to working with him.

As for the legal position, some of the points that were made in court referred to a technical matter that was raised by NAGALRO—the National Association of Guardians Ad Litem and Reporting Officers. I assure him that we are working closely with the board of CAFCASS to ensure that the service is delivered. I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman did not join me in praising the very hard work and dedication not only of those employed but of the self-employed and other staff at CAFCASS. I hope that he may in future take the opportunity to do so.

Petty Sessional Areas (Leeds)

31. **Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell): What steps he proposes to take to obtain equal representation of all areas in Leeds following the merger of the existing petty sessional areas into one area. [10341]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): The distribution of magistrates in the area will remain the same after the amalgamation. Magistrates in the existing petty sessional areas will serve on the amalgamated bench with effect from 1 January 2002.

On the wider question, the Lord Chancellor requires that each bench should broadly reflect the community that it serves, in terms of gender, ethnic origin, geographical spread, occupation and political affiliation. The Leeds advisory committee will continue to strive to achieve a balanced bench following amalgamation of the petty sessional areas. However, when recruiting new magistrates, the pre-eminent requirement is that a candidate must be personally suitable for appointment, possessing the six key qualities required in a magistrate.

Mr. Challen: I welcome the response, so far as it goes. I also welcome the words of the Lord Chancellor, who wrote in this week's edition of *The House Magazine* about the importance of community representation on magistrates benches. In Morley, 91 per cent. of those serving on the bench are local, but we are to be subsumed into the Leeds bench, on which only 66 per cent. of people who serve are local. So we need a determined attempt to secure more resources, recruit locally, and ensure that

low-paid people, for example, or those who are self-employed in Morley have an opportunity to serve on magistrates benches.

Mr. Wills: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. I pay tribute to his hard work on behalf of the magistracy in his constituency. I have been conscious of that since I took this job and since he was elected. I assure him that we share his view of the importance of local justice and of local people being involved in the lay magistracy. The Lord Chancellor has gone to much trouble to involve local people and ensure that groups in our communities that are not adequately represented on the bench at the moment are so represented in future.

It may be of interest to my hon. Friend to know about the hard work that has gone into trying to get more people from ethnic minorities involved in the lay magistracy. The Lord Chancellor has enlisted the help of Operation Black Vote, for example, to run a scheme involving job shadowing, education and training in order to encourage people from ethnic minorities to apply for appointments. The scheme has been run in seven pilot areas. People who will shadow magistrates have been identified in Bristol and Birmingham. Recruitment of participants and magistrates is—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I concern myself with getting through the Order Paper, and that is very difficult when answers are so long.

Domestic Violence

32. **Margaret Moran** (Luton, South): What plans she has to introduce third party orders for cases of domestic violence. [10342]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this important issue. The Government are concerned to ensure that the range of remedies available to survivors of domestic violence provides sufficient support and protection. I am therefore pleased to be able to announce that we will be conducting a short research project fully to assess the implications and benefits of introducing third party orders, as provided under section 60 of the Family Law Act 1996. We will work closely with stakeholders and interest groups to ensure that the project addresses the diverse needs of all who need to use the court system.

Margaret Moran: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful reply. When she is taking evidence for the research, which will be most welcome, will she look into work undertaken in New South Wales, in Australia, where third party orders are used, police prosecute on behalf of victims of domestic violence, satisfaction levels are over 77 per cent. and the safety of victims has been vastly enhanced? Will she take that on board so that we can quickly enact section 60 of the Family Law Act to provide greater protection for victims of domestic violence?

Ms Winterton: I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has carried out as chairman of the all-party group on domestic violence. I know that she recently made an extremely useful visit to Australia, and I look forward to receiving her assessment of how the third party scheme works there.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The President of the Council was asked—

Parliamentary Timetable

43. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): What proposals he has to reform the timetable of the business of the House. [10353]

47. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What proposals he has for reform of the pattern of sittings of the House; and if he will make a statement. [10357]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I recognise the wish of many Members for sitting hours and a parliamentary calendar that are more predictable and allow them better to balance their commitments to Parliament with those to their constituencies and families. The Modernisation Committee will address these matters in this Session. I announced the dates of the next recess in our first week back, and I will make every effort to announce parliamentary recesses as early as possible to allow Members to plan their time more effectively.

Caroline Flint: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that timetabling of business is a good way to ensure better scrutiny of the legislation that we take through the House, and that the Opposition could make good use of that process? Is he not shocked, as I was, to hear that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is advising his masters not only to have their MPs do one day a week, but to pass legislation unscrutinised to the House of Lords?

Mr. Cook: I would not wish to suggest that anything that the right hon. Gentleman proposed would necessarily shock me, but I was startled to see that he had suggested to his Leader that the Conservatives be organised on a one-day-a-week rota. I have no objection to their organising themselves as they wish, but I hope that they will not then object if we try to achieve reasonable hours for those on the Government side who come to Parliament four days a week.

Mr. Mullin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it cannot be right in a democracy for the Government to be awarded a holiday from scrutiny for nearly three months every summer? Has not the time come to consider September sittings?

Mr. Cook: The issue of September sittings will have to be part of any overall review of the parliamentary calendar. The Modernisation Committee in the last Parliament suggested that September should be used for Committee weeks for Select Committees to sit. So far, relatively few have taken the opportunity of that invitation. My hon. Friend may wish to discuss that with the members of his Select Committee.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that instead of talking about timetables and changes to the timing of business, a more effective way for the House to perform

its function of scrutinising legislation would be to enable every Standing Committee that has charge of a Bill to take outside evidence before it begins the scrutiny of the Bill for which it is responsible?

Mr. Cook: I understand the case that the right hon. and learned Gentleman makes. There is provision in Standing Orders for that to happen, and I hope that in the case of one or two Bills that will come before us in this Parliament, that practice will be invoked. I hope that we can move to a situation in which more Bills are published in draft long before they reach Standing Committee. That would give an opportunity for the Select Committees and the public to comment. To achieve that, we need a rolling programme of legislation, rather than one crammed into a tight Session that provides half a year for legislation.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Does not the right hon. Gentleman have a dilemma, however, in that the word "reform" means different things to different people? To the Opposition and the country at large, it means changing our procedures to be more effective in our scrutiny of legislation, whereas to some hon. Members on the Government side, it is a euphemism for fewer votes, less work and early nights. Will the right hon. Gentleman give us an assurance that in any package of reform that he agrees to bring before the House, his overriding aim will be to improve the scrutiny of the Executive by the Chamber, not merely to court popularity with Members on his own side who do not like working after 5pm?

Mr. Cook: That is remarkable effrontery on the part of Front-Bench Members who are scheming to send imperfectly scrutinised Bills from this place and urging their leader to call them here for one day a week. For the record, there was no overall reduction in the hours that we sat during the past Parliament, and no one seeks such a reduction. However, it may make sense for us and for the scrutiny of legislation to ensure that those hours conform to the working practices of the world outside. We would possibly get more respect from our constituents if they saw us living in this century rather than two centuries ago.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): Would not our commitment to our constituents be greater if we were full-time Members of Parliament and some of us were not involved in other activities, and if we reduced the 13-week summer break when we are Members without a Parliament and cannot use the avenues available to question the Executive? I hope that those points will be seriously considered when we modernise our procedures.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is a sterling example of a full-time Member of Parliament. I—and, I hope, others—take to heart his observation that those who are not necessarily as full time as he should be careful about casting stones at others.

I do not believe that there is any appetite in the House or among our constituents for us to spend less time in Parliament, but there is a case for ensuring that the time when Parliament sits is more evenly spread. I am willing to consider that if we can reach a consensus.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am sure that the Leader of the House accepts that providing adequate time for opposition is a vital part of our democratic process. Will he confirm that the Modernisation Committee, which he chairs and on which I sit, and the Procedure Committee, which I have the honour to chair, are currently considering ways in which the House can scrutinise the Executive and hold them to account more effectively, not least through altering our method of dealing with oral and written parliamentary questions? Does he accept that all Opposition parties have a vital part to play in the effective operation of the United Kingdom's democratic parliamentary system?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments, which underline the fact that the Modernisation Committee has managed to proceed in a way that is not party political but acknowledges our common commitment to making a success of Parliament. I hope that the debate on modernisation will not proceed on the basis of antithesis between Government and Parliament. It remains my guiding principle that good scrutiny makes for good government. We need an effective Opposition and effective scrutiny in Parliament to achieve that.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was asked—

Recycling

44. **Ms Joan Walley** (Stoke–on–Trent, North): To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what his targets are for the recycling of paper on the parliamentary estate. [10354]

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): The House authorities follow the Government targets of 40 per cent. recovery of waste, with 25 per cent. of that being recycled. We currently exceed those targets, with 100 per cent. of waste recovered. In the current financial year, we expect 50 per cent. of that to be recycled.

Ms Walley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that reply, but I have long supported genuinely effective paper recycling at the House of Commons. Approximately six years ago, some mysterious brown paper bags became available in our offices. There were rumours that they were going straight to landfill or incineration, and not for recycling. How does the hon. Gentleman monitor recycling here? It is crucial that the House set an example of "do as we do" rather than "do as we say". We need to implement our commitment.

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Lady is right and makes a valid point. We have not properly considered the disposal of paper in the past. In the current financial year, we have started to disaggregate the amount of paper that we collect. I believe that paper constituted 30 per cent. of the total waste material recovered last year. However, I cannot tell the hon. Lady the exact proportion of recycled paper. I take her point to heart, and I shall ensure that the disposal of parliamentary rubbish is put on the agenda of the appropriate Committee at the earliest opportunity.

The President of the Council was asked—

Parliamentary Questions

45. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): If he will bring forward proposals to the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons for reform of the process for tabling parliamentary questions. [10355]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): Parliamentary questions provide an important mechanism for Members of the House to hold the Executive to account. The Procedure Committee is currently undertaking an investigation into the system for tabling parliamentary questions, and into the possibility of tabling questions and motions electronically. I look forward to its conclusions being brought to the House for our consideration.

Mr. Heath: Setting aside the fact that it would be nice if written questions for a named day could be answered on that day, does not the two-week delay between tabling an oral question and having it answered mean that Parliament often appears blithely oblivious of the topics of the day outside the Chamber? Does it not also mean that hon. Members have to apply absurd circumlocutions to make a question relevant to the question on the Order Paper? If civil servants can prepare appropriate notes for Ministers replying to Adjournment debates, other debates or private notice questions in a matter of days, why can they not do the same for oral questions at departmental Question Times?

Mr. Twigg: The hon. Gentleman raised this matter with my predecessor a year ago, and it is certainly not a new matter for the House. The Procedure Committee reported on it more than 10 years ago, and at that time proposed a reduction in the notice period to five days. That proposal was rejected by the Government at the time. Hon. Members on both sides of the House look forward to the outcome of the present deliberations of the Procedure Committee, when we shall have the opportunity to consider the matter again. Clearly, this is a question of striking a balance between ensuring the topicality that the hon. Gentleman seeks and ensuring that hon. Members asking questions are given fully briefed answers.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): While I recognise that government does not come to a standstill when the House is in recess, is it not time to reconsider whether we should be able, in a sensible way, to put written questions to the Executive during parliamentary recesses?

Mr. Twigg: My hon. Friend has raised this matter on a number of occasions, including through his membership of the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons. I do not know whether the Procedure Committee is examining the matter—but I see that the Chairman is nodding, so perhaps it is. That will, therefore, be one of the conclusions that we shall be able to consider when the Procedure Committee reports.

Online Consultation

46. **Margaret Moran** (Luton, South): What plans he has to allow online consultation on draft Bills. [10356]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): New forms of information and communications technology provide important opportunities for widening public participation in the democratic process. It is for individual Committees investigating draft Bills to decide how to conduct their investigations, but I welcome the fact that Committees are making greater use of the internet. On the Government side, draft Bills are now routinely published on the internet, and consultations invite e-mail responses.

Margaret Moran: Is my hon. Friend aware of the online interactive dialogue called Women Speak, which was held by the all-party group on domestic violence with survivors of domestic violence? It involved voices largely unheard by hon. Members, including Irish women travellers and Bangladeshi women. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that the House, when considering legislation, should hear the voices of those who usually go unheard? Will he actively encourage more online interactive consultation on draft Bills?

Mr. Twigg: Yes. I pay tribute to the excellent work that my hon. Friend has done on domestic violence and in pioneering e-democracy. I also pay tribute to her ingenuity in raising the matter twice in different sets of questions this afternoon. It is clearly vital that we use all the forms of technology available to us to encourage an interactive approach for members of the public. Important lessons can be learned from the Women Speak pilot that my hon. Friend mentioned. As of January 2001, all Government documents have routinely been published on the internet. That is an important first step, but we have a long way to go to ensure that we use all these forms of technology properly.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Are the Minister and his right hon. Friend aware that this proposal has been given its current impetus by early-day motion 347, led by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), who is not in his place this afternoon? Is the Minister aware that the context for this is that hon. Member's splendid diatribe on the growth of presidential power in No. 10, and that this is an attempt somewhat to redress the balance of power by bringing back to the House of Commons the opportunity to scrutinise legislation and Executive actions more effectively? Have the Minister and his right hon. Friend had the opportunity to see an advance copy of their hon. Friend's book? If so, perhaps the Minister would like to give us his reaction?

Mr. Twigg: I am tempted to say that my hon. Friend is not here because he is working on his computer. I have not had a chance to see his book either online or on paper, but I look forward to doing so. It demonstrates that there is a continuing and important debate to be had about constitutional reform and about how we can strengthen this Parliament. The task of the Modernisation Committee, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, is very much concerned with strengthening Parliament and its ability to serve as an effective forum for national political debate.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, in response to my private notice question about Railtrack, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions said—speaking of the chairman of Railtrack—

"the chairman had come to me on 25 July and said, 'If you don't give me more money, I cannot make a statement on the 8th of November that we are a going concern.'"—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 26.]

This morning, on Radio 4's "Today" programme, the chairman of Railtrack was interviewed. James Naughtie said:

"Yes but he's saying that you said to him that unless you got something like you wanted you feared that the outfit might not be a going concern in November. Is that true or not?"

The chairman replied:

"No it is not true."

I am sure that the Secretary of State would not wish Members to be given a misleading impression of the nature of that meeting, Mr. Speaker. Have you received any approach from the Secretary of State indicating that he wishes to come to the House and make a statement?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me reply to the point of order.

I have had no communication from the Secretary of State on that subject.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During questions to the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, you had to admonish Ministers twice for their prolix replies. Is there any further action that you can take if that conduct continues? Some of us suspect that Ministers are trying to avoid difficult questions further down the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker: I think the hon. Gentleman will know that Ministers have taken my advice on that.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have been very determined in your attempts to safeguard the privileges of this House. In view of what you heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) about the conduct of a Minister, can you advise me what action can be taken if that Minister is unwilling to come to the House and answer those serious charges? How may I ensure that he will deliver his minutes of the meeting? If Mr. Robinson, the chairman of Railtrack, is prepared to deliver his version of events, surely the Minister ought to deliver his minutes so that we can see who is telling the truth—because shareholders have been defrauded by the actions of this Government.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to raise a point of order?

Mr. Skinner: Yes. Why on earth should we believe Robinson?

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it about the same matter? I have stated my case on that: it is nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. Robathan: It is not about the same matter.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I spent a quarter of an hour and more talking to one of my constituents, a Mr. Evans of Broughton Astley. He expressed in strong terms his feelings and those of, I understand, a quarter of a million or so other people who had invested small amounts in Railtrack. They wanted to hear answers from the Minister yesterday, and did not. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that it is perfectly proper for a Secretary of State to put the minutes of any meeting in the Library of the House of Commons?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Minister; it is not a matter for the Chair.

Movement of Farm Animals

3.33 pm

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to limit journey times in respect of the transport of animals to slaughter; to promote the establishment of a network of local slaughterhouses; to limit the frequency with which animals may be brought to market in any twenty-day period; and for connected purposes.

The purpose of my Bill is to implement a series of practices that will improve safeguards against the spread of contagious diseases such as foot and mouth among farm animals. It is also designed to promote responsible purchasing practices among supermarket chains, and better working practices among cattle, pig and sheep farmers and dealers. Both would reduce significantly the possibility of a further epidemic.

Eight months on, Government, farmers and scientists are still speculating over the causes of the current foot and mouth outbreak with no one apparently having proof positive of the specific origin. Despite that uncertainty, it seems very likely that the rapid and extensive spread of the disease was due to multiple journeys and lengthy journeys. Animals were transported in quick succession in and out of markets and elsewhere by dealers looking to maximise their profit on each animal, which simultaneously exposed the greatest possible number of animals to any infected ones.

Lengthy journeys to slaughter became widespread in the meat and livestock industry in the 1990s. As well as the obvious and real implications for tracing a subsequent outbreak of a contagious disease, multiple journeys and long trips to slaughter have serious consequences for farm animals' welfare. Long periods of travel lead to fatigue, dehydration and distress. One does not need the brains of a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food scientist to realise that consistently exposing an animal to a cramped, hot and noisy environment is intrinsically traumatic, and can lead to a compromised immune system and greater vulnerability to contagious and generally debilitating diseases.

A factor in the upsurge of such commercial practices has been the centralisation of supermarkets' distribution networks, which they present as driven by consumer demand for cheap food. Disingenuous claims such as those prolong the use of questionable methods, which the supermarkets frequently practise outside the gaze and perception of the consuming public.

In the United Kingdom, 80 per cent. of the market is now controlled by the five largest retail chains, including Wal-Mart, whose recent arrival is both a challenge and an opportunity for the Government to enact coherent legislation regulating the movement of animals to market and slaughter, and the location of that slaughter. My Bill helps in the formulation of such legislation.

The provision in the Bill to impose a maximum limit of eight hours on the transport of animals to slaughter is, as Compassion in World Farming points out, rather limited, but it is, regrettably, the shortest limit that the European Union allows member states to impose on journeys to slaughter. CIWF believes, as I do, that those journeys should be as short as possible. Not only does that accommodate farm animal welfare considerations but, from commercial and public health perspectives, it improves the quality and integrity of the product.

Extensive and ever increasing journey times have followed the closure of hundreds of local abattoirs. The network of abattoirs is shrinking, and in the past 15 years in England alone over 60 per cent. of abattoirs have closed, leaving barely 300, with all the attendant adverse impact on animal welfare. Producers and dealers have often ignored using local abattoirs in favour of the marginal increases in profits gained from those larger abattoirs that have the seal of approval of supermarket chains, despite the distances involved in getting the animals to slaughter.

The second part of the Bill is designed to promote the continuance, or in some cases reopening, of a network of local abattoirs. The spate of abattoir closures in the 1990s coincided with tougher EU meat hygiene laws, which smaller operators found expensive to comply with. That extra cost was compounded by the supermarkets' decision to source their meat from a handful of large remote abattoirs whose prices had not risen as significantly as those of smaller local ones.

Further closures of local abattoirs need to be arrested and some that have closed must be encouraged to re-open. In order to achieve that, the Government must examine ways of providing financial assistance to them, through EU structural funds perhaps, and stimulating investment in local abattoirs. The Government should also enter into negotiations with our EU partners to secure a revision of EU meat hygiene law that creates a better balance between high standards of hygiene and ensuring the economic viability of more local abattoirs.

Farmers should be encouraged to use local abattoirs. One possibility may be to make a proportion of their subsidy dependent upon the use of local abattoir facilities. Supermarkets should be encouraged to relax their policy of sourcing from a few large abattoirs and to buy meat from local producers. Their present, no doubt efficient, centralised distribution networks raise serious health and welfare concerns. Supermarkets need to be persuaded to adopt a more holistic approach to the communities to which they sell goods and in which they carry out their business. Whether that change of direction is best achieved by fiscal inducement or legislative constraint is a matter for a future debate.

The third provision in the Bill would place further restrictions on the movement of farm animals in the UK market and auction network. When an animal has been brought to market, it could not again be brought to that or any other market for a period of 20 days.

If any good has emerged from the foot and mouth disease debacle, it is that the transient spotlight of political concern has focused for the moment on the transportation, marketing and dealership of sheep, a multi-sale culture that the RSPCA believes should be substantially reduced or, better still, eradicated. The 1997 RSPCA survey of 200 livestock markets showed starkly that the vast majority were failing to adhere to legislation in some key welfare areas.

The adverse impact on animals of repeated loading and unloading, the potential for spreading disease, and their welfare track record calls into question the whole future role of markets. Poorly trained and supervised drovers, inadequate animal holding areas, few if any drinking facilities and serious overcrowding: does not that litany of market abuses merit the immediate action that the Government were swift to take in other markets?

[David Taylor]

In the internet age, is not a thorough review urgently needed of the archaic and often cruel system that we use to buy and sell animals? My Bill takes a worthwhile step down the road of reform. My suggested movement control is hardly a provision pitting the country dweller against the urban masses. Even the Livestock Auctioneers Association has called for a 20-day moratorium on the movement of animals to market.

The practice of purchasing cattle, pigs and especially sheep at market and then transporting them speedily to another or to several different markets to increase the profit made on each individual animal has to be checked, and swiftly. The final part of my Bill would, I believe, make an important contribution to arresting the culture of multiple market journeys that has taken root in the live animal industry in this country.

Animals are sentient beings. They are a type of stock very different from the intangible ones moved around by the barely animate lads in eccentric jackets and loud ties—but one would not always think so. Animals have a right to far better treatment from us. Like us, they have feelings, even if they do not have reason and language. If we, ourselves animals, have rights, then it is both logical and moral to extend them to other animals.

We should respect those rights. As the present dominant species in the natural world, we have the right to use its resources, but only if we balance that with our duty of stewardship over that natural world, and with a duty of care to and for other animals. That duty includes protecting them from unnecessary physical pain, emotional distress and commercial exploitation.

If foot and mouth disease has taught us anything, it is that neglect and abuse of sentient beings in the pursuit of maximum commercial gain can have the most serious consequences, in both welfare and economic terms.

Compassion in World Farming has described my Bill as

"a vital weapon in the fight against infectious animal diseases".

I hope that the Government agree with that assessment, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by David Taylor, Mr. Adrian Bailey, Colin Burgon, Mr. David Drew, Paul Flynn, Judy Mallaber, Dr. Nick Palmer, Mr. Gordon Prentice, Mr. Gwyn Prosser, Bob Russell, Dr. Howard Stoate and Mr. Mark Todd.

MOVEMENT OF FARM ANIMALS

David Taylor accordingly presented a Bill to limit journey times in respect of the transport of animals to slaughter; to promote the establishment of a network of local slaughterhouses; to limit the frequency with which animals may be brought to market in any twenty-day period; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July 2002, and to be printed [Bill 43].

Opposition Day

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Education and Lifelong Learning

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.44 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I beg to move,

That this House notes the mounting evidence of crisis throughout education; deplores the Government's conduct in first ignoring evidence of fraud involving Individual Learning Accounts and subsequently stopping ILAs without notice; regrets the growth of paperwork that is driving good teachers out of schools; further regrets the failure of the Government to allow parents a real choice of schools for their children in many parts of the country; condemns the Government's system of student support, which has discouraged applicants from poorer families and urges the Government to institute a proper public consultation on its replacement; congratulates those teachers and students who are achieving good results despite the Government's interference; and believes that standards will not be improved if the Government maintains its current policy of constant interference in the day-to-day running of education.

Let me break the normal rules of an Opposition day debate and start on a note of agreement with the Government. We agree that education matters as much as any public service. We believe, as I hope the Government do, that opportunities should be equally available to all children, whatever their background, and to all adults who need training. We recognise that teachers work hard and effectively in schools and colleges throughout Britain. But, and it is a serious but, this House needs to debate education today because in too many areas of education and lifelong learning there are widespread, chronic and growing problems. That is not because of any lack of interest from the Government in those matters. I know that the Secretary of State is deeply sincere in her commitment to the subject. The charge we make today is not malice or neglect: it is simple incompetence, combined with an irresistible desire to meddle in too many things.

During the past few months, the country has seen how the Government are visibly failing on issues such as transport and health. In education, the problem is subtly different. We are having a quiet crisis in education—in teachers' morale, in student debt and in adult training. The Opposition will not allow that crisis to remain quiet any longer. Today and every day, we will fulfil our duty to point out the many and growing failures of the Secretary of State's Department and in doing so we will defend the interests of those who work as educators and those who need to benefit from education.

I shall start with the current chaos over individual learning accounts, partly because the failure is serious in itself and also because it symbolises why the Government so often fail to turn good intentions into good policy. The simple truth is that the Department for Education and Skills, in the face of stiff competition, is the Whitehall champion in being driven by tomorrow's headlines and only tomorrow's headlines. "Announce in haste and repent at leisure" is the Department's motto. Never has that been more apparent than in the case of ILAs.

I shall take the House through the salient points of the 13-month disaster. The scheme was launched in September 2000, with great goodwill from those in the training industry who welcomed the idea of the Government providing £150 to help adults receive training. What has become apparent from our investigations over the past week is that the Government wilfully ignored warnings, even before the scheme started, that it was flawed. I hope that the Secretary of State will address that point directly in her reply, because the Government have tried in the past few days to give the impression that they became aware of the problems with fraud only in recent months. Letters that I have received today show that that was not the case.

On 20 September last year, before the scheme was launched, James O'Brien of the Pitman Training Group wrote to the then Secretary of State:

"As more details of the scheme have emerged, we have expressed our concern both to DfEE officials and to Capita plc that there was insufficient detail in the rules of the initiative. As a responsible training provider we worried that this lack of detail left the scheme open to abuse, which would not be helpful to either the initiative itself, or the majority of the training sector."

The Department tried to address that issue with a cap on the value of the training, but the effect of that was not to stop fraud but to damage the programme, as Mr. O'Brien pointed out in a letter to the Secretary of State in October last year, which said that

"the government has put a very ill-advised cap on the value of the training. From 20 October 2000 government will only make the 80 per cent. funding available on the first £250.00 of eligible training in any one year—a very low figure for worthwhile IT training."

Throughout the life of the ILAs, the Government should have been aware of the potential fraud problem. They may have chosen to ignore the training experts, but one accusation I would never make of the Government is that they ignore the press.

So what have the Government been doing since 6 May, when the *News of the World* produced the characteristic headline "Mr. Big Cashing in on Blair Millions"? The article revealed one of the many scams that have been uncovered. In this case, a company pocketed the £150 from the Government, and in return offered only a few leaflets to would-be trainees.

The problem that the Government have failed consistently to address is that no real checks were carried out on anyone posing as a training provider. Even if some old Labour remnants on the Government Front Bench will not read the Murdoch press, I am sure that they read *The Mirror*, which ran a story exposing ILA fraud on 13 July. Why, therefore, did the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills issue a press release on 20 July that was headed "Individual Learning Accounts to Continue into New Era—Healey"? The release began:

"Adult Skills Minister John Healey today confirmed details of how the successful introduction of Individual Learning Accounts over the last year will be followed up."

After that press release was issued, further stories about fraud appeared in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, the *Birmingham Evening Mail* and the *Sunday Mercury*. They detailed the various scams. There were even stories in *The Irish News*, so people in Ireland knew that there was a fraud problem. Only the Government appeared to be in the dark about it. Finally, on 24 October, the Government suspended ILAs. They gave the priceless reason that ILAs were being shut down because they were too successful.

However, that was not the end of the story. Two days after the ILAs were shut down, the Department for Education and Skills produced its key document for this Parliament, entitled "Delivering Results: A Strategy to 2006". Hon. Members from all parties will have read every word of this document but, in case they did not reach it, I merely draw their attention to the rather attractive pull-out section at the back. The section is called "Milestones on the Road to Delivery". As ever with this Government, the milestones get bigger the further away they are: more jam is promised for the day after tomorrow than for tomorrow itself. The key point is that there is only one milestone in the Government's education and skills policy for 2002, and the House will wish to know that that is to expand individual learning accounts.

The Government talk about joined-up government, but they cannot even join up the work of one Department. It is not a case of the left hand not knowing what the right is doing: in the Department for Education and Skills, the first finger does not know what the second finger is doing.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I fear that my hon. Friend has missed one vital component in the network of Government incompetence that he has set out. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills wrote to every hon. Member to explain the collapse of the ILAs. Is my hon. Friend aware that that letter made no mention of fraud at all, even though 279 fraud cases are being pursued by the police? Does not my hon. Friend agree that the purpose of letters addressed "Dear Colleague" should be to tell colleagues in the House what is going on—not to put about Labour party political propaganda?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes a good case. Did the Government continue not to know what was going on, or were they simply—and characteristically—trying to disguise what was going on? I hope that the Secretary of State will take the opportunity today to enlighten the House as to which of those options hon. Members should decide is the truth. The Government have one policy milestone for next year, and they have missed it already. That is not merely a shambles, it is a scandal, and someone should own up to the responsibility.

I hope that the financial implications will be investigated fully, because many millions of pounds of taxpayers' money have been spent on the ILA scheme. Moreover, many genuine training providers throughout the country who were doing an extremely good job for people requiring training are now under threat. In Liverpool, the Everton Development Trust offers vital computer training to a deprived local community, but it is already considering making 10 people redundant.

Henley Community Online in Oxfordshire is seriously considering its future, although it provides exactly the kind of information technology skills that we need to create a modern and competitive economy. No wonder Mr. O'Brien, who has seen this sorry saga coming from the beginning, wrote again to me this week, saying:

"The current situation is wholly unsatisfactory. The suspension of the scheme—with no indication of whether or not it will restart, when that might be, or what might take its place—has created a vacuum in this vital sector. The legitimate training providers and the learning public are being penalised for the shortcomings of both the unscrupulous traders and the Department."

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Neither the Government nor I would defend fraud, but would the hon. Gentleman care to estimate what proportion of people with ILAs receive fraudulent training? Is not that a tiny proportion of the 2.5 million people who receive ILA training?

Mr. Green: I hope that the proportion that receives fraudulent training is very small, but my point is that neither I nor the Government know. The Government have been shelling out tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money not knowing whether the training is genuine or fraudulent in any individual case. That is why I have referred the matter to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. The hon. Gentleman raises the central issue: how much money is being spent on fraudulent training? Why did the Government not know that that was happening during the 13 months of the scheme? The House deserves to hear an answer to that question today.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): As my hon. Friend has twice mentioned Mr. O'Brien's experience, he may be interested to know that Mr. O'Brien approached me last autumn, when I had some responsibility for such matters. Is it not entirely characteristic of the way in which the Government handle things that, last autumn and again this year, they have arbitrarily withdrawn a scheme at short notice? Last autumn, they reduced the entitlement and capped the scheme, without consulting the participants in the industry and with no attempt to remedy the alleged ills that caused them to take that entirely arbitrary action.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. The charge is twofold; there has been wilful neglect over many months, followed by panic—a reaction that penalises the innocent along with the guilty—and the Government are equally culpable on both counts.

Another body that has been involved from the start is the Association of Computer Trainers. I repeat that all hon. Members know how important it is to develop computer skills in this country. Retraining adults, giving them computer skills, is often the best way to provide them with opportunities in life that they would not otherwise have had, so I hope that the Minister will take to heart the contents of the letter that I have received in the past two days from the ACT, which states:

"no consultation has taken place with any of the members of ACT . . . despite numerous attempts by the ACT members to point out the flaws in the ILA scheme and the reporting of those 'cowboy' companies to various Government bodies . . . very little action was taken at the time and certainly no consultation took place as to how these situations could be addressed. In fact, despite the best efforts of the members of ACT they were completely ignored when it came to the question of what to do to ensure that the ILA could work properly."

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on the role of Capita, which received £50 million from the Government to manage the scheme? Will he comment on Capita's management of the scheme and its efforts to tell the Government that real faults existed?

Mr. Green: I am not sure about the details of Capita's involvement and whether it brought such issues to the Government's attention. If the hon. Gentleman has more to add, I suggest that he join me in giving evidence to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. The one thing that is beyond doubt is that all the serious bodies and all the genuine training providers in this country warned the Government throughout that there was something wrong with the scheme and that it was wide open to fraud, but the Government did nothing. That is unarguable, and it is the main burden of the charge that the Government have to address.

I have described the most dramatic recent collapse of the Government's policies for education and skills, but there are far too many more examples. One of the crises in our schools is that in teacher morale. I have already observed that the Department's besetting sin is that it prefers to sort out the press coverage rather than the underlying problem.

For example, in a case study last week, the National Union of Teachers commissioned Professor Alan Smithers and Dr. Pamela Robinson of Liverpool university to examine why so many teachers were leaving the profession. I shall come to the reasons in a minute, but it is worth noting that the Department's immediate reaction was to rush out welcome figures about teacher recruitment in the hope of muddying the waters for 24 hours—as ever, spin first, substance second.

Of course, that exercise did not work. Frankly, there is little point recruiting more trainee teachers if they never get in front of a class of children. On that specific point, the NUT's findings are stark. Of every 100 final-year student teacher, 40 do not make it to the classroom and another 18 leave in their first three years of teaching. In total, 58 per cent. leave within the first three years. That means—it is worth the Secretary of State considering this—that, for every final-year student teacher under the Labour Government, there is a better than even chance that they will not be teaching in three years' time. Is she proud of her Government's record on that?

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I have been listening intently to the hon. Gentleman. Does he agree that teacher numbers have risen by 11,000 since 1997? Does that not show that the Government's policy is having success in keeping teachers in the classroom?

Mr. Green: It is not immediately obvious that the hon. Lady has been listening carefully, but I welcome her to the debate. If she wants to dispute the fact that teacher morale is low and that there is a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention, she will not have to dispute it with me. She will have to dispute it in every staff room in the country. She is a conscientious constituency Member and I am sure that she visits schools in her constituency. She will find that there is a crisis in morale.

I was asked whether the Secretary of State was proud of her predecessor's record. It is a shame that he is not here, because I discovered that the crisis in numbers is acute in Sheffield, his former bailiwick. Last week, *The Star* in Sheffield reported:

"A Sheffield education department spokesman said there were still problems with certain subject areas such as science, languages and maths.

'It seems for many schools the vacancies reported in the summer have not been filled,' he said."

The Star adds:

"During the last academic year the worse difficulties were experienced in January and February".

That sums it up. Vacancies have not been filled and we have still not reached the worst part of the year. Things are likely to get worse before they get better.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): On the point about recruitment and retention, does the hon. Gentleman recall that Conservative Essex county councillors said at the beginning of the year that Essex schools were on the verge of a four-day week? Will he join me in welcoming the fact that that dire prediction has been proved to be completely without foundation? Although recognising the challenge that recruitment presents, is it not incumbent on all politicians not to exaggerate the situation for our own party-political ends? We should particularly bear in mind that there are 11,000 more teachers in schools today than there were four years ago.

Mr. Green: Loyalty should be rewarded. To correct the hon. Gentleman on one fact, the director of education in Essex made that point.

Mr. Rammell *rose—*

Mr. Green: The hon. Gentleman has had his chance. If he talks to his colleagues in the county, he will find that Essex schools, like schools all over the country, are working extremely hard to solve the problem. That is why there was only a minor crisis in the summer. He will also find that teachers who are not qualified to teach a particular subject are increasingly being put in front of classes. That is how schools are trying to get around the crisis, and it is not ideal. The hon. Gentleman invites us to celebrate what is going on, but the NUT survey— *[Interruption.]* I am especially delighted that members of the Government Front Bench are prepared to pour scorn on the teaching unions; I am sure that that will be noted outside the House.

According to the NUT survey, 60 per cent. of teachers say that the work load caused by unnecessary paperwork is one thing that makes them want to leave. One teacher in Surrey wrote to me saying that in the first nine days of the autumn term he received nine different documents from the Government—a directive every day. As he says, no wonder there is no time for him to teach. Such nonsense discourages people from teaching.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I read the NUT report, and it is worrying. It refers to teacher retention and recruitment. On the age range of teachers, however, it states that they are predominantly over 40. Why is that? Why has it been difficult to recruit teachers who are now in their thirties? Is not it because the hon. Gentleman's Government did not recruit teachers? This is not a party political point.

Mr. Green: The hon. Gentleman was doing well up to his last comment. It used to be possible to recruit teachers and it is increasingly difficult now. All those teachers who are now in their forties were recruited in the 18 years of Conservative government. The mantra that Labour Members were taught in 1997 to blame everything on the previous Administration has run out. This is the second term of a Labour Government. The previous Administration is their Administration. If there are problems with teacher retention and recruitment, it is their problem; it is not the responsibility of teachers or a previous Government.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the problem is that we do not know whether that is the case because education spending did not increase in real terms during the four or five years up to 1997? Since then, there has been, certainly in East Sussex, a 25 per cent. increase in education spending. Is not that the real issue?

Mr. Green: Every single one of those facts is wrong. Average spending in the period 1992-97 was higher as a proportion of gross domestic product than in the first term of this Government, who cut education spending in real terms. That is why there are so many problems.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) read the NUT survey, and I hope that Ministers have read it, because a lack of classroom discipline is cited ahead of pay as a reason for teachers being driven out of the profession. Some 45 per cent. of them say that that is a reason for leaving, yet the Government have consistently taken disciplinary powers away from head teachers over the past few years. If they do nothing else in schools in the next year, I urge the Secretary of State to return disciplinary powers to heads and teachers so that they can decide what happens in their schools.

I also urge the Secretary of State not to believe that she can spin her way out of the crisis. When the Government stifle teachers with bureaucracy and prevent heads from enforcing discipline, it steadily drives good teachers, who all our children need, out of the profession. Teachers are too intelligent to be fooled by the Government spin machine. They will not let their crisis in morale be buried, and neither will Conservative Members.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that one unintended effect of abolishing corporal punishment in schools is that if a teacher lays a finger on a child, or is accused of doing so, he or she is suspended and investigated, which often results in undeserved professional ruin?

Mr. Green: There is a problem in the length of time that it takes to hear cases against teachers, so many of whom are acquitted. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is too much noise in the Chamber.

Mr. Green: If Ministers do not think it a problem that teachers are suspended from work for a long period and then acquitted, with inevitable damage to their professional career, I feel sorry for them, because that is a serious crisis, which many teachers recognise.

The Government cannot hide from the fact that standards in maths for 11-year-olds slipped this year. If the Secretary of State is willing to take the credit when exam standards rise, she cannot evade responsibility when they fall. Her predecessor famously said that he would resign if the targets were not met by 2002, and I

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understand that as 2002 approaches, the right hon. Lady is prudently withdrawing from that commitment. However, parents cannot withdraw, and they want to know what is happening and what the Government are doing about it.

Parents also want to know why popular schools are too often prevented from expanding. I have received a copy of a letter sent to a woman in the west midlands whose experience is typical of parents throughout the country. The letter suggests that as she is unlikely to get her first choice of school for her children, she should put down three choices, but it then says that she is unlikely to get any of the other choices. The problems experienced by parents in exercising the choice that all parties want them to have is another crisis that the Government need to address.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Does my hon. Friend agree that the crisis in teachers' morale is certainly not helped when they find that their hard work with their pupils is not rewarded when exams come to be marked? At Doctor Challoner's high school in my constituency, which is an excellent grammar school, all the key stage 3 English tests had to be remarked, resulting in 54 pupils having their levels raised and five pupils having them dropped. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need reliable test results in which teachers, parents and pupils can have confidence?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend is right and she makes a powerful point.

I know, as the Secretary of State does, that there is much good work in our schools, but there would be so much more if the Government stopped interfering and let schools make more decisions for themselves. She and I were at the national teaching awards last week, and I am sure that she, like me, was in awe of some of the work being done by the best teachers and the best schools. I put it to her that no decision or interference by her, by me or by any other politician would improve the standards of such teachers and, too often, politicians are the problem, not the solution, in our schools.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): If the hon. Gentleman believes that parents should have the right to choose the school, why did he support the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) when he said that he believed the Conservative party would free schools so that they could select between 20 and 40 per cent. of their pupils? Surely that is hypocritical if the hon. Gentleman believes that parents should have the choice.

Hon. Members: Ask the Prime Minister.

Mr. Green: As my hon. Friends say, the hon. Lady should ask the Prime Minister, but she should also ask the Secretary of State and consider her Government's policies on specialist schools. The idea that schools should be able to select a proportion of their pupils does not divide the two Front Benches, so if the hon. Lady believes what she said, and she may do so honourably, she is opposing the policy of her own party.

The crises are not confined to schools. The student loans system has hit so many problems that even the Department has noticed and decided to start again. Debt problems have become such a burden for so many students that all the Government's rhetoric about encouraging students from different backgrounds to go to university has been shown to be so much hype.

Not only was that crisis predictable, it was predicted. Four years ago, we said that the Government's combination of loans and fees would not work, and it has not worked. Our criticism now is that having messed it up once, the Government are not willing to have a full and open debate about how to do it better next time. Instead, they are going back inside Government to cook up another policy internally; only after they make a decision will they deign to have what they will, no doubt, call consultation, but which will in fact be nothing of the sort.

Further education is not spared the crisis. Teacher morale in FE is arguably lower than in schools, yet where is the money going? It is going into central bureaucracy. In *The Times Higher Education Supplement* last week, John Brennan of the Association of Colleges pointed out that the old system of funding FE and the training and enterprise councils cost £150 million, whereas the new system of the Learning and Skills Council will cost £193 million next year—that is £43 million less for front-line services.

Across the board, there is a crisis in education. The Secretary of State should learn from her predecessor, who spent his first few weeks at the Home Office undoing some of the worst policies of his predecessor and moving towards some of the policies first advocated by the Opposition. If he can do it, she can. The right hon. Lady has been left a legacy of too much interference, too much paperwork, demoralised teachers, angry parents, disillusioned students and an education sector that demands and deserves much, much better. I commend our motion to the House.

4.16 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"notes that by 1997 the education system had suffered from 18 years of neglect, schools funding had been cut, nearly half of 11 years olds were failing to reach expected levels in maths and English, teacher numbers had fallen by 30,000, nearly half a million infants were in large classes and roughly seven million adults suffered from inadequate basic skills; welcomes the substantial progress made since then, including: education spending rising as a share of GDP to 5 per cent., record results at Key Stage 2, 11,000 more teachers in schools and infant and primary class sizes reduced; further notes that recruitment to initial teacher training rose by 5 per cent. last year, the second year's rise after eight years of decline; supports the Government's plans for continued investment in and reform of education, and its central goals of transforming secondary education to ensure higher standards for all, giving more people the chance to learn; further supports the Government's pledge to expand higher education so that 50 per cent. of 18 to 30 year olds can benefit from higher education by 2010; welcomes the announcement of a review of the student support system in the light of this recent pledge; recognises the success of Individual Learning Accounts, while understanding the necessary public interest case for suspending them; and believes that the Government's education policies form a coherent and radical programme that will deliver its ambitious targets and move the education system away from the neglect and waste of individuals' talents between 1979 and 1997.".

I, too, attended the teaching awards last weekend. I have nothing but praise for the organisers and especially for the teachers throughout the regions and the nation who were applauded at that event. However, the teachers with whom I spoke that evening would not have recognised the school system that the Opposition spokesman describes. They were talking not only about high standards and how enjoyable and fulfilling they found their job, but about extra resources, the success of the literacy and numeracy strategies, repairs to school buildings and the opportunity to be paid more for the job that they do.

I listened carefully to the speech that the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) made to his party conference last month, in which he spoke of the importance of talking about the good things and of not knocking teachers. Today, I listened in vain for any acknowledgement of the improvements and achievements of the past four years. I shall not go on about the failures of past Governments—the hon. Gentleman is right, it was a long time ago—but I shall take a few minutes to describe the successes of the past four years, which have not so far been mentioned.

We have made incredible progress in raising standards in reading and writing, but the really magical aspect of the literacy and numeracy hours is where the most improvement has been made. Taking local education authorities throughout the country, we find that the greatest improvement has been achieved in Tower Hamlets, Newham and other deprived London boroughs on which the Conservative central Government turned their backs year after year. The success of the literacy and numeracy hours is not just that between 12 and 14 per cent. more children now enter secondary school with the basic skills they need to learn effectively, but that under the Labour Government we are for the first time beginning to close the gap between those who achieve and those who do not.

That success can be seen in GCSE performance statistics. We have almost reached the target of 50 per cent. of pupils getting five A-starred to C grades, but what is even more important is that the best progress is being made in areas of great urban deprivation under the excellence in cities programme. At the end of the first 18 months of that programme, the improvement in GCSE performance—pupils achieving five A-starred to C grades—in those areas far exceeded the improvement achieved throughout the country.

The hon. Gentleman argues that if progress has been made, that has been done by the teachers, but if progress has not been made, that has been done by the Government. In fact, progress has been achieved through partnership. Yes, teachers have done the most work and should receive the most credit. Yes, the reason that standards have risen is that the quality of teaching in our classrooms has improved in the past four years. However, for the first time in two decades, teachers have had a Government who support them. That has not been confined to investing in education. I defy the hon. Gentleman to enter a school that does not acknowledge that it is getting more money in its budgets year on year now than it ever had under the Tories. I deny that he would find a school where an increase in capital cannot be found. The achievement has been brought about by dint of better quality teaching. That has been supported by greater investment in teachers and greater investment in building. There has been good solid work to ascertain what succeeds in terms of the literacy strategy, the numeracy strategy, excellence in cities, education action zones and the key stage 3 strategy.

All this has seen 40,000 more classroom assistants in our schools and more computers for children than we ever saw under the previous Government. It has brought about an increase in standards for which every person in the education service—not only teachers and government but local authorities, local advisers, governors and all those who work in supporting our schools—has reason to be proud.

I am not complacent. I know that there is still an historic connection between social class and education attainment. I know that for every child who goes to school and cannot read effectively by 11, there is a life chance denied. We face that and we challenge that. We come to terms with the situation and overcome it. That is done day on day. Four years of partnership and determination to address and raise standards has brought about the highest increase in standards at every age group that we have seen for many a year.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The right hon. Lady talks about standards improving over the past four years. Surely she would acknowledge that standards of behaviour in our schools have not improved over that period. Standards of behaviour, quality of life and discipline in our schools have deteriorated under the Government. That is the opinion of the chief inspector of schools, who highlighted the problem in his annual report, as the right hon. Lady will know. Why have the Government not addressed the problem? Why is the problem getting worse, and what will she do about it?

Estelle Morris: I shall start the second part of my speech by being in agreement with what the hon. Member for Ashford said in the first part of his. I agreed when he said at the Conservative party conference that a child who has never heard the word no by the age of five can hardly be thought to have the skills, confidence and ability to behave well at school, and that teachers pick up these problems. I do not differ substantially from what he said. I think that the behaviour of some children in schools is far worse than when I taught, and far worse than a generation ago. However, that is not the fault of the education service alone. It is often the fault of parents who do not bring up their children with the discipline and structure that they need by the age of five, and that is when it matters. Every child of that age should go to school knowing how to behave.

We are doing something about the situation by means of sure start and working with parents. We have spent £2 billion on early years rather than the £1 billion that was spent by the previous Government. There is an early years place for every four-year-old. There has been a massive increase in places for every three-year-old. This means that more parents—most parents want to be able to discipline their child—will have support before their child reaches the age of five and goes to school than ever before.

A third of our secondary schools is covered by excellence in cities. We have a programme of learning mentors that teachers tell us is helping them, and that is not only to deal with the problem of teaching other children, but to deal as well with the very children whose

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behaviour is causing a problem. There were no learning support units on site under the previous Government. These units are helping too because teachers can now ask a child to leave a class in the knowledge that he or she will go to an on-site learning support unit where they will receive the support that they need.

If a child is excluded, he or she does not get only two hours of education a week, which is what we inherited from the previous Government. We are moving so that by September 2002 we shall have reached our target of every excluded child getting full-time education. It is a disgrace that in 1997 the Conservative Government were prepared to allow some of the most vulnerable children not to receive full-time education if they were excluded. That is another example of how we are helping. I am not complacent, but our record of helping schools to cope with behaviour is better than it ever has been.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I will give way once more and then I will make progress.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): The right hon. Lady made a statement that was factually incorrect. Back in 1984, under the last Conservative Government, I taught in a school with an on-site learning support unit. Frankly, I do not know why she is talking such rubbish.

Estelle Morris: Of course I accept that individual schools had learning support units, but there was not a planned programme called "Learning support units"; that was initiated by the present Government—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) must be calm.

Estelle Morris: Wise words, Mr. Speaker.

There was not a concerted plan, with money committed year after year, called "Learning support units", which has now been rolled out in urban secondary schools. I do not deny that some schools made their own arrangements to deal with badly behaved children. In fact, like the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), I taught at a secondary school with its own unit, but it was not called a learning support unit; there was no plan for a roll-out of learning support units, nor were there sufficient pupil referral units off-site or full-time education for pupils needing learning support.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) *rose—*

Estelle Morris: If the hon. Gentleman remains calm for a little longer, I may look on him kindly later, but not now.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood) *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I may look even more kindly on the right hon. Gentleman if he sits down and lets me make a little progress. I want to have time to address individual learning accounts; I am in danger of not being able to do that if I do not make progress.

Before doing so, however, I shall touch on two issues raised by the hon. Member for Ashford as I am keen to set the record straight. For the record, last Thursday, the Teacher Training Agency published figures on teacher recruitment and retention, and we issued a supporting press notice. The figures had been planned by the TTA for a considerable period and, if the hon. Gentleman checks, I believe that he will be happy to withdraw his allegation that they were rushed out at the last minute in response to a survey and report by the National Union of Teachers.

Teacher recruitment figures are good and they demonstrate progress and success. They should be welcomed and applauded; they are a good thing for our education system. There are more teachers going into teaching than at any time since 1992; there is a second successive increase in the number of people choosing teaching as a career. More importantly, in almost every shortage subject, there is an increase in recruitment; there has been a 20 per cent. increase in maths and a 10 per cent. increase in other shortage subjects. I know that that is not enough and that we have not yet reached our targets but, after all, we have told the House that we inherited a historic failure to achieve targets; we achieved our teaching recruitment targets only during times of economic recession.

The important thing about the last two years is not just that we have improved teacher recruitment but that we have done so against the background of a tight graduate recruitment market. Graduates have real choices about where they go, with excellent financial offers from the private sector, the City and other companies. Nobody has to recruit as many graduates as the teaching profession, the Government and local authorities; if we include those who train through work-based routes, we have recruited more than 30,000 teachers this year, which is an 8 per cent. increase. I know that that is not enough—I am not claiming that for a minute—but hon. Members should remember that teaching is the first-choice career of most people leaving university in this country. There is not one profession, job or employer recruiting the number that we manage to recruit to teaching. In the past four years, against the background of a tight recruitment market, we have stemmed, slowed down, stopped and reversed the decline in the number of people going into teaching.

Mr. Boswell: The Secretary of State talked about quantity and the number of teachers recruited. Will she give similar assurances about the quality of teacher recruitment?

Estelle Morris: I think that they are a smashing bunch; the people coming into teaching now are of a better quality than ever before. The hon. Gentleman belongs to a party that has talked about teacher morale; I cannot think of a worse way of attacking teacher morale than saying to young people joining the profession now that they are not as good as their predecessors a generation ago. They deserve our thanks, our confidence, our praise and our best wishes for entering the fine profession of teaching.

The hon. Gentleman might say that that is Government hype or a case of trying for headlines. He is generous in nature and I know that he is serious about his commitment to education. I take his comments seriously, which is why I advise him to look at the Ofsted report. It says that inspectors have found that newly qualified teachers are now as good as our more experienced staff. I sense that

and see it when I go around schools. The NQTs are better prepared; they are good teachers; they have a real choice of careers to follow.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Estelle Morris: I may shortly, but I first want to move to the issue of retention.

I know that there is a problem with retention, but let us look at the figures. About 12 to 15 per cent. of those entering teacher training do not go on to teach. I am not saying that that is acceptable—I wish it were better—but it is probably reasonable. There have always been some who have gone into teacher training but not entered the profession. The drop-out rate from under-graduate courses is about 17 per cent. It is lower in teaching than in other courses. Some of the trainee teachers will not be good enough to pass the course; some will not like teaching; some will finish their teaching practice year but find that the profession is not for them. The figure of between 12 and 15 per cent. has remained pretty constant over previous years; it has always been the way. Others drop out before the end of five years' teaching. Again, some will have found that the profession is not for them. That figure has been pretty consistent, but I acknowledge that it rose last year.

The figure concerning teacher retention that is never quoted is that, of those leaving the profession, 13,000 a year return. They do not go for ever; they do not vanish never to be seen again. Let us remember that 70 per cent. of the work force is female and that many will leave for career breaks, to have children and to bring up families. Of course I worry about teacher retention. Retaining those whom we have done so well to recruit is always at the top of my priorities, but I ask Conservative Members and those outside the House to remember that 12,000 to 13,000 teachers a year return to the profession. I know that there is more to do on retention.

Mr. Gray: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Estelle Morris: As the hon. Gentleman is incredibly calm, I shall take an intervention from him.

Mr. Gray: I shall remain incredibly calm, despite the right hon. Lady's speech. She talks sensibly of the very high quality of young teachers, and we on the Conservative Benches of course entirely agree with her, but she seems a little complacent about morale in the teaching profession. How does she react to the headline in *The Times Educational Supplement*, no less, which reads: "Labour fails to stem the exodus of teachers"? Does she agree with that?

Estelle Morris: For a headline in *The Times Educational Supplement*, that is par for the course—although I suppose that that is a different problem.

I thought that I had made the position clear. We have done more than any Government on recruitment. I know that we have more to do on retention, but we cannot keep teachers until we have them in the first place. When recruitment was a problem, I answered—I think—three Adjournment debates on the failure to recruit to the teaching profession. Now we have this debate about retention, but we should think about both matters, and that is a hugely important job.

I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what I think about teacher morale—and it is borne out by what people tell me when I go into schools. It presents a real challenge. When we question teachers on many of the initiatives that we have introduced, they say that they are good and that they work. They say that the literacy and numeracy strategies and booster classes work, but that in order to manage their jobs and to meet the requirements of those good initiatives, they need more support. That is why we have provided more classroom assistants and support for teachers.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Estelle Morris: No, I want to turn to individual learning accounts.

I want to go through what I see as the order of events concerning ILAs. It is important to put on record exactly what has been happening, to offer reassurance where possible and to explain where there has been misleading information, let alone misleading selling. I return to why ILAs were launched. Let us remember that individual learning accounts were designed to attract people back to learning. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) has always claimed that as a Lib Dem policy. No comment. Many of the people whom we were trying to attract back to learning had left learning at the age of 14 or 15 and never been back. Their memory of learning was of failure, low esteem, and getting nothing out of it. They did not feel that learning was for them.

Whatever previous Governments did in that regard—the previous Government did not do much—did not work for such people. They did not go back to learning. They now work in a labour market where skills are crucial and learning is necessary, even if one has not done it for 30 years.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Estelle Morris: No, I must make progress, but I shall take interventions after my comments on ILAs. For all the best motives, we set out to design a system that was user-friendly, did not entail too much bureaucracy, did not involve sheaves and sheaves of paper and was not difficult for users or providers to access. ILAs were launched in September 2000. Within a year, by July 2001, we had 1.5 million account holders, far exceeding our expectations. We expected to have reached that figure a year later.

Of those 1.5 million account holders, we received complaints from 0.19 per cent. Investigation showed that a minority of those complaints were about non-compliance. Every one of the complaints received by the Department in the first 10 months of operation was looked into. During that time, one company was subject to a formal departmental investigation. In that case, no fraud was found to have taken place. In January this year, we set up a learning provider support unit in the Department, which had the job of looking into complaints

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from individuals and providers about non-compliance. Each of the complaints from the 0.19 per cent. of account holders was looked into.

Mr. Gray: Six thousand.

Estelle Morris: I must correct the hon. Gentleman. The figure at that point was 3,000.

Mr. Damian Green *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I will take interventions in a while.

At the end of July we noticed, because we collect the figures, a small increase in the number of complaints. As a result, we carried out a full re-registration process, which began at the start of July and was completed at the end of July this year. Far from failing to act in July, that is what we did because of the slight increase at the end of that 10-month period. As a result of the re-registration process, 700 providers lost their registration.

Over the next two months, which takes us into September, the number of complaints increased to 0.25 per cent. of 2.3 million learners. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) has the correct figure for that. More accounts were opened, and complaints were received from 0.25 per cent. of account holders. Again, we took action. We established a compliance unit with Capita, which worked closely with us on the matter. I am grateful to those involved. They are our delivery partner. The unit started work on 24 September this year, because of the increase in complaints from 0.19 per cent. to 0.25 per cent. between July and September. That gave us an additional resource to investigate the complaints.

During September we decided to withdraw all non-personalised application forms, which is where we believed some of the abuse and mis-selling had taken place. Individuals could apply for their ILA only by contacting the ILA centre directly or through the ILA website. That took effect on 28 September. At the same time, we suspended the registration of all new providers, so that we could introduce a more robust registration procedure. In October the number of complaints was 8,000 or 0.35 per cent. of 2.5 million account holders. Over that three-month period, the number of accounts grew from 1.25 or 1.5 million back in July to 2.5 million in October 2001. That far exceeded our expectations about the amount of subsidy that the Government would pay and the number of account holders.

We took action in July, monitored it and took further action in September. However, by October, there was another increase in complaints and an unusually high number of accounts had been opened. Consequently, we decided to withdraw individual learning accounts. The announcement was made to the House on 24 October. Since then, we have written to all account holders and providers to inform them of our decision. People who already hold ILAs have until 7 December—six weeks—to use them, but we shall not register new providers.

Mr. Willis: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Estelle Morris: Before I do that, I want to give some more details of the 8,448 complaints. More than a quarter are about providers not complying with the rules of the scheme, mis-selling or potential fraud. Three quarters of the complaints have nothing to do with non-compliance. They relate to 404 learning providers—5 per cent. of those registered. Every allegation is followed up by our compliance unit or the Department's serious investigation unit. Cases of suspected fraud are referred to the police.

Until now, police have brought charges against four providers and 30 individuals. Radio 5 and the Radio 4 "Today" programme stated that 279 cases were being investigated by the police. That is not true. An Opposition Member repeated that figure; I understand that, given that it was broadcast by the BBC. I believe that the BBC has subsequently withdrawn the figure. I repeat that the police are investigating four providers and 30 individuals. I do not excuse what has happened; I do not like it, but it is important at the current stage in the development of adult learning and supporting adult education to put what has happened in perspective.

I want to put on record exactly what else has happened to the 2.5 million account holders. The ILA scheme is probably the biggest and, despite what has happened, the greatest success in getting adults back to learning. It is all right to hold a debate on collecting figures for mis-selling and abuse because that has occurred, and we have taken action at every stage. However, it is also worth talking about our evaluation evidence for what is working. Ninety-one per cent. of account holders say that ILAs have supported learning and fulfilled or exceeded their expectations; 84 per cent. believe that they helped to improve their knowledge and 59 per cent. feel that they helped them to become more confident.

There is nothing more serious than ensuring that we, as a Government and as a society, give every chance to people to return to learning, not only for skills but for leisure and fulfilment. The majority of people who have taken out ILAs experienced a quality of learning that exceeded their expectations. However, public expenditure must be as robust as possible and a good scheme must not be further damaged. I therefore believe that we took the right action in October. No one told us to do that; no outside body pulled us up but we monitored and investigated the complaints, kept track and tried to remedy the problems, and we made the decision that that was not enough and that we would withdraw the scheme. It was the right decision.

I give a cast-iron guarantee that we will build on the huge success of ILAs in the next few months and ensure that further plans for progress on adult learning will take the best from the best scheme that has ever existed, but also remedy its shortcomings.

Mr. Willis: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. We would like to associate ourselves with many of her comments about the influence that ILAs have had on an awful lot of adult learners. However, in her press release of 24 October, she said:

"We have therefore decided to prevent any further take-up of ILAs. We are writing to all ILA account holders and learning providers registered with the ILA Centre to inform them that ILAs are going to be withdrawn and"—

this is the crucial bit—

"to assure them that the decision to end the programme has not been made lightly."

From the Liberal Democrats' point view, that is a very serious statement from the Secretary of State. There has been nothing in her speech today to tell us whether this is

to be the end of the scheme. Will she give an assurance that the scheme is not going to end? If it is to end, that would create a far more serious situation than the one we have contemplated so far.

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman asks a reasonable question. He will appreciate that we have to have an evaluation of the scheme's strengths and weaknesses, and of what action we need to take. Without taking any more time than is necessary, we want to ensure that we remedy the scheme's shortcomings. I can give the hon. Gentleman a cast-iron guarantee that this is not the end of Government funding for adult learning, or of Government support for all those who find a lack of money a barrier to returning to education, learning and training. I am hesitating a little because I am loth to say whether the future provisions will be called ILAs or something else, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to wait a while for that decision.

The key is that, for everyone out there who benefited from the ILA scheme, this is not the end of the Government's commitment to adult learning, in terms of energy, resources, commitment or anything else that we can do to make it work. We are not, however, about to reopen applications for ILAs next week. We need to ensure that we have overcome the inherent problems in the way in which the scheme was operating.

Mr. Damian Green: May I tell the right hon. Lady why her explanation does not wash for a minute? She has spent 10 minutes telling the House that there were very few problems, that very little was wrong and that only four people were being investigated. Yet, completely out of the blue to everyone involved, she suspended this vital programme—I agree with her that it was vital—just like that, without any warning or any hint of consultation, leaving the training sector very angry. If there was only a very small problem, that is not the action of a responsible Government. Either the problem was much worse than the Secretary of State is telling the House, or the Government panicked and acted unreasonably in the face of what she describes as a very small problem. Which is it?

Estelle Morris: I have laid out as clearly and straightforwardly as I can the number of complaints that have been received.

Alistair Burt (North–East Bedfordshire): Thousands.

Estelle Morris: I have said that there were thousands. There is no need for the hon. Gentleman to repeat it. I have already said that to the House; it is on the record.

I have laid out as clearly as I can the number of complaints. Perhaps we have different standards from the Opposition, but I thought that the potential misuse of public funds was sufficient reason for the Government to take action in the interest of public funding and of the scheme. Obviously, we went through how we should do that. I shall tell the House exactly why we did it with no notice, and I think that we were right. There would have been a risk if we had said, "Hang on. We think there is a bit of abuse of the system. We give you notice that we are going to withdraw the scheme in four weeks' time." What would those who were abusing the system have done during that four-week period? They would have abused it more and more, because they would have seen that the system they were abusing was going to be taken away. That is why we did what we did, and we did it absolutely fairly. That is why we said, "There will be no new accounts from tomorrow", or whatever the date was. Perhaps it was to come into force "in several days' time"; I stand corrected if it was not "tomorrow". We wanted to stop those very few rogue providers abusing the system further.

We have been absolutely fair to the 1 million people who had already signed up for ILAs but who had not yet drawn them down. We gave them until 7 December to sign up for a course so that we could pay out the subsidy. We acted fairly. We honoured our commitment to those who had already signed up, and gave them six weeks to organise their course, but we gave those providers who were abusing the system not one day longer than they were entitled to in which to abuse public money further.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Estelle Morris: I have spoken for far longer than I should have done, and I want to let other hon. Members in. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members' comments are very touching, but I shall have to resist their invitations.

Let me return to where I began. I certainly view education—and the Government, my team and, I think, the whole House view it—as one of the most important public services in the country. We know that if we do not get education right as a nation, we shall not get anything else right.

Every Government's capacity to deliver depends on their ability to get the education system right. That is why we are proud of our achievements in early-years education, child care, sure start, literacy and numeracy, class sizes, rewarding teachers, getting more people into higher education, increasing funds for further and higher education and adult learning. That is why we will continue to communicate with schools: we will continue to work with them to spread good practice, to learn from them what works, and to take them further forward.

At the end of the day, I know what will deliver the quality education service that we all want. It will be teachers teaching well and lecturers teaching effectively—but they cannot do that unless the rest of the education service works with them. Every one of us has a part to play in that. I give a commitment to the House and the nation: this Government's record as a true, active, honest, good and worthwhile partner in the education service is a record of which we should be proud, and that is exactly the way in which we will go on working. We will not stop until the real problems of our education system have been overcome. As I have said, we will act in partnership. That is what we promised, that is what we have delivered, and that is what we will continue to deliver in the future.

4.51 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): It is refreshing to hear both Front Benchers begin an Opposition day debate in a great deal of agreement. We associate ourselves with many of the comments of the Secretary of State and of the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), especially his praise of teachers.

At the much-shortened Conservative party conference, it was pleasing that the hon. Gentleman used his first speech as education spokesman to make it clear to all

[Mr. Phil Willis]

teacher unions and, indeed, teachers that the Conservatives would now be the teachers' friend. He echoed those remarks today in quoting the National Union of Teachers extensively. Perhaps in future it will be Conservative policy that is made at NUT headquarters.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: Dream on.

Mr. Willis: One can always dream.

The Conservatives are right to use a whole Opposition day to highlight the Government's failures. The Secretary of State tells a good tale, and is very supportive of what the Government are doing. No one would accuse her or her Ministers of not being committed to their briefs. The reality in the country, however, is very different, and we must address that reality today.

Nowhere is there a more glaring problem than in the Government's promises on expenditure. In 1997, the Prime Minister made it clear that a Labour Government would spend more of the nation's wealth on education than the previous Tory Government—a firm commitment that has not been fulfilled. During the four years before this Government went to the country, they spent 4.6 per cent. of gross domestic product on education, compared with the 5 per cent. spent by John Major's Government between 1992 and 1997. That is the reality; that is the promise that was not kept during the first four years of Labour government. Only if the Government compare 2000-01, their best spending year, with 1996-97, the Tories' worst, do they come out better.

The Secretary of State talked about every institution—schools, colleges and universities—having more money to spend, but she was disingenuous because it is only certain schools that have more money to spend. Certainly, if a school was part of an education action zone, it got some more money. If it is a specialist school, it will get more money. If it bids for the right amounts of the standards fund—or its local education authority does—it will get more money, but in reality a significant number of schools, colleges and universities are as short of cash at the end of four years of a Labour Government as they were at the beginning of Labour's term in office.

Ms Ward: Every secondary school in my constituency received direct money from the Government around April each year, in some cases up to £60,000. Every primary school in my constituency received a direct grant. Many of them used that not just for additional items such as computers, but for important projects and extra classroom assistants. I do not understand why the schools in the hon. Gentleman's constituency should be any different from every other school in every other part of the country.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for highlighting one of the problems that her Government have not dealt with. Schools in my constituency happen to be in North Yorkshire, one of the 40 worst-funded authorities in the country. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady sighs. I recognise that it is a tiresome point that we keep making, but schools in the poorest-funded authorities fare worse.

I recognise that that problem is historic and not particularly one of this Government's making, but they promised to solve it. There was a clear commitment before 1997 that a Labour Government would reform the standard spending assessment. That has not happened. One of the problems is the money that goes to schools in poorly funded local education authorities.

While the hon. Lady is in listening mode, I hope that she does not have any sixth forms in her constituency. If she does, she will suddenly find that they are being short-changed by a significant amount by this Government as a result of the sixth form funding guarantee.

Some hon. Members in the Chamber were on the Committee that considered the Bill—now the Learning and Skills Act 2000—that set up the Learning and Skills Council. We were given a guarantee that for the first two years there would be no difference in funding. What we find is that the funding for any additional students in any of those sixth forms is not £3,500 for a four AS plus three A2 package, which is the current average—not the highest or lowest—but £2,600. That is £900 less per student. That is not simply disingenuous, it is dishonest.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: Can the hon. Gentleman help me? I have listened carefully to his comments. Of course his support for many of the points that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) is welcome, but it is notable that unlike on past occasions the Liberal Democrats have not tabled an amendment to the Conservative party's motion. Could he or the one other Liberal Democrat who is attending the debate shed light on whether that is because of incompetence, lack of care or because they agree with the motion and intend to vote with us? Possibly, consistent with Liberal Democrat policy, it is all three.

Mr. Willis: I shall come to Conservative policy in a second, but what my colleagues and I do with amendments is entirely up to us. At the end of the debate, the hon. Gentleman will see which way we vote.

I return to the funding of sixth forms and further education colleges, which is a serious point. We were also promised during the passage of the Learning and Skills Bill that funding for the FE sector would be levelled up so that it would no longer have to languish miles away. In fact, for that same four AS, three A2 package, for which colleges currently get an average of £3,030, from next April, they will get only £2,600, a drop of 14 per cent. in their core funding, as a result of the introduction of the new funding mechanism with the Learning and Skills Council. However that is dressed up, it is a real-terms decrease in the resources going into FE colleges.

The most serious point made by the hon. Member for Ashford, and the most serious accusation that we can level at the Government, is their failure to provide an adequate supply of teachers to our schools. In response, the Secretary of State made some clear points about what the Government have tried to do, but unless they can guarantee enough teachers of sufficient quality in our schools, the rest of their policy is of no consequence at all. Without the teachers, we have nothing.

The former Education Secretary, now Home Secretary, said in opposition:

"The Conservatives' failure to plan properly has created a ticking time bomb in terms of future shortage of suitably qualified teachers in key subject specialisms."

That was in *The Independent* on 1 September 1996. How right he was, but rather than doing something about the problem in his four years as Education Secretary, he lit the fuse to make it worse. Secondary vacancies have trebled under this Government, according to their own figures, not those of the National Union of Teachers, and primary vacancies have doubled.

There has been a 51 per cent. increase in the number of instructors, meaning that more children in our schools are being taught by unqualified staff, no matter how that is dressed up. There is now an army of supply teachers who keep our schools going in terms of bodies in front of children. In key subjects such as maths, despite the golden hellos, there has been a fivefold increase in the number of vacancies since 1997, which is a serious problem.

It is not surprising that we have a problem. There is low morale in our schools. Whether we like it or not, 2.5 million days were lost in teacher illness last year, often through stress and overwork. That has to be tackled. The NUT survey conducted by Professor Smithers and Dr. Robinson, which the Secretary of State frankly dismissed, is a damning piece of evidence. It shows that, last year, out of 100 final-year trainee teachers, 40 did not go into the classroom and a further 18 will leave within three years. The Government's own statistics show that in the past three years nearly 30 per cent. of newly qualified teachers had left their post by March of the first year of teaching.

We cannot afford that level of wastage when we are desperately short of professional staff. The Government need to do something about that. What is their response to the teacher shortage crisis? First, there is fast track. Let us have a group of super-teachers, they say, to be recruited and deployed by the Department: £9.2 million was poured into that scheme, to provide 111 teachers. How on earth can anyone justify using such resources to produce such a low output?

The targets for advanced level skills teachers were hopelessly missed, and those for initial teacher training have been missed every year since Labour came to power—to be fair, they were missed every year before that, too.

Most staggering of all, with shortages staring the Government in the face, they deliberately reduced the number of training places for postgraduates. That is how they have been able to manage the discrepancy. That is why the numbers between the targets and actual recruitment have started to narrow. In 1997-98, according to the Library, some 19,169 postgraduate places were available. By 2001, that had been reduced to 16,611. How can a Government serious about trying to recruit more teachers be prepared to contemplate a reduction in the number of postgraduate places available?

The undergraduate route into teaching is also being allowed to wither. We have seen a 25 per cent. fall in recruits in 1997. When the Minister responds to the debate, teacher recruitment and retention must be addressed up-front. We need answers on why the Government keep reducing targets while proclaiming a desperate need for teachers.

All that is depressing, but it would be wrong to accuse the Secretary of State, or her predecessor, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), of not being committed to education and the education brief. No Member of Parliament who had seen them perform would do so. Indeed, I would be the first to admit that when the Government came into power in 1997 they were left with a daunting mountain to climb. I like Conservative Opposition day debates, because they are like reading an annual report from Hogwarts school—there is always a little something missing.

I have been reading the Conservatives' manifesto on education, produced for the general election, because I thought that it would be illuminating to find out what their policy was. The document starts with the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) saying:

"We present here the most ambitious Conservative programme for a generation."

Let us remember that that was only five months ago. It was not an ambitious programme for under-fives, because they were not mentioned. That is 1.5 million children not involved in that ambition. The document contained no policies for young further education college students. Further education was not even mentioned in the document, even though it has become a big topic for debate today. That is a further 676,000 students ignored by the Conservatives. Adult learners did not fare much better, because they were not mentioned—another 1.9 million people not involved in the most ambitious Conservative programme for a generation. In fact, some 3.8 million individuals were ignored in that report from Hogwarts school—sorry, I mean from Conservative central office.

We should recognise that the Conservative party has had nothing to say on huge areas of the education service for the whole of the past four years and has said nothing today about what it would like to happen in future. Lifelong learning, which is part of the motion before us, was hardly mentioned at all by the hon. Member for Ashford, except in his attack on individual learning accounts. That is typical of the way in which the Conservative party has operated.

Mr. Boswell *rose—*

Mr. Willis: I make an exception of the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), to whom I shall give way.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, although I detect a certain pre-emptive nature to his comments. I simply wish to ask him whether, when we debated lifelong learning in Westminster Hall recently—a debate in which the Minister for Lifelong Learning and I both participated—he was able to share his thoughts with us at that time.

Mr. Willis: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that I am rather busy. *[Interruption.]* I have a lot of activities. Members of the Conservative Front Bench can be replaced often, but I have to spread my talents around.

The Government have failed most of all with those young adults who need their help the most. Last year, 23,000 pupils left our schools with no qualifications at all. The truth behind that statistic is that many of them played truant for one or two years before the end of their compulsory school lives. The provisional figure for this year shows a rise to 25,000 in the number of young people leaving school with no qualifications.

The child poverty figures are similarly chilling. Despite the Government's rhetoric, 43 per cent. of children in London still live in poverty. In the borough of Tower

[Mr. Willis]

Hamlets, the figure is an appalling 74 per cent. Those statistics are also associated with a huge rise in juvenile crime, especially in those areas where there is a high incidence of young people leaving school with no qualifications. It is not rocket science. The problem has always existed, but it is a major problem and we ignore it at our peril.

The Government inherited from the previous Conservative Government two other problems: one in four adults unable to perform the most basic mathematical computation, and one in three unable to find the name of a plumber in a telephone directory. Sadly, those ratios are exactly the same today. I accept that the Secretary of State has made inroads into the problems associated with primary and early-years education, but there is still a huge distance to go before that blight on our society is stamped out.

What is the Government's response to the problem? The White Paper has been delayed, and I presume that the education Bill will also be delayed. I hope that the Minister responding to the debate will give the date on which that Bill will come before the House, so that we can dismiss the reports that have appeared in the media.

Some of us still believe in the comprehensive ideal. I know that Conservative Members have never really believed in that, or been committed to it, but Liberal Democrat Members have. We are disappointed that, to tackle the root problem of youngsters who constantly fail in the education system, the Government are to introduce a programme of secondary schooling that sets out deliberately to tier our education system in such a way that those with the least continue to have the least.

Liberal Democrats have no objection to specialisation, or to the idea that each school should have an ethos. That is nothing new: whether one likes it or not, every school that one visits claims to have its own, special ethos. We find it appalling that the Government should adopt a policy that allows them to decide which ethos a school can pick. The policy also means that only half of all schools will get the money to support that ethos. The Secretary of State tells us that in 2005 half of Britain's secondary schools will be specialist schools and will have received £500,000 in extra money. However, if those schools are not going to be measurably ahead of their counterparts that have not received the same resources, they should not be given the money in the first place.

It is sad that although the schools that are doing well under Labour will be rewarded with more resources, those desperately trying to deal with the 23,000 to 25,000 youngsters without qualifications will not get any extra resources at all. That is not fair, and I hope that the Secretary of State will address the point.

Estelle Morris: That is not so. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that this Government have taken more action to ensure that schools that serve particularly challenging areas are eligible, and succeed in applying, for specialist school status? If he were to consider the percentage of free school meals provided by specialist schools, he would find that we have shifted that immeasurably. Does he acknowledge that our programme for the 400 secondary schools in which less than 20 per cent. of pupils achieve five A-starred to C grades ensures that they receive extra resources? He paints the picture as though the only extra source of funding comes from specialist school status. That is not the case; the funds are targeted where they are needed.

Mr. Willis: I am more than happy to concede much of what the Secretary of State says. I have undertaken an analysis of the schools with specialist status, and she is right that such a shift has taken place, compared with the previous regime in which the very affluent schools in our communities were the only ones to be given that status. However, she would agree that, for example, the secondary modern schools in Kent have less and less chance to meet the Government's criteria, given that 45 per cent. of pupils are put into grammar schools in some areas and that children with real learning difficulties are often left out. She would also accept that many schools and many of the head teachers who speak to hon. Members say that they opt for specialist status not because they want to pursue a particular specialism, but simply because they want the extra £500,000 involved, which will improve the overall education of their youngsters.

Finally, the absence of any comment on further education from the speeches of Conservative Members was telling. I am sure that the Secretary of State would agree that unless we can turn on the further education sector so that it deals with the army of young people and adults who are ill-educated, under-skilled and ill-qualified, we shall not address many of the fundamental issues in our society.

Many people in further education, especially college principals and lecturers, feel that the Government are paying lip service to that sector. There is a drift in policy between the Secretary of State, the No. 10 policy unit, which seems to control so many things these days, the Learning and Skills Council in Coventry and the 47 sub-regional learning and skills councils. The way in which the chief executive was so dismissive of the sector in his comments on the "Today" programme and the way in which the chairman classified the FE sector as market traders shows a lack of understanding and commitment at the very top of the Learning and Skills Council about the needs of the FE service.

I and many Conservative Members who were involved with the Learning and Skills Act were promised that the reorganisation would result in a saving of £50 million, but we are now told that it has resulted in a £43 million excess cost—a difference of nearly £100 million. If that happened elsewhere, there would be a hue and cry, but it is not mentioned when it happens in education. That is unacceptable.

The FE sector now faces one of the most difficult and challenging populations of young people that it has ever had to face. If the Government are serious about getting those young people into education and training, they must recognise that young people need a personal service, but the overall funding for the FE sector has decreased by 5 per cent. during the lifetime of the first Labour Government. Since 1995, the core funding for its basic budget is 9 per cent. lower. That does not emphasise the needs of the FE colleges. I have tried to raise the issue of those at the bottom of the spectrum.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): I have some figures that suggest that funding for further education has risen significantly—in fact, by £200 million. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that?

Mr. Willis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for reading his intervention so well. I urge him to take a serious interest in the FE sector, because if one examines FE budgets, one finds that core funding has gone down since 1995. Colleges have to bid for money from a standards fund, and that means that they face the same problems as schools. Unless they are successful in a beauty contest, they do not receive the money.

Colleges in some of the most deprived areas where we are desperately trying to get people into college do not have the resources that they need. That leads to a perverse situation. If colleges do not meet their targets for 16 to 19-year-olds, they lose huge amounts of budget and that means that they cannot go into the market for those over 19. That is barmy.

James Purnell: If the hon. Gentleman examines unit funding per pupil, he will find that the amount has been stabilised under this Government and is about to go up. Does he accept that the trend has been reversed?

Mr. Willis: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asked that question. He will know from the note that has been placed in the Library that that will not take place until 2002-03. We are not even there yet. It is hard to pay bills from something that one might be promised in two years' time. The Chancellor also tells us that we have a war to pay for, but I shall not go into that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] No, but I point out that it might be the next excuse for not being able fully to fund the public sector. We shall have to watch for that.

The introduction of education maintenance allowances has been one of the Government's good ideas. Liberal Democrats supported them when they were introduced and we continue to support them. However, only 30 per cent. of the areas of Britain have access to them; why not everyone? They are easy to introduce and operate and they would encourage all 16 to 19-year-olds wherever they are. But the Secretary of State has not committed herself to that target.

The national skills taskforce recommended that everyone should be entitled to level 2 training throughout their lives, but the Government have not responded to that recommendation. The taskforce also said that level 3 training was so crucial for 16 to 25-year-olds that it should be free up to level 3. The Government have not responded to that even though it is a major need.

On individual learning accounts, I do not want to comment on the issues relating to fraud. We do not have access to the information that the Government and the Director of Public Prosecutions have, but we agree with the hon. Member for Ashford that there should be a full inquiry. All the details should be put on the record and the House should have a proper debate on what went wrong during the process.

However, we urge the Secretary of State not to abandon the principle of individual learning accounts. Many students received their first access to further education through them, and Liberal Democrats are wedded to the principle behind them. She suggested, however, that a scheme might be introduced to replace them. If so, a number of people might become disillusioned as one system finishes and another begins, and many providers might go out of business in that period. The Secretary of State will have our support—and I am pretty sure that of the whole House—if she ensures that young adults who want access to training can obtain it with the minimum of fuss. I urge her to try to sort out the mess as soon as possible and to have a replacement scheme on the blocks ready to go.

5.24 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I apologise for briefly leaving the Chamber during the opening speeches, but there was an emergency involving some of my constituents, of which I gave the Speaker notice. It is not my usual practice, and I thank the House for its indulgence.

I welcome the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) to his position as education spokesman for the official Opposition, and I look forward to listening to him in the coming months. I do not know how long his tenure will last, but I hope that it will be reasonably long. Continuity in education is everything. I saw him sitting at the back of the Education and Skills Committee recently and he is welcome to join us.

I have high expectations of the hon. Gentleman because I know that he has an interest in and knowledge of education. My welcome is genuine; I am not merely going through the motions. However, I should note that I recently received an e-mail from a head teacher of a successful sixth form college in my constituency in which he said, "Please, Barry, don't send me any more of those dreadful Opposition day debates. I have tended to circulate them to the rest of the staff and they found that knock-about stuff so depressing that I would rather not have the material." Somewhere in the subterranean passages of Conservative central office, there must be an "invent a crisis" unit. That does not help anyone.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said that people would have to be deaf and blind if they did not know about the lack of morale in some parts of the teaching profession, but we must consider what we say in Opposition day debates and the way in which they are framed. He said that six things were dreadfully wrong with the education sector—perhaps he could have found even more. I entreat him to raise the tone of the debate, because we can have a good one that is based on the facts. We could agree that since 1997 the Labour Government have not got everything right and, as Chairman of the Education and Skills Committee, I might even say that the Conservative Governments from 1979 on did not get everything wrong, although I am tempted to say that most of it was.

There is a middle way. We can have a serious discourse on the future of the education sector. All hon. Members have a responsibility to raise the level of debate, rather than drag it down. Let us compare the tenor of today's debate with what happens in the Select Committee. The hon. Gentleman's colleagues participate in it—one of them is in the Chamber—and the quality of the debate is high. We are able to bury party differences in a constructive manner. I do not want the House to become a major Select Committee, but let us take our responsibility for the tone of the education debate seriously and raise its level. The hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

repeatedly referred to a crisis; according to his predecessor, there was always a crisis. Let us change the terminology.

Let us give a sober assessment of the situation. We should accept that not everything that the Government have done since 1997 is wrong. If I were to do a proper school report on them I would say that their record shows them to be innovative, because they have tried new ideas and structures. Perhaps that is bad, but the Leader of the Opposition said on the "Today" programme this morning that the trouble with the Government's management of the health sector is that they are not introducing new ideas or partnerships and are not binding the private sector into the health service. In this debate, however, the Conservatives are saying that the problem is that the Government are innovative, that they have new ideas and are trying to introduce the private sector to education. They have been greatly criticised for that.

Mr. Damian Green: I defy the hon. Gentleman to find in my speech any criticism of the Government for trying to involve the private sector in state education. I made no such accusation, and I believe the exact opposite. I am glad to hear that the hon. Gentleman does, too.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait until a little later in my speech, when I will turn to his remarks on individual learning accounts.

Returning to the school report on the Government, as Chairman of the Select Committee, I find sure start very interesting and innovative. No one has mentioned sure start today, but much of the debate has been about how we can break the cycle of deprivation in education, and this Government, rather than previous Administrations, have introduced several exciting, innovating schemes that seem to contain the seeds of solutions to the problem of stimulating the imagination and creativity of children from birth to age eight. The Select Committee's report on early years education was very positive about sure start's achievements in areas of deprivation. In the school report, we can make a mark in the plus column for that.

We have identified a critical point, at about age 13, at which many people from relatively deprived backgrounds lose interest in education. How do we keep them in education and enthuse them? Two policies are on the right lines. One aims to provide a genuine vocational path to young people who are not academic in the traditional sense. For years, as I say every time I speak in the House on this subject, all the academic accolades have gone to the bright pupils, the top third who achieve the best marks in maths and classical subjects. The rest of the class has received very little reward. What I like about some of the innovations to which we have been turning our minds in the past four and a half years is that they aim to engage and reward the young people in the middle and at the back of the class. The Government are taking steps to provide a proper, recognised vocational channel for young people, and that is a remarkably positive aspect of this period of educational change.

Many of us outside education can see how important sure start is in breaking the cycle of educational deprivation, and we want to know when the Government will fully expand the policy. If sure start is successful, why is it not being rolled out faster? We know that there is a problem in ensuring that later sure start programmes are up to speed and are learning from the earlier ones, and that is acceptable. However, there is lots of evidence that sure start is successful, so it is the Government's responsibility to roll it out faster, and I urge them to do so. In the school report, they get a little bit of a plus and a little bit of a minus for that.

As with sure start, all the research that I have seen suggests that education maintenance allowances work: they retain young people in education and provide a stimulus that was lacking before. I understand that they are expensive, but we must be honest about our desire to achieve inclusion. Many hon. Members only see how much EMAs cost, and the considerable expense of rolling out the policy throughout the country. However, what is the cost of not doing so? The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) mentioned those who leave the education system with no qualifications. We know what that means in terms of the likelihood of such people suffering deprivation or achieving success, getting a job or falling into a life of crime. Such things can cost society a great deal of money. The cost of not rolling out sure start and EMAs has to be seen in that context. The final verdict is: interesting, but could do better.

Literacy and numeracy appear in the plus column. Some remarkable results have been achieved, especially among children aged up to 11. Most fair-minded people would agree that that is true. However, as Chairman of the Select Committee, I see inspectors' reports, hear evidence from the chief inspector of schools and examine the data, and from that vantage point I can see issues that have not been tackled adequately during the Labour Government's first four years. One of those issues is the 11 to 14 age group.

I understand that the Government's policy is to turn their mind to the question of how to achieve greater success with that group. In a sense, the Government are trying to apply the innovative techniques that have been used further down the age range to the 11 to 14 age group. I understand that the process will take time, but we must not delay tackling the problem of the performance of children who were previously doing quite well in school levelling off or declining after they turn 11. Remedying that problem presents a serious challenge. The news is not all bad: GCSE results for the top 50 per cent. of pupils are encouraging. However, as we know, the difficulty facing any Government is how to tackle the problem of the bottom 50 per cent.

Many aspects of higher education appear in the plus column. The Committee has carried out two inquiries into higher education—my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) has been a participant. We have found some interesting developments in HE, especially the consistency of money flowing into research. That is a plus, although everyone knows that if we are to have world-class institutions the commitment to research must be continued.

On the other hand, there are serious problems in HE. If we do not tackle them soon, we will have serious trouble sustaining our world-class institutions. I am talking about the most exclusive club of HE institutions, including the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Warwick and Nottingham and the London School of Economics.

We cannot continue to pay university teachers so little. I should declare an interest: when I worked for a living, I was a university teacher and I still have a vestigial connection with the Association of University Teachers. If we do not tackle pay, the quality of those who are attracted into universities and stay on to become professors will decline year on year. That presents a serious challenge to the Government, who must also tackle another significant problem that emerged from the Committee's inquiries: too few young people from the United Kingdom stay on to do postgraduate work, complete their PhD and go into university teaching. My interim verdict on HE—I intend to return to the subject shortly—is: a mixture of pluses and minuses.

Further education currently gives rise to the most entries in the minus column, but that is not a final judgment—I hope that the Select Committee's inquiry into FE will stimulate an increase in Government activity in that sector. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough is right to point out that FE did not appear in the Conservative party's manifesto. I know that the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) is interested in the sector, as he used to have ministerial responsibility for it. The FE sector is vital, not only for delivering conventional FE, but because many of the FE colleges will play an essential role in achieving the Prime Minister's target of 50 per cent. of young people entering HE.

Further education now delivers far more HE provision than was provided by the entire FE system when the Robbins report was written. It is salutary to think about that. It is an enormous sector and we must get it right, including the resources that flow into it and the salaries that are paid. The problem with so many people being on short-term and temporary contracts is one to which the Government must turn their mind. At the same time, they are coming under pressure on student finance.

Having agreed with a number of the comments of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, we must fall out on something. I learned from the inquiry into access to HE and retention within it that there are no easy answers, so there is a great challenge. Perhaps most Members, or many—possibly those who do not have universities close to their constituencies form the higher percentage—do not recognise yet how vital the HE sector is to the future of our country in terms of competitiveness and producing the bright young people who will be the leaders in engineering, management and all the things that make the United Kingdom wealthy.

If we do not invest in our universities and we do not get things right, we shall be in serious trouble. Perhaps there are three challenges. First, we must get pay right. The same can be said about the flow of postgraduates into HE. Secondly, we must recognise that universities have an enormous role in the community, and I mean that in a big sense. It is about time that we realised that most universities in most regions are the biggest employers. They are the biggest bringers of wealth, the biggest potential for change and the biggest potential for innovation.

I would hate to see my constituency if the university were taken out. The same could be said of Manchester, with its four universities, and of Leeds, with its two great institutions. If HE institutions were removed from most of the towns and cities of our country, we would be left with an appalling tragedy. Indeed, there are certain areas where we need more universities, not fewer. I think especially of Cornwall, Bolton and a couple of other places.

Thirdly, some people said during our inquiry into HE, "The bravest thing that the Labour Government did after 1997 was to change the basis of student finance." We could no longer accept the situation that we found in our inquiry. It revealed that we spent roughly the same percentage per capita on HE as our major industrial rivals; we spent a bit less than many and a bit more than others. As a ball-park figure, the percentage was about the same. However, 40 to 45 per cent. of that spend was flowing into student support. That was double what any of our competitors were spending.

It is necessary to make a decision on priorities at some stage. Is the priority the quality of teaching? Is it the quality of on-going research? Is it the quality derived from using universities as an agent of regeneration in communities and the regions? Alternatively, are we to reintroduce a system that makes it comfortable for people who should pay something towards their own education? I believe that it would be extremely dangerous if we chose to go back to the old system of student finance rather than looking forward and ensuring that we keep expenditure in balance.

I wanted, as did the Committee, to have regard to the poorest students who were in trouble. Most of the evidence showed that there was a percentage of students from very poor backgrounds who were put off by the fear of debt and by the incomprehensibility of the system, which meant that they had to go to five different pots of money. We were also worried about the time that students were spending on part-time work. As I have said, these are matters of balance. I worry about the Government because they got the collywobbles about their resolve after a successful campaign by the Liberal Democrats during the election. Whatever interdepartmental inquiries are made, I hope that the repercussions for the rest of the system of starting to spend an enormous percentage of the higher education budget on student support are clearly understood.

I shall say a word or two about individual learning accounts. I tried to produce a balanced report; the Government have done some good things and some not so good things. I tried to be even-handed, but the Government should deal with some things very soon. I came to education late. I went to a smart boys' grammar school, but did not enjoy it much; I lived in a part of the world where people from humble backgrounds were made to feel different. The school I went to is down the river from Westminster; it is now a private school, but it was not when I was there. I had four years in industry before I got back into education; people helped me, first, get into further education, then into higher education. When I got into the London School of Economics, I found it difficult to leave education at all.

I like the fact that ILAs are there and that we introduced them.

Mr. Barker: They were there.

Mr. Sheerman: Let us be fair; I shall come back to whether or not they are in existence in a moment.

ILAs are a wonderful idea. This is the first time that they have been introduced and they can bring about profound change. We often do not recognise in the House

[Mr. Sheerman]

that changing the culture of our country means reaching people who have never been interested in education and training and getting them into training; doing so is a sign of real success. It is all very well getting middle class professionals or the band just below them interested in education; the difficulty is reaching the third of our population that has never had decent education and training. ILAs were beginning to achieve that. Ruth Silver from Lambeth college gave evidence to the Select Committee and spoke about the way in which ILAs were getting through to the very people whom we need to target with education, training and skills. We should not write off ILAs, as they have achieved genuine success.

I hope that the Secretary of State reads the Select Committee report, but I shall repeat what she told us. She said that ILAs would be frozen; there would be a period of suspended animation—to take up the point made by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker)—then they would be re-energized pretty quickly. That is what I understood, and I hope that it is true. However, the Department issued a press notices, which stated,

"Individual learning accounts to be suspended".

Two or three times the press release said that ILAs would be suspended, before going on to say:

"We have therefore decided to prevent any further take-up of ILAs."

To be polite, the language gets very dense; it is worrying that one does not know what is happening from that press release. To be fair, in the last Education questions, the Secretary of State, in the final sentence of one response, indicated that ILAs would be resumed in some form and would be back on track relatively quickly. There is one thing that Education Secretaries have to do; they have to do the job competently, which, I am sure, my right hon. Friend can do, but they also have to stand up to big brother. If big brother in No. 10 says, "I don't like what is happening with student support", he has to be stood up to and told the truth about student finance. If big brother in No. 11 says, "I don't like what is happening with ILAs", he has to be stood up to and told that, not only were ILAs very much his idea, but the money for them has to continue. ILAs are innovative, new, exciting and very largely successful.

I heard "File on 4". It was an excellent programme, and very funny in parts. It told the story of a man who had been convicted of selling supposedly leather sofas at £6,000 a time. When people complained because the furniture was in fact plastic, he moved into the ILA market and sold worthless CD-Roms, presumably creaming off the £175. The programme was hilarious in some respects, although I doubt whether the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey), found it funny. However, let us not obscure the fact that a small percentage of forgeries have been found in a very big programme, so the argument for reinstating ILAs quickly is made.

From everything that I have heard in this debate, I conclude that ILAs should be back on track—albeit modified—and celebrating innovation. We should say to the Opposition that innovation sometimes brings problems, that those problems must be recognised and fixed, and that innovation should not be abandoned. Not everything in good, innovative government will work, but some things should be tried. The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) knows exactly what I mean, as he tried a few things at the Department of Health. A good Government and good Ministers see what works, fix what can be fixed, and retain the vision.

One other chord has been struck in this debate: let us be real about the difference between what Ministers think is out there and what really is out there. I realised during the election campaign that if one does not let the people who are to deliver the vision construct that vision, they will not be keen on delivering it because they will not understand it. There is still a gap—I have said this to the Secretary of State on the record—between what the Government think they are achieving and what is translated to teachers, head teachers, support workers and others on the ground. I ask the Secretary of State to launch a campaign to reach out to those people. She has the right policies, and most of them attract more pluses than minuses, but she has a job in explaining them in order to deliver on her ideals.

5.52 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): I want to follow the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) in two respects. First, as one of the more short-lived predecessors of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), I, too, welcome him to his responsibilities on the Front Bench. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the way in which he opened the debate. He focused the attention of the House in particular on the question of teachers' morale and the absurdity of the policy on individual learning accounts as it has turned out in practice—and did so extremely effectively.

Secondly, I follow the hon. Gentleman into another aspect of education policy, which my hon. Friend mentioned relatively briefly but which did not merit a single complete sentence in the Secretary of State's speech: the shambles of the Government's policy on the financing and structure of higher education. The hon. Gentleman said that when we have a policy that does not work, we should acknowledge that fact. There are few better examples of a policy that does not work for which this Government are responsible than that which they introduced in the first weeks of the previous Parliament on the financing of students and on higher education more generally.

Perhaps I should begin my remarks on higher education by stressing that although there are sharp differences between the two major parties on the way in which we are likely to deliver policy objectives in higher education, there is no major distinction between those objectives. It is a truism that higher education is hugely important in the modern world. If we are to earn our living in the globalised economy, we must be a knowledge-based society. I hope that we also agree that the case for a vigorous and expanding higher education system is not purely utilitarian, based on earning one's living. It is also based on providing people with the opportunity to lead more fulfilling lives. We should always restate those objectives in parallel, not seeking to emphasise one to the exclusion of the other.

Furthermore, there is no divide between the two major parties—I hope—on the commitment to achieve the Prime Minister's stated objective of further increasing the

participation rate in higher education from the 30-plus per cent. achieved by the previous Government, which has not yet been improved in the four and a half years under this Government, to 50 per cent. So far, so good; so uncontroversial.

However, we must then address the question of mechanisms. I suppose that there is no surer sign of problems in the evolution of this Government's policy than that old staple of a Government looking for a way out of trouble that is the planted press story which appears on August bank holiday Monday. I have seen the inside of a Whitehall Department, and boundless though my admiration is for Sarah Womack, the political correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, I very much doubt whether she picked up the following story on the grapevine on Bank holiday Sunday.

The article was clearly the result of the Government asking themselves what story they could place in the empty newspapers on Bank holiday Monday. The headline reads: "Blair plans a U-turn on university tuition fees". If one is to manage a good plant on a bank holiday Monday, one must first identify the problem that one is going to solve and, secondly, state in unambiguous terms, so that headline writers on duty over a bank holiday weekend can understand, what one intends to do about it.

On stating the problem, an unnamed senior Minister was wheeled out with a quotation for the article. He told *The Daily Telegraph* that the policy introduced by Labour in 1998 was a "total shambles". The quotation goes on:

"It's a disaster and hugely unpopular. It was a mistake, which came home to us on the doorstep when we were canvassing at the election, and that is being recognised in the Cabinet now."

There we have the Downing street plant, ahead of the bank holiday weekend, asserting that their policy was a disaster. On considering what to do about the problem, the first line of the story makes it clear:

"Tony Blair has ordered a rethink on university tuition fees".

That is simple and straightforward.

Then the briefing machine went quiet until the week of the Labour party conference. They use their material, these people in the briefing machine; one has to give them that. Kenneth Baker used to be told when Secretary of State for Education that he was never knowingly undersold. That principle could be applied more generally to this Government, as the story rode again.

Clearly, there was a problem at the Labour party conference, because on 3 October a headline read: "Rethink on student loans is under way". The story said:

"A full-scale review of university fees and loans has been ordered in an attempt to find the fairer system of student funding demanded . . . by Tony Blair."

The same story was therefore announced twice.

I invite the House to remember the days on which those two stories appeared. The first sighting of the story was on 27 August, and the second on 3 October. Eight days later, on 11 October, the review had obviously been completed because we found in *The Independent:*

"The die has been cast. Tony Blair has spoken and the United Kingdom plans to become the first country in the world where graduates will have to pay a tax as a way of funding their university education."

The story in *The Independent* continues:

"No one expected the Government to come up with such a radical solution to the mess it created of student finance after the 1997 election. Not surprisingly, there is amazement all round. University vice chancellors are as gobsmacked as senior civil servants, and even New Labour insiders are left with their mouths open."

According to the next paragraph of the article in *The Independent*,

"No details have been worked out and a number of real problems have to be overcome."

The review was announced on 31 August, the announcement was repeated on 3 October and the conclusions were announced on 11 October. Clearly, there was a certain amount of surprise, which was accurately reported by *The Independent*. Somebody in the Department obviously pointed out to the Secretary of State that the review had not yet been formally set up. The results had been published, but the Department had not yet found a way of announcing that the review would take place.

On 22 October, 11 days after the results of the review had been announced, another staple of ministerial life took place: a keynote speech to vice-chancellors. It was a perfectly unexceptionable speech; indeed, it contained some points with which I agreed, and to which I shall return. Of course, the real purpose of the press release does not become clear until one gets to the notes to editors. The first note to editors reads:

"Estelle Morris began a review of student support arrangements in the summer."

As far as I am aware, that was the first time that the review had been formally announced to the world. I am not making a narrow party point or just the procedural point that Parliament might have been told about the review, as it concerned a controversial policy that was approved by Act of Parliament. The question therefore arises whether the matter was correctly handled in procedural terms.

Given the history of the past four and a half years on student finance, and given the fact that the Government have acknowledged that that was a shambolic failure, can we not learn from the mistakes of those four and a half years, and give ourselves more than 11 days from the announcement of the review to the announcement of its conclusions? In particular, perhaps we could have the 11 days the right way round, with the review announced before the conclusions. It is an absurd way to carry out the process of policy making in an area of vital importance to our national life.

Having made those points about the way in which the issue has come back on to the policy making agenda, I shall be slightly less confrontational. I go back to my starting point: the policy objectives are largely shared by the two sides of the House. The Secretary of State's speech to the assembled company of vice-chancellors on 22 October set out two key issues, and I shall dwell on both in the course of my remarks. On both subjects, I wholeheartedly agree with the policy objectives that she set. I also agree with the implied criticism in her speech of her own Government's record. I do not believe that we have succeeded in delivering either of those policy objectives in the years since 1997. That is due in significant measure to the funding structure set up by the Government in 1998.

The first issue that the Secretary of State highlighted in her speech to the vice-chancellors was equity of access. When she responded to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford at the beginning of the debate, the right hon. Lady made a powerful and emotional case that the Government had stood alongside pupils and students from low-income backgrounds and had sought to improve their life chances by using the power of the Government to improve the education opportunities available to them.

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

I do not deny that the Government have taken significant steps in some places to improve the school opportunities available to children from low-income backgrounds. I do not take that away from them, but I sought to intervene on the Secretary of State in order to remind her of the words that she used in respect of the higher education sector and the same social policy issue, and to ask her whether she was as pleased with the record of her predecessor as Secretary of State in improving equity of access to higher education as she clearly was with the improvement of the literacy and numeracy records for pupils from low-income backgrounds.

I quote to the House the words used by the Secretary of State on 22 October. She said:

"None of us can defend the position where five times as many young people from professional backgrounds enter higher education compared with those from unskilled and manual backgrounds—73-74 per cent. compared with 13-14 per cent.—and when that gap has not narrowed in recent time."

That is as close as a Secretary of State in office is ever likely to come to condemning the record of her own Government on equity of access for students from low income backgrounds.

The problem is not that that is new or unpredicted, or that no one knew that that would be the result of the policies introduced by the Government in 1997. We knew ahead of the event that that was likely to be the consequence of the policies that the Government introduced in 1997 and 1998. It was not just the Opposition who were arguing that that would be the consequence. It was one of the central findings of the Dearing report that if the Government followed the policy prescription that they ended up following in 1997-98, that would diminish the opportunity for equitable access, in particular for students from low-income backgrounds.

Dearing's version of the statistic that the Secretary of State quoted on 22 October is more compelling than hers. As far as I know, it has not been updated, but perhaps it should be. Dearing examined the participation rates of students with equivalent A-level qualifications. He looked at students with two A-levels, and reported that 77 per cent. of students with two A-levels from middle and upper income groups went on to higher education. The corresponding figure for students with the same intellectual qualification but with a low-income background was not 77 per cent., but 47 per cent. Dearing addressed the issue head-on, and it was one of the principal motivations for the policy mix that he recommended, which was not the policy mix for which the Government ended up legislating.

The failure of policy in the past four and a half years was identified by Dearing, and he made specific recommendations on how to address it. Before we go rushing into the Prime Minister's latest attachment to the graduate tax, perhaps it would be sensible to spend a few days at least, and preferably much longer, looking again at the Dearing report to see whether the things that have happened were predicted—I believe that they were—and whether the findings of the Dearing report should now inform our policy making in a way that they were not allowed to do four and a half years ago.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Was not the basic error that on the very day that the Dearing report was published, the then Secretary of State came to the House with his conclusions, which differed from Dearing's? Is not the moral that a period of reflection on what had been offered to the country at great length and expense should have taken place then and ought to take place now?

Mr. Dorrell: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. It took Dearing 14 months to produce—if I remember correctly—18 volumes. It took the Secretary of State a matter of hours to receive the report and come to the House of Commons with his conclusions. It is a classic example of acting in haste and repenting at leisure. My central point this evening is that we are in danger of seeing exactly the same thing happen again, because the Prime Minister has rushed off to the newspapers with a press release, and six weeks later has rushed back to announce the conclusions, without allowing the policy-making process proper time to assess the alternatives.

Mr. Sheerman: I agree with much of what the right hon. Gentleman has said. However, no one has found the answer to the problem about which he speaks. When we had full maintenance grants and no fees, we could not get young people from low-income backgrounds into higher education. The answer probably lies elsewhere: perhaps in education maintenance allowances for 13 and 14-year-olds, but not in the old system.

Mr. Dorrell: It would be a mistake to rerun the Dearing committee's debate in an intervention and a response. Clearly, it is true that not only student finance has an impact on participation rates for students from low-income families. However, I have often said that although the Dearing report comprises 18 volumes, all of us who are interested in the issue should remember one sentence at its heart. The report traced the way in which the argument had changed during the committee's deliberations. The sentence states:

"We did not end up where we started."

I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) was in the Department when the Dearing review was set up and perhaps he could confirm that the Conservative Government and the Labour Opposition expected Dearing to recommend the abolition of the maintenance grant and its replacement with student loans, but the continuation of free tuition. Everyone expected that, including, as he has often said, Lord Dearing. That is why the sentence that I quoted is so significant.

The committee considered the evidence and the options and concluded that if public money continued to be directed at supporting students in higher education, equity of access should be provided by focusing public money on means-tested maintenance grants and expecting a private contribution from the individual through a tuition fee. Dearing's central conclusion was that we should have means-tested maintenance grants to support students from low-income backgrounds who go away to university, but that all students should be expected to contribute to the cost of their tuition from their future earnings through fees supported by a loan system.

The Prime Minister and the then Secretary of State rejected that conclusion in a hurry at the beginning of the previous Parliament. I believe that the Government should

return to it and assess it more carefully at the beginning of this Parliament. Dearing's recommendation deals directly with equity of access, which is clearly and rightly important to the Secretary of State, given her earlier comments. However, Dearing also recommended that approach because he realised that if students pay tuition fees to universities, an important extra benefit accrues to the university system. It would make the universities more directly accountable to students and therefore, rightly, more responsible to the student body than to the Secretary of State and the Department for Education and Skills.

I have not said so previously, but I sharply disagree with the policy in the Conservative party manifesto to sell the spectrum to endow universities. That is an original Father Christmas policy, which would undermine the objective of making the universities accountable to their students. It would make them accountable to nobody. That is an unattractive idea. Contemplating selling spectrum to mobile phone companies almost seems like another world. That policy now seems less attractive for many reasons and I hope that we shall not pursue it.

Such a policy undermines the key message of Dearing: a proper, accountable and more independent university system, which moves away from the over-centralisation for which we were responsible in the 1980s and 1990s and gives universities genuine independence to develop a more flexible system, is provided through students being supported to pay fees. That would enforce a principle that the Government have not respected: extra money raised from students should be ring-fenced for the higher education sector. If students pay fees straight to the universities, that is the end of the problem.

Mr. Levitt: The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting contribution. Although we have a system of students paying fees and of accountability, half the students who go into higher education are not required to pay fees because of means-testing. Yet that has not tackled the problem of the differences in university attendance between the various social classes. On accountability to students, I am worried that the right hon. Gentleman comes close to advocating top-up fees, which the Government have rightly opposed. Will he clarify his position on that?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall not get into an argument on top-up fees, because I am basing my argument on the findings of Dearing. There are aspects in any document that runs to 18 volumes that I would not necessarily have written in exactly the same way. However, on policy mix for higher education, the Dearing report comes closer to setting out a coherent programme, which is likely to provide a vigorous university sector, than the policy that the Government have pursued in the past four and a half years or the policy idea in our manifesto for the general election.

Mr. Willis: Does the right hon. Gentleman concede that we have moved on since the Dearing report? I agree with almost all his comments apart from his conclusiions, about which we have always argued. Since the Dearing review, the Cubie commission was set up in Scotland and produced some compelling evidence, and the Rees review has taken place in Wales. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that that academic research is a vital complement to the Dearing report? After all, Lord Dearing's inquiry began almost six years ago.

Mr. Dorrell: Of course, I do not suggest that Dearing is the end of knowledge on the subject or that we should substitute one 11-day policy-making process for another. The lesson of events in the past four years is that we should take time to reflect. The Dearing report is the most serious, coherent and comprehensive review of the subject in the United Kingdom in the past six years.

I want to emphasise the value to the higher education sector of creating a world where a larger proportion of university income comes directly from students and does not pass through the Department for Education and Skills. That would provide a more flexible and responsive higher education sector. Let us revert to objectives—a subject that is not controversial. The Secretary of State made it clear in her speech on 22 October that she agrees with that objective. She said:

"Over the last ten to twenty years, the higher education sector has seen a huge shift from being an elite to being a mass system, but without anyone necessarily thinking strategically about what we want our universities to be achieving."

That is a pretty damning criticism by a Secretary of State of a Government who have been in office for four and a half years. What type of institution will be required if we are to increase participation in higher education from the 30-odd per cent. today to the 50 per cent. that is the Prime Minister's objective? Surely it is absurd to believe that a vision of what a university ought to be, based originally on Oxbridge, the London School of Economics and a few other traditional universities, which had much less than 10 per cent. participation in the pre-1960 era, can be extended and made available to 50 per cent. of the population.

I am certainly not arguing for a return to polytechnics and colleges for advanced technology, or for creating artificial pigeonholes; quite the contrary. I seek a system in which institutions are more responsible to their student body, and are freer to work through for themselves how to meet the needs of their student bodies more accurately.

In this connection, it is worth recording the words of two distinguished people who have worked in the higher eduction sector and who have described in colourful terms what is wrong with the unduly straitjacketed world that higher education has become. Professor Zellick, the head of London university, states:

"It's a pretty thoughtless way of getting people off the streets and out of the dole queues and it isn't what the country needs. Nobody says that, so we struggle on doing lots of silly things and wasting money. You've got people of moderate academic ability doing questionable academic courses culminating in degrees, leaving university, as they arrive, with inadequate literacy and numeracy."

That is from the vice-chancellor of London university.

The former principal of Strathclyde university, Professor Sir Graham Hills, states:

"British universities are in decline. They are short of money, short of ideas and short of confidence. Within a generation they have ceased to be independent beacons of learning and radical thinking and have become obedient outstations of the Department for Education and Employment."

There is no disagreement in the House that we want to create a system of world-class institutions with equitable access. However, I sometimes think that hon. Members on both sides of the House are in denial about the

[Mr. Dorrell]

consequences of the policy prescriptions that have been followed by the Labour Government over the past four and a half years. I do not absolve the Government who went before them from pursuing a policy of over-centralisation or from over-bureaucratising the university sector.

World-class institutions will not be created by bureaucratic diktat from the Department for Education and Skills. They will be created by providing a framework within which institutions are able to develop genuine world-class expertise. That result would flow from a much more liberal system, of the kind that Dearing envisaged—a much more attractive and compelling vision than the one currently on offer from the Government.

6.24 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I should like to apologise to the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) and his Front Bench colleagues, because I also had to leave the Chamber briefly to fulfil a long-standing commitment.

I am pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), who gave a succinct and clear analysis of the current position of higher education. I welcome what he said about the broad band of agreement about the objectives. One of those objectives is equality of access, and there is a range of reasons relating to that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) mentioned. One must be the quality of teaching that young people receive in schools to attain the standard to go on into higher education. I shall return to that aspect of the debate.

The National Union of Teachers' report is an important document—I declare an interest here: I am still a member of that trade union—but it is only one document to be added to the totality of the debate about the recruitment and retention of teachers. It is interesting that there seems to be a shift of emphasis—this is evident not only from the NUT but from the other teachers' unions—in the last paragraph of the summary of that document, which states:

"Policies for recruitment must be balanced by policies for retention."

Recruitment numbers are going up, as the Secretary of State made clear today. More young people are being attracted to teaching now, and are going to university and into postgraduate certificate of education courses in order to get into teaching. The issue now is retention. The NUT document goes on:

"It is important to listen to the teachers and address their concerns."

I am equally sure that the Government will do—and are doing—just that.

I would like to share my experience of schools in Bristol. I have visited schools and talked to head teachers and teachers about the present situation. I want to add my congratulations to teachers on all their hard work and commitment, because standards have gone up. For the Opposition to lead in this debate with such a tirade against teachers without recognising their achievements and the way in which standards have improved is nothing short of a disgrace. Standards are going up and there is a huge commitment from teachers. However, there is also a need to continue to retain teachers.

I want to speak briefly, from my experience, about the nature and quality of those being recruited and about the position of teachers leaving—and, indeed, returning to—the profession. I also want us to look at the profession in the same way that we are now beginning to look at other professions, because people no longer go into a profession and stay in it from their first day of work until they retire, as was the family tradition. People now move in and out of professions, often to the benefit of those professions; I believe that that is explicitly of benefit to the teaching profession.

At one of the schools that I visited recently, I met the head teacher and we soon struck up a conversation that went something like this: "Yes, isn't it awful? I've advertised for a teacher and a deputy, and I've had so few applications. Instead of getting 40, I've got four." However, when I asked him about the quality of the applicants, he replied, "Oh, I've made a really good appointment." The people applying at present are of the highest quality.

In a stable economy with high levels of employment, people who apply to work in teaching have made a firm commitment to teaching. The head teacher of that particular school readily admitted that the people coming through his door were of the highest quality. He now has a new deputy head teacher and two newly qualified teachers of the highest quality, following a tradition going back many years.

We acknowledge that the number of applicants has gone down. There are more jobs—particularly for women—out there in the market, and fewer people are applying for the reason that it is traditionally expected that they would be a teacher. However, the quality of newly qualified teachers is important.

Another school that I visited recently had three newly qualified teachers, all of whom had been mature students. They had gone back into education—in a way to which my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield referred—having experienced other employment elsewhere. They had tried other things. They had worked in retail, in business and in commerce. However, that work had not given those people the level of satisfaction that they had expected, and they had recognised, either through doing voluntary work with young people or through their own families, that teaching was an alternative. They came into teaching with good qualifications and with added experience. They brought to the classroom something more than those of us—I include myself in this description—who went from school to university to school without being able to bring a breadth of experience to young people.

I recently heard an amusing anecdote about a young person who had said "My mum has just got a job in the school: she is going to be the careers teacher. I don't know what she will be able to tell them; she has never done anything but teach". We laughed, but there is a sound point there. I am sure that qualified teachers, with all their generic skills, have much to tell young people—on the basis of wide experience in their own families, and of work known to them through family connections—about what they might want to do. I am sure that they want to instil in young people the highest possible aspirations. How much better it would be, however, for school staff rooms to contain teachers who have worked in the travel industry or in engineering. I am thinking of those who, because of their wider background in, perhaps, farming,

can say to young people "There is a breadth of work out there that we can tell you about". That, I think, is enriching and good, and I think that the school to which I have referred, with its three NQTs—mature students—has acquired something that enriches both the staff room and the pupils.

The head teacher of another school, a beacon school, has moved on to offer elsewhere the expertise that built up the school. The deputy head—acting head, at the time of my visit—was very excited about the job for which she was going to apply. She told me that, even if she did not get the job, it would have been a challenge and a rewarding experience to be the acting head of a beacon school with so much going for it, and that it would be very good for her CV.

That teacher took me around the school and introduced me to two NQTs. Those young people had come straight from university. They had already worked in the school, they had been there as students, they clearly had aspirations and they were doing a really good job. The teacher then introduced me to one of the new nursery teachers, an older woman who had entered the school as an assistant teacher.

That woman had found her way gradually through the system. She had done her studying at night, while in a part-time job, and she was now back as a fully trained nursery teacher. That was excellent: she was an older person who had brought up her own family, she had much to offer the school, and she was going to stay in the locality for a good while. I am sure that the diversity provided by those with wider backgrounds and different experiences will prove valuable.

Subsequently, on a Saturday afternoon, I met a young man who has opposed me in two general elections, representing the Green party. He is a wonderful young man, very colourful—not just in terms of the name of his party, but in terms of all the work that he has done in youth clubs and with photography. He helped Sustrans, the cycling organisation, to get its million cyclists on the road for the millennium event. Although he had wide experience, however, he had never quite settled down—but now, he told me, he was doing a PGCE course.

That young man has worked in secondary schools in Bristol, and he now realises what fun young people can be. He can offer them all his experience, and no one will be able to get the better of him—although I am glad to say that I did in the general election! He will make a superb teacher: he empathises with young people, he has a lot of experience, he has a lot of go and he will bring something rich and valuable to the staff room as well as to young people.

Nowadays, it cannot be assumed that a teacher who enters the profession with qualifications at 20 or 21 will be a teacher for ever. I hope that such teachers will take a break, and then return. The Secretary of State suggested that we should consider not just the drop-out figures, but the figures for those returning to teaching. Surely it is beneficial for people to return with wider experience. I am thinking of those who may have entered the profession when young and then, perhaps, started a family. We should recognise the contribution made by women in bringing up children, and see it as a real plus on their CVs. Such experience—such "early years" work—is something they can bring back to teaching.

I am not as pessimistic as some have been today: I think that the figures should be viewed in more depth. We should understand what is happening in the profession as a whole. It is certainly becoming more demanding. I agree with the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who said that young people themselves now presented a greater challenge. They too are more demanding and difficult, in many ways, than those of us whose teaching experience took place 20 or more years ago. If we take into account those who bring more maturity, more qualifications and more experience of life to the profession, however, I think we can view the profession positively. We should bear in mind that more young people are choosing it, more mature students are returning, and more people who have had a taste of teaching and then gained wider experience are also going back.

I do not particularly want to return to the profession myself, but I recently replied to a student questionnaire that asked "If you were not a Member of Parliament, what would be your ideal job?" I thought about it for a long time—I thought of all the exotic things I might do—but, if I was to be honest, I had to write "Teacher". I did, however, add "On a good day".

There is nothing better than teaching—on a good day. There is nothing more exciting in the world than the exhilaration of helping young people, seeing their eyes light up and knowing that something has been understood and aspirations have been extended. I am here because I want to ensure that that right is extended to more young people—that they will have better-qualified and more experienced teachers with wider experience and more maturity.

We are fortunate in Bristol. I know that there are pressures on teachers in other parts of the country, which we do not experience to the same extent. We do not have as many applicants, but they are high-quality applicants—and in Bristol the idea of lifelong learning does not just mean adding a bit of adult education when people are older: that notion has now gone. Although it is a good thing, it is not what Labour Members mean by lifelong learning.

In at least two parts of the city—we are looking for a third—we have established sure start. We are breaking the cycle of deprivation by helping not just the youngest but their parents—whole families—to recognise the importance of education. We are on a solid foundation in developing more nursery education—and it should be remembered that by doing that, and through the provision of smaller primary school classes, we have increased the number of teachers throughout the country by some 11,000 over the past four years. More teachers are working in, particularly, nursery and primary education, which is important and a good priority for the Labour party.

That proud tradition has been built on in Bristol. In the primary school sector, there has been an improvement of 9 or 10 per cent. in literacy—in line with the national average—and a higher percentage improvement in science skills. I congratulate all teachers involved in that excellent work.

My severest criticism and my real concern—I trust that the Government will address it—relate to key stage 3. I have seen skills in Bristol in which the level for those 11 to 14s has been maintained, or has dipped. I do not

[Valerie Davey]

think that that has been caused merely by the transition or the curriculum: I think we must look hard at the whole nature of what we are trying to achieve for the age group involved. We must target our interest in and support for teachers to ensure that this is another rewarding, improving step in education; otherwise those five A to C grades will not be achieved.

The number of A to C grades is rising slowly. Hon. Members who know Bristol as well as I do recognise that we have a specific problem at secondary level. With the city-wide review of secondary education, we will, I trust, deal with that.

On further education, the City of Bristol college, with its new site in the centre and its plans for the future, is drawing in more and more young people at 16. I want education maintenance allowances to be brought in widely across the city. I give every encouragement to the Front-Bench team to knock on the door of No. 11 and ensure that the finance is there to roll out education maintenance allowances across the country, including Bristol.

On higher education, the university of Bristol is part of the Russell Group. I have been a member of the university's council. I have argued the case for more local and state students going on to higher education. We have a new vice-chancellor, whose brief is to ensure that more children from state education go to the university. I will do everything—I know that other Labour Members in the city will do the same—to ensure that that objective is achieved.

We are fortunate. We also have the university of Bath and the university of the West of England. The work that they are doing in different ways to ensure internationally recognised excellence of provision and wide equality of access—the Prime Minister's goal is that 50 per cent. of people aged 18 to 30 have experience of higher education—will, I trust, be endorsed, encouraged and achieved with the contribution from the three universities in the Bristol area. Beyond that, we are encouraging people in Bristol to take part generally in wider access to education, ensuring that, through commerce and industry, there is the access; there is the motivation.

I end with something that is near to my heart, which is ensuring that older people get into information technology. The city has a centre for IT training, which the college set up, but which is supplemented largely by the university of the West of England. For those of us who until recently had never wanted to put our hand on a mouse, classes start at 7.30 in the morning and go on until late at night. People can leave work and go in for an hour. That resource, which is enabling people of all ages, is remarkable and good.

Only last weekend, I went to a fresh start course for the 45-plus age group to open an IT suite. I gather that the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) has the constituency with the most older people who are IT literate, but I assure him that the people of Bristol and outside are now looking to IT, if only to e-mail their grandchildren throughout the world.

That is all part of the wider education to which many more people are now aspiring thanks to a Labour Government. Let us not knock what has been done. Let us encourage it. Let us praise, particularly our teachers, and encourage more and more people of different ages to return to teaching.

6.43 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): The hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) made some constructive points, and the debate has been an unusual one for an Opposition day. It is easy to associate such a day with hard words and criticism. There has been some of that, rightly, but there have also been some constructive contributions. If I were to single one out, it would be that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), who has caused me to attenuate a large chunk of what I might have said on higher education. I am sure that the House will have no difficulty with that.

The underlying situation is that while we all understand that it is all very well to trade insults across the Chamber, there must be a common basis and understanding in our commitment to education. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) was, rightly, at great pains not to challenge the motives of the current ministerial team or indeed the general competence of teachers. I strongly agree with him. We must start with a measure of consensus and make constructive—I hope—criticisms, but criticisms nevertheless. Motives and even some passion in the commitment to education are fine, but Governments must deliver.

The debate highlights a problem that I have felt for some time that the Government are running into. They are what I call an adjectives, or an epithets, Government. There are some fine words. I select my special favourites: "modern", "joined up", "high quality" and even "world class". But the difficulty is that they do not always attach to nouns, or perhaps I should say that they are so portable that they are transferred between nouns and, in any case, the nouns do not attach to reality.

When considering the Government's record on education, which, do not forget, now extends to nearly five years, I am reminded increasingly of the old story of the laconic teacher who completed the report in the Michaelmas or autumn term, "Trying"; in the spring term, "Still trying"; but by the summer term had got to "Still very trying."

The House will understand that, as my specialist area is post-16 education, I shall not say much about schools, although many issues of morale, and indeed of Government behaviour towards schools, are mirrored in what has happened further on. As others have spoken on it, I shall touch briefly on the serious problem with teacher training, recruitment and retention. Of course, there are good teachers around, and good new teachers, but it is not always easy to secure them, and in certain places, the applicants for new posts are not as many as to give a realistic choice or the ideal choice.

I find it predictable but depressing that the recent NUT survey showed that the main problems with teacher retention related more to pupil behaviour and the weight of Government bureaucracy than to teachers' pay. Perhaps we would take too long if we were to go into that tonight, but the Government will have to deal with all those issues. One in particular that they will need to look at afresh is the impact of housing costs in areas of high pressure.

I turn to post-16 education. The main difference, it needs to be said, is that the education system at post-16 begins to deal with volunteers, rather than conscripts,

whether they are more or less willing to learn. Accordingly, issues of student recruitment are immediately relevant. In that area, the Government have been foremost in setting targets, and whether they have been fulfilled is an even more precise measurement than whether school standards have risen.

That brings me to the withdrawal of individual learning accounts. The Government are guilty of two equivocations. The first—the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) and others were right to mention it—is that we need to know whether it is a temporary suspension pending reintroduction. I can think of a number of things that have been withdrawn in the Chamber that have never come back. Secondly, there is the issue of whether the Government think that what they have done has been a success or a failure. The one will inform the policy decisions for the other.

There has been much talk about fraud. No one holds any brief for that. It must be stopped, but it is extraordinary that on the back of a comparatively small amount of reported fraud, the whole programme has crashed within 12 months of its national roll-out. I cannot help feeling that there is an underlying motive of funding, bearing it in mind that the original estimates depended on 1 million people taking up the scheme, and that that was predicated on a reduction of money held in training and enterprise councils of £150 million—£150 each. If take-up has reached 2.5 million, that immediately creates a serious budget crisis for the Department.

On the significance in practice of individual learning accounts, unusually, I pray in aid the Deputy Prime Minister, who pleased me on one occasion when he appeared at Prime Minister's questions by knowing about ILAs and being broadly, though not uncritically, in favour of them, but then he perhaps let himself down somewhat when he said:

"they do the job that the Tories failed to do, which is to train our work force."—[*Official Report*, 24 May 2000; Vol. 350, c. 964.]

If they did that job and they are being removed, that job is not being done. Frankly, I thought his remark a little offside, because I had as a Minister, and retain, a strong commitment to further education and lifelong learning. There is no difference between us on that. I differ from the Government on that only in their implication that such a commitment started only in 1997.

It is disturbing that the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, in a recent briefing note, referred to

"the way in which lifelong learning seems to have dropped down the agenda of DFES since the election."

If nothing else, the Government can belie that by finding ways of supporting both providers and individuals who felt themselves cut off in midstream following the sudden announcement, and by instituting as soon as possible transitional arrangements, if necessary, and then replacement ones at the earliest possible moment.

I hope that, in doing that, the Government will have regard to two matters of substance. First, the history of demand-led initiatives in FE and HE, under Governments of both parties, shows that they can escalate very quickly as the market responds, and a more measured pace of expansion may be appropriate. There is no point in having, to borrow a phrase, boom and bust.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): The hon. Gentleman will recall the notorious demand-led element of the further education funding methodology, for which I think he had some responsibility, under the Conservative Government. Does he remember that that Government withdrew it at very short notice, causing chaos in the financing of further education colleges throughout the country?

Mr. Boswell: I do not in any sense seek to act as an advocate for that demand-led element, which in fact came slightly after my time, but I was indeed, delicately, making the point that I thoroughly agree that all Governments must be careful not to lose control of the system, because there can be bad consequences if they do. Indeed, some reparatory work had to be done to ensure that the system could continue. The hon. Gentleman is right about that. We need a sensible pace of expansion, with the right kind and levels of incentive.

The second matter to be considered is that support, including student support, may be better delivered through accountable local providers, in a decentralised way, than through cash handouts from the centre, which may be subject to abuse and more difficult to control. That is a matter for discussion.

If ILAs have been successful in overshooting their target, they are perhaps the only element in education post-16 for which the Government have achieved that. What has happened to Government plans for an expansion of 700,000 students enrolled in FE over a two-year period that will elapse next year? In fact, such enrolments have been trending inexorably downwards by about 1 per cent. a year. As Ministers will know, the FE sector—I do not run it down, I report it as I see it—is characterised by financial pressures, staff stress and significant student dropout, which is highly wasteful, and that is even before various bits of the education establishment start hectoring FE on quality issues.

The underlying causes of that must be tackled. It is important for Ministers to emphasise the distinctive virtues and roles of further education and vocational qualifications, rather than seeking falsely to assimilate them in some overall post-16 agenda, including higher education.

The Government have set a 50 per cent. target for participation in higher education. By definition, that target cannot have been missed yet, because it runs through most of the current decade, but given the disappointing levels of higher education recruitment, especially in the access areas, for people from less-advantaged homes, I predict that it, too, will come under pressure, unless the revised arrangements that are to be phased in resolve the situation.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the 50 per cent. target?

Mr. Boswell: I have some scepticism about it. One needs to ask whether Ministers themselves agree with it. I think that they will seek to wriggle out of it by redefining either participation or higher education. If the Government say that they want 50 per cent. of adults to participate in some relevant and appropriate continuing education, without reference to level, location or timing, I am all for that—I want far more adults, at all levels and from all backgrounds, to participate—but I do not think that we should necessarily define what those adults are doing as higher education.

Mr. Willis: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the real target that the Government need to set concerns 14 to

[Mr. Willis]

19-year-olds and the removal of the drop-off point at 16, and that unless we can get more young people to stay on in school or in education or training after the age of 16, targets of 50 per cent. in higher education are meaningless?

Mr. Boswell: I have considerable sympathy with that view. I have myself spoken about the need for a more longitudinal approach. One has to recognise the individual segments and not try to put them all together, but what goes on in school must have an influence on what happens thereafter—on access and readiness to learn—and is highly relevant. I agree with the hon. Gentleman on that.

Mr. Chaytor: We agree about the importance of increasing participation at ages 16 to 19. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that further education is to be defined not simply in terms of three-year degrees, and that two-year foundation degrees, and the role of HNCs and HNDs, have been an extremely important part of it and will play an important part in meeting the 50 per cent. target?

Mr. Boswell: Again, I have little difficulty in agreeing with that. Perhaps we are following obsolete models, or models that have a particular but not a universal relevance. I am anxious that Ministers should not disguise what they are trying to do by rebranding it to mean that everybody will go to university for three years and metaphorically carries an Oxford degree in their knapsack. That is neither appropriate nor necessary. I am sure that we can have flexibility in participation without eroding the differences between institutions.

Behind this debate lies the Government's attitude to students. My right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood spoke most eloquently on the subject. The Government want to claim credit for more participation but are reluctant to fund it, so there is continuing pressure on the unit of student funding, challenging our universities' continuing ability to deliver excellence in teaching and research, and offering a miserable deal for some students. I expect that it is all right for those from more conventional backgrounds, who can fall back on a fairly conventional and professional home, where there may be financial support or help with resources, but it is hard indeed for the first-time access user, which is already reflected in recruitment figures.

There is a danger that the social advance of the democratisation of higher education, which took place largely under the previous Conservative Government, might get lost. It is at least clear from the Government's review of their policies that they are worried that that might happen. I hope that any changes will devolve as much as possible of the access responsibility, provided that the funds are also transferred, to the institutions themselves.

With regard to the interface with further education, the Government will have to pay attention to the overall financial mix and how that is to be balanced. That would be a better approach than some sort of notional fusion, at nominal cost, of the two sectors.

The world of education now realises that for all the fine words of nearly five years of Labour government, and a growing and undeniable responsibility on the part of that Government, nothing much in education has got better. The House will remember that as early as 1999 the Prime Minister called for a year of delivery. That year of delivery was supposed to have taken place in the last millennium. Our young people deserve access to high quality education. What worries us is that that might be progressively denied them, for one reason or another, but neither they nor us will forgive the Government if they fail now.

7.1 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who speaks with sincerity and knowledge on post-16 education. I remember him as a responsive Minister, although we could never get any resources out of him or his Government. I intended to speak on one aspect of the decision on individual learning accounts, but I am tempted to pick up one or two of the other issues mentioned in the Opposition motion.

I am not comfortable with several aspects of Government education policy, and my hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench would not believe me if I said otherwise. However, the matters that cause me some discomfort are not mentioned in the motion. I am not uncomfortable with the school building programme, which has been incredible. In my part of the world, we are setting up a brand new high school, which will solve problems that have been festering in Ormskirk for decades. I am not uncomfortable with the direct funding that has gone into schools, for head teachers and senior staff to distribute as they, with their local knowledge, think fit. I am not uncomfortable with sure start, and the magnificent work that scheme has achieved in Skelmersdale. I am not uncomfortable with excellence in cities, or with excellence clusters—we have one in Skelmersdale that is doing wonderfully well in bringing learning mentors into our schools.

Like the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), I am a firm believer in the comprehensive ideal. I always have been and always will be. The comprehensive ideal was a failure only because it never properly existed. We were never able, with the best will in the world or with the power sometimes available to us, to bring in a system that did away with all the horrors of selection and the private system. The Opposition motion mentions

"the failure of the Government to allow parents a real choice of schools".

What does that mean? How can a real choice be provided? A person could have written that sentence only if he or she had never examined the situation and the complexity of the relationships between schools and their admissions policies—or the lack of them.

The only comment that the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) made to support that element of the motion was the claim that the Government did not allow good schools to expand enough to give everyone real choice. What nonsense. The logic of that would mean we would end up with one school in Lancashire with everybody in it, because the parents all chose it as the best school. Many students already travel miles for hours every day to get to the schools that their parents think are most suitable. The selection that still exists in our system does not provide real choice for all parents.

The motion also mentions the issue of student finance, about which the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) talked cogently. The motion claims that the present system has

"discouraged applicants from poorer families".

Of course it has. We have never had a system that did not, and it would probably be difficult to invent one. Student finance has gone to pot ever since the Conservative Government started to fiddle about with student loans, and the Labour Government have not done anything satisfactory to solve the problem since 1997.

My one serious criticism of the Government I support is that they have not significantly altered the numbers of young people from working class homes who have entered higher education. I was glad that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the article in *The Independent*, because I jumped for joy when I saw the announcement of the possibility of introducing a graduate tax to finance students in higher education. I have always been a supporter of a graduate tax. It has always seemed to me the most efficient and fairest way to fund tuition fees, and I hope that any new scheme will also include a maintenance element. A graduate tax based on income means that we would not force people, as we do at present, to go for the highest-paid jobs. Many graduates are altruistic and wish to take jobs in the public services or overseas, which are not necessarily highly paid.

In welcoming a better system of student finance for higher education, we must also remember that students in further education have a rotten deal. It has always been the Cinderella service in terms of resources. We must address the issue of the education maintenance allowance, and I agree with the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) that it should be rolled out across the country as soon as possible. Some of my constituents are students at Wigan college and Southport college, which are in different education authorities. My constituents do not get the allowance but they sit next to young people from Wigan and Southport who are doing the same course and who do get the allowance. Those young constituents ring me to ask why they do not get the allowance. That is understandable, because Skelmersdale is as deprived an area as Wigan.

I taught in higher education for 20-odd years and I hope that if we introduce a graduate tax we also introduce an element that recognises that students have a responsibility to use their opportunity properly. One of the things that distressed me as a teacher in higher education was the small minority of students who utterly wasted their time at university. They did not turn up for lectures or produce assignments. They even skived off exams at the end and just dropped out of the system. We cannot introduce a good system of student finance unless we accept that students must bear responsibilities in return.

The motion also criticises the Government's

"current policy of constant interference in the day-to-day running of education."

I am married to the head teacher of a large comprehensive school in a difficult area in Skelmersdale. She makes no complaint about the amount of interference or bureaucracy. She says that she goes through everything rapidly, picks out the essential stuff and ignores the rest. That skill, of picking out the essential materials in the information that is presented, is one that all hon. Members have. We would have to work 24 hours a day to read all the tripe that lands on our desks. In the same way, good head teachers and teachers know precisely what they have to do. Teachers have always been able to manipulate whatever systems Governments put in place.

However, although the Conservatives criticise the Government's "constant interference", the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) said in an intervention that discipline in schools was going to pot and demanded to know what the Government were going to do about it. In other words, the hon. Gentleman was demanding Government interference in schools. The question is whether one is attracted by what the Government are trying to do, or not.

I shall turn briefly to the difficulty of attracting people into teacher training and, ultimately, into the teaching profession. I think that, at a time of virtually full employment, it is remarkable that the numbers being recruited into teacher education should have risen. After all, who on earth would be a teacher when, to paraphrase George Orwell, prison is an alternative?

Teaching can be a dreadful job. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West said that on a good day it can be the best job in the world. I have been there and done that and I know that it was the best job in the world—on those good days. It can also be a job in which teachers put their personalities on the line day after day in front of 30 young people aged, say, 13 or 14—the age group that I have always found to be the most difficult. Teachers are tested and pressured, and it is no wonder that so many of them suffer stress.

That stress is what accounts for the drop-out rate among those recruited into teacher training. A first-year student going into a school for teaching practice is usually quite coddled. I have done a lot of that in my time, and I know how it works. Such students are given a light timetable and a decent class in order to ease them into what is a difficult job. In their second or third years, however, or when postgraduate certificate of education students do their third teaching practice, the proposition is somewhat different. They are on their own in class. I intend no criticism when I say that many people find themselves constitutionally incapable of carrying on and decide to choose some other profession. That has always happened.

I was involved in teacher education in the 1970s. We knew that a substantial proportion of our students would get through their courses successfully, and complete their teaching practices, but that they would go off and be accountants, for example, at the end. They would decide to use their brains in a different way, because teaching was not for them. We should not be surprised by the recruitment difficulties that are being encountered.

I am delighted that the Under-Secretary for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey), is back on the Front Bench, as I know that the aspect of ILAs about which I am most worried is really his pigeon. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough said that the ILA was a Liberal Democrat policy—no wonder then that it got into trouble. We should be more careful about to whom we listen.

It is bitterly disappointing that the ILA has had to be suspended. It has been crucial to the Government's lifelong learning policies, which I regard as visionary, important and even, in many ways, inspirational. I understand that the suspension was needed to tackle

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

fraud in the system, but I suspect that the success of the ILA scheme, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has termed it elsewhere, meant that the sheer number of people who wanted to take advantage of it was the greater cause.

We should not be surprised that people take the money that they are offered to go on courses. The more attractively and efficiently that that money is offered, the more people will pick up on it. Wherever public money is made available, even for the very best of causes, the parasites will gather to try to take advantage. We sometimes call those people entrepreneurs: my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said that the leather sofas that such people sell are made of plastic, but they have also gone into the business of selling ILAs.

I ought to point out that more than fraud is involved. Many people have encountered incompetence in the administration of the ILAs. My constituent, Susan Ashcroft, has allowed me to refer to her, but I have many other constituents in similar circumstances. She was working as a nursery nurse at a special school. She opened an ILA account to help her through a higher national certificate course in early childhood studies. She spent months inquiring into the ILA scheme, and had even contributed towards it, but no one at the ILA centre at Darlington could tell her what had happened to it. Eventually, she received an unsigned letter from Darlington telling her that her account was closed.

By then, Susan Ashcroft was committed to a course costing her £425 for the first year, and £300 for the second. We are still pursuing that mystery, but I do not think that the problem had to do with fraud. I think it was a matter of sheer bloody incompetence.

I believe that the Government should stamp ruthlessly on fraud and on bureaucratic incompetence, but I must explain to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary my serious concerns about the suspension of ILAs where that affects courses set up under partnerships between local employers, local further education institutions and trade unions.

I should declare an interest. I am a member of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, and I am chairman of the USDAW group of MPs in the House. I describe myself as an "allied worker". USDAW totally supports the Government's lifelong learning project, and was immensely successful in using ILAs in the most practical way—to give its members access to learning.

The union has inspired partnerships with employers and FE colleges that have involved hundreds of courses and thousands of workers. Nearly all the workers involved have undertaken no formal education since they left school. By way of contrast, I understand that about 80 per cent. of all ILA applications came from people already participating in some form of lifelong learning.

The bids for union learning funds were often very vigorously tested, with the active encouragement of the previous Labour Government elected in 1997. The lifelong learning courses set up under the partnerships that I have described are fully accountable, and fraud cannot be involved. I shall give one example of the work that went into such a venture.

Ann Hickson was the learning representative at a call centre in Bolton that has a staff of 900. She signed up 500 staff members for ILAs. She should get a medal for that: she should not have to see all her work, and all the hope that it engendered, snuffed out. Thousands of low-paid and unskilled workers are involved in the partnership schemes. Employers supply the premises, so there is no extra travelling involved. That is important to people who work long hours or peculiar shifts. The FE colleges supply tuition and equipment, which for the most part means computers.

The union does the recruiting and negotiates the ILAs. That ILA component has been absolutely vital to ensure that low-paid workers participate. If nothing is done to address the current situation, those people are unlikely ever to apply for courses in future. That is the main problem. They have already been difficult to persuade on to courses, and the money available under the ILAs has just made it possible for the learning representatives to attract them. I prophesy that if things fall apart now, they will never come back to learning.

USDAW learners are new to adult learning—they are the women returners, the manual workers and those who have few or no IT skills. They are often people with basic skills needs; people with no qualifications; and people who lack confidence, do not believe that they can participate in learning and thought that whatever learning days they had were over at the age of 15 or 16, or whenever they left school. To attract such workers, the courses have to be accessible to those who have busy working lives, affordable and confidence raising.

No doubt, the partnerships involving other unions are exactly the same, but the USDAW partnerships have cracked all those problems through the work of their learning representatives. Learning centres have been or are being set up at Littlewoods in Bolton and Oldham; at Reality, which was once Great Universal Stores, in Wigan and Widnes; at Sainsbury's in Hoddeston and Haydock; at Kays in Leeds; Elthel Austins in Liverpool; and at Tesco in Welham Green.

I shall pick out one of those centres, which is right next door to me. At Reality in Wigan, 12.8 per cent. of the work force signed up. That figure includes 103 people on computer literacy and information technology courses; 12 on European computer driving licence courses; 18 on basic skills courses; and 18 on a Spanish course—perhaps that relates to holidays. Without an ILA, a CLAIT course costs 90 quid—beyond those people's means. With an ILA, it costs £15.99, which they can manage, and they are happy to do so. Moreover, Wigan and Leigh college says that there is a much lower drop-out rate than on college-based courses, simply because people find it easier to go to the courses after work.

The importance of that sort of development speaks for itself, and I ask the Minister whether he would consider a transitional scheme, especially for those current arrangements, to tide them over the period between the suspension and the emergence of whatever turns up after the reassessment. Perhaps equivalent funds, supplementary to those of the union learning fund, could be earmarked and administered through the union learning fund and Department for Education and Skills team. That could run until next summer, when the courses end, or until the new targeted scheme is in place, whichever is earlier.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had little choice but to do what she has done. I am grateful to her for the account that she gave in her opening speech about the measures that have been taken to address the difficulties that have come to light and for what she said was a cast-iron guarantee to commit funding to lifelong learning schemes, or whatever they are called, in the future. However, I hope that, in replying to the debate, my hon. Friend the Minister will address the specific issue that I have raised and that, if he is free later tonight or tomorrow morning, he can meet some USDAW representatives who are lurking about the House and dying to talk to him about it.

7.24 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), who is indeed an honourable Member. I am not sure whether I should say this, but I had some sympathy with his views on the problems involved with the word "choice". Many of my constituents cannot have a choice about school; they live in small villages with one school or are served by just one high school, so there is no choice. Perhaps a happier word might be "diversity", and hon. Members on both sides of the House find themselves in considerable agreement about that issue.

It is important to emphasise that we agree that not everything is bad in education. Far from it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said in opening the debate. We must remember that there are many fine teachers in many fine schools, and they are producing outstanding results for their pupils. There is no doubt that standards have been rising for a considerable period. The continuity in policies such as the national curriculum—introduced by the Conservative Government and maintained by this Government, although increasingly prescriptively—has contributed to that increase in standards.

There is lots to agree about, but the Secretary of State does not quite understand that the job of Her Majesty's official Opposition is to oppose. It is not our job to list all the ways in which we agree with the Government; it is our job to explain what we disagree with them about and to point out failures in their policy.

Mr. Chaytor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Luff: I happily give way on that philosophical point.

Mr. Chaytor: On the philosophical issue of the Opposition's role, does the hon. Gentleman therefore agree with the Government about the record investment in the past five years, which has played such an important part in raising those standards?

Mr. Luff: No, I absolutely do not. I am afraid that that is totally wrong factually, and I shall return to it later in my remarks. That is one of the great Labour lies that those at Millbank peddle so enthusiastically, and it has no foundation in reality whatever. Is that answer clear enough for the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Chaytor: On the philosophical point, is the hon. Gentleman saying that that investment has not taken place? Is he saying that, if the Conservative party was in power now, it would immediately stop that investment? Would it continue that investment? He should tell us what his philosophy is.

Mr. Luff: I am forced to anticipate a later part of my speech. The answer is that the Labour Government managed to spend 4.6 per cent. of gross domestic product during the previous Parliament, but the Conservative party usually managed to spend 5 per cent. of GDP. The Labour party spent less, as a proportion of national income, than we did, which is nothing to boast about.

James Purnell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Luff: No, I must get on. There will be a section on funding later in my speech, and if there is time I shall happily give way to the hon. Gentleman then; he will have a chance to intervene.

I understand the concern expressed by Labour Members about the word "crisis", which features in the motion. I asked myself whether it is the right word to apply, and I think that it is. Teachers receive a new directive every day. Head teachers and governors are drowning in bureaucracy. Teachers are leaving in droves, no matter what the Government say. There are severe teacher shortages, and they are occurring in Worcestershire for the first time.

This is no criticism of those teaching in Worcestershire's schools at present, but I have to tell the Secretary of State that there is a real problem with the calibre of applicants for vacancies in Worcestershire, and head teachers in my constituency are worried about it. People are being appointed not because they are the best applicant, but because they are the only applicant for a job, and there is a need to fill the classroom with a teacher.

Mr. Levitt: Surely one reason that there are teacher shortages is that the number of teaching posts has been increased by policies such as reducing class sizes to 30 pupils at key stage 1. That policy has been achieved successfully and has generated many new teaching jobs.

Mr. Luff: I am talking about secondary schools, where class sizes are rising, not falling—one of the other signs of crisis in the education system. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) said, Ofsted has warned that discipline is decreasing in classrooms. Head teachers are no longer free to expel disruptive pupils, and the Government should intervene to give back head teachers their freedom on the issue and to remove burdens from them. The ridiculous exclusion targets represent a recipe for disaster in many schools in my constituency. Moreover, there are gross discrepancies in funding between local education authorities, to which I shall refer later in my remarks.

Ms Ward: If the hon. Gentleman believes that head teachers should have more power to exclude pupils, perhaps he will tell the House what he thinks should happen to that increased number of excluded pupils? Does he think that we should return to the policy that operated under the Conservative Government, whereby excluded pupils received very little teaching time, which increased the problem for those pupils and society generally?

Mr. Luff: I vow to speak more briefly than those hon. Members who have spoken before me, and I am being

[Mr. Luff]

lured into subjects that I did not really want to discuss in detail. I have sympathy with what the hon. Lady says, as I do so often. I am not suggesting that exclusion and expulsion should be the first resort for head teachers; they should be the last resort. But head teachers should be free to decide whether exclusion is right for the rest of the pupils in their schools. They should not have an eye on what the Department for Education and Skills says should be their exclusion target. They should take a pragmatic decision, with the utmost reluctance, to expel or exclude when they judge it necessary, and those who are expelled or excluded should be sent to pupil referral units, or similar organisations, which are now quite widespread in Worcestershire. That is where the trouble-making children who can destroy the opportunities of the other children in a school should be sent. Of course, systematic troublemakers should be taught and looked after, but I do not accept that they should be included in mainstream schools. Head teachers, not politicians or civil servants, should make the decision.

I shall try to speed up now. My point about the Government is that, when it comes to public services—whether the schools, the police, hospitals or anything—they combine the two worst strands of communism: Stalinism and Trotskyism. They are Stalinist because they are fixated with central control and Trotskyist because they believe in permanent revolution, changing the goalposts all the time with innovation for innovation's sake. That is true of all the public services in my constituency. Targets are set from the centre and the structures around those targets change time after time after time.

The previous Secretary of State was particularly guilty of those charges. He was a directive junkie. Every day, a new instruction told teachers their job; on almost every subject, he knew better than the teachers in my constituency. He also liked telling us what he was doing. Virtually every week a new glossy publication came through the letterboxes of Members of Parliament. I suspect that those publications were not designed to encourage our understanding of education, but to further his ambition to be the next leader of the Labour party.

Each instruction for teachers means more change to absorb. Some of the changes are small and some are large, but there is always change. No wonder head teachers despair and teachers leave the profession. Recruitment may be up and we can rejoice at that. It is obviously a good news story, but there is no point in turning on the tap if the plug is out at the bottom of the basin. That is what is happening in teaching.

What about local accountability? The Government derided the previous Conservative Government with just cause for excessive centralisation and for taking powers away from local authorities. However, what are this Government doing? Local education authorities are, at best, an irrelevance and, at worst, a serious inconvenience for them. That is why they are plotting the abolition of LEAs as part of the move towards regional government. LEAs, such as Worcestershire, now just administer the inadequate resources that they receive from the Government. LEAs are blamed for failure and ignored when they succeed; they are irrelevant to the Government. Ministers prefer to constrain what schools can do through increased national funding, the prescriptions of the national curriculum and a multitude of funding streams that are all targeted to achieve the Government's objectives and not those of head teachers in individual schools.

Mr. Chaytor *rose—*

James Purnell *rose—*

Mr. Luff: I promised that I would give way to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell).

James Purnell: The hon. Gentleman referred to lies about funding, but I wish to correct him. He might like to comment on the fact that funding in the last term of the previous Conservative Government went down by £100 per pupil when, in the past five years of Labour Government, it went up by more than £500. Does he not accept that his GDP figure had more to do with the growth of the economy than with the status of education funding?

Mr. Luff: I have news for the hon. Gentleman. Governments can spend only what they can afford to spend. I think that the Chancellor might face problems in that regard in forthcoming years in this Parliament. I warn the hon. Gentleman to be careful about such comparisons.

Who do schools report to and who are they accountable to?

Mr. Chaytor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Luff: No, I have taken nine minutes already and I promised to try to be brief.

Mr. Andrew Turner: My hon. Friend has another half hour to go.

Mr. Luff: I hope not.

Schools should be accountable to parents, governors, pupils, councillors and LEAs. Is that end of the list? Heavens—no. A local head teacher sat down with me the other day and, off the top of his head, cited a few of the other bodies to which he was accountable. They include Ofsted, ConneXions, the Department for Education and Skills, the regulations implicit in the standards fund, external assessors for performance payments, visiting assessors for head teachers and governors, examination boards, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and—because he has a sixth form—the learning and skills councils.

I should dearly like to explore the learning and skills councils at some length, but I will not. They are a subject for debate in themselves as they are a seriously pernicious influence in that they remove a large chunk of local accountability. The proposals on their powers that are currently being consulted on are an outrage that the Government should abandon.

Not surprisingly, the problem with all these bodies is that they provide conflicting advice. The DFES often provides conflicting advice. At present, I am aware of a case—I cannot identify it because it is too sensitive—where the advice on exclusions is contradictory. The Protection of Children Act 1999 means that the head

teacher is obliged to exclude, but circular 10/99 on exclusions means that he cannot. He is bound to break one of the Government's directives whichever course of action he takes. Such cases are repeated in area after area of education.

We can argue about the quantity that schools receive, but where do they get it from? Head teachers want a single metaphorical cheque in the post that tells them how much they will have for the next school year. They should be able to decide how to spend it. Instead, however, there are 29 streams of funding and the complexity of some of them—particularly the standards fund money—is so great that many head teachers say that they will not bother to apply for money any more. They do not want to go through all the lines of accountability and all the paperwork to obtain a relatively small sum of money. It is a big issue and the Government need to understand it.

I recently tabled a written question to ask Ministers how many separate funding streams there were. It was a numerical question—it contained the term "how many"—and the Minister for School Standards supplied me with a lot of words but not with an answer. I am not surprised, because I do not think that it was an answer that he wanted to give.

I shall not labour the point about GDP, but I remind Labour Members that the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister, promised in the 1997 Labour party manifesto that

"we will increase the share of national income spent on education".

That manifesto pledge was spectacularly broken, and it is amazing that the Government amendment to our motion boasts about raising expenditure to the levels that they inherited from the previous Conservative Government. The amendment does not actually say that, but that is what it claims. The Government are taking credit for getting expenditure as a percentage of GDP back to the level that they inherited from us.

There has been a significant underspend by the DFES recently. How I wish that that underspend—it comes to about £1 billion—had been parcelled up into cheques and sent to the 40 or so worst-funded LEAs.

I said a lot about education spending in Worcestershire in a debate two weeks ago. I accept that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) cannot respond because he is a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the DFES, but he accused me locally of scaremongering. I wrote to him to say that I objected to that, because all I was doing was giving publicity to a parliamentary answer that I had received from a Minister.

Mr. Dorrell: Scary.

Mr. Luff: It was pretty scary. My right hon. Friend anticipates something that I may say later.

Let me provide the background to this case. Earlier this year, head teachers in my county mounted an unprecedented lobby. They were concerned that Worcestershire receives £9 million a year less than the average shire county—a big shortfall—and that results in a real problem for our schools. I have sought to be fair by pointing out that the problem has been created by both parties. In 1991, the Conservative Government introduced a formula that led to the current situation but, in 1997, the incoming Government did nothing to address the formula. They allowed the situation not only to go uncorrected, but to get worse. The major parties should hang their heads in shame; it is a problem for both.

Mr. Chaytor: The hon. Gentleman refers to an important point. He said that this Government did nothing to address the problem, but that is not true. Earlier, he referred to the increasing use of centralised funding streams, but does he not agree that schools in Worcestershire, like the schools in my constituency of Bury, North, have benefited from the use of central funding streams? That money was top-sliced from the standard spending assessment and, had it been distributed through the SSA, the differentials in funding would have been even greater.

Mr. Luff: I will not deny that there has been a marginal change as a result of that. The fact is, however, that Droitwich Spa high school in my constituency gets £460,000 less than a school in Hertfordshire. Therefore, there is still a huge problem. There has been some tinkering, but no attempt to tackle the real issues. However, we are promised a new formula in a year or so.

It is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Worcester and the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), who responded to a debate in Westminster Hall the other week, are trying to turn this into a highly partisan and political issue. The hon. Member for Worcester wrote to all the schools in his constituency with a letter that he wanted them to send to parents and that he wanted the parents to send back to him. I caricature the letter slightly, but it basically said that all the problems in education were the fault of the previous Government and that the only good things to have happened in schools were the achievement of the two Labour MPs for the county.

That stretches credibility a bit. The hon. Gentleman should listen to the wise words of the Secretary of State who said, when she opened the debate, that the previous Conservative Government were in power a long time ago. It is time for the Government to stop blaming us for the problems that they have created or, at least, have been a significant party to. More important, I do not think that politicians should take credit for things that others have done. We all know that people power won Worcestershire the limited extra £1.35 million last year. It was no achievement of any of the MPs. We all helped the campaign along and I am proud to have done that. However, ultimately, the power of the people of Worcestershire won the money for the county. It was not a lot of money—£1.35 million against a shortfall of £9 million—but it helped. I was grateful for it, but it did not exactly solve our problems.

In the debate last week, I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, whether the money would be repeated, but he ducked the question. So I drafted a written question and, for once, got an answer. The Minister for School Standards told me:

"We have no plans to pay transitional grant in 2002-03."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 531W.]

compensation must be well made and it is better to pursue a targeted approach which encourages the sector to develop in a way that will help it to progress.

We are achieving that through the England rural development plan, under which support is given for rural development and agri-environment schemes, and by continuing our efforts in Europe to reform the common agricultural policy. That is the right way forward for the industry, rather than putting more money into a quick fix or help for the agriculture sector.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Was not the right to agrimonetary compensation substantially signed away by Lady Thatcher at Fontainebleau with the effect that 80 per cent. of funding for agrimonetary compensation comes from the taxpayer, which is not the case for our European partners?

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for his comment, but I would argue that the original justification for the Fontainebleau decision still stands. That justification is that the rebate compensated the UK for its relatively low level of EC receipts. *[Interruption.]* I understand how excited the Opposition get when those issues are raised.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Given the Minister's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), there can be no one left in the country who believes that the Government care about farmers and others living in rural communities. None the less, does the Minister agree that there is a reason to give Devon county council compensation for instigating its own inquiry into foot and mouth—an inquiry that will cost £25,000—in the absence of a Government inquiry into the disease?

Ruth Kelly: As the hon. Gentleman is no doubt aware, the Government are committed to achieving a sustainable future for the agriculture sector. Agriculture has been given a high priority, not least because of its considerable difficulties in dealing with foot and mouth disease.

We are committed to compensating farmers as far as possible for the effects of the disease. Not only have we matched funding to voluntary organisations for the relief of distress, helped farmers on a case-by-case basis and compensated them for the effect on their farms and the welfare of their animals, but we are putting significant sums into the rural economy in general. We will continue to approach the matter rationally, so that we can pursue a viable strategy for the industry's future.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Is not it reassuring that, in the recent general election, Labour recorded the biggest vote in its history in rural areas and returned its largest ever number of MPs from those areas in spite of the continuous barrage of whining and whingeing from the Opposition?

Although there is great sympathy with the farming industry for its recent problems, before that period the contribution of the farming industry in England to gross national product was less than 0.5 per cent. while manufacturing industry's contribution to gross domestic product is more than 20 per cent. Is not it right to look to the coming crisis in the manufacturing industry now, to make sure that aid is given where it should properly be given—to the manufacturing industry?

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend rightly points out that the Government's commitment to the rural economy was recognised at the last election, as it was at the previous one. Of course, we must consider the real difficulties in which the agriculture sector finds itself, and we are committed to working with farmers and those employed in the rural economy to think of a viable strategy for the future. That is why the Government are in the vanguard of pressing for reforms to the common agricultural policy in Europe, and of diverting money right back to the rural economy and away from the production subsidies that have done so much to create the problem in the first place.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Surely the point is that this money was available and the Government did not apply for it. Is the Minister aware that the average income of west Norfolk grain farmers has fallen to £5,000 a year? They have been getting rid of staff and cutting expenditure on local services, and they feel that this treatment is extremely shabby. Surely it shows that the Government do not care about the countryside.

Ruth Kelly: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is altogether untrue. I take his comments as yet another Opposition plea for more public spending and I want the Opposition Treasury team to spell out exactly how they would meet such commitments. The right way forward for the industry is to enable it to restructure sensibly and rationally, so that it can compete in an efficient market. That is what we are helping it to do.

Work Incentives

12. **Charlotte Atkins** (Staffordshire, Moorlands): What steps he is taking to improve incentives for those with children to work. [11340]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): To help families and to make work pay more than welfare, we have introduced and widened the 10p tax rate. We have reformed national insurance contributions and introduced the working families tax credit, including a child care component, which is helping to make work pay for more than 1.25 million families, giving a minimum income for a full-time working family of £225 a week. Building on those successes, we will introduce from 2003 a new system of tax credits that will allow further progress in supporting families in work.

Charlotte Atkins: By guaranteeing a minimum income, the working families tax credit has been a real boon to families in Staffordshire, Moorlands, which is traditionally a low-pay area. What impact has the child care element of the working families tax credit had and has take-up increased now that there are so many more child care places in the local economy?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is right. If we are to help more mothers in particular to get back into work, we need to improve the number of child care places available. The child care tax credit was introduced a few years ago,

and 145,000 mothers and fathers now benefit from it. It is making work possible for tens of thousands of people who would otherwise not be able to work, and we are determined to do more on the provision of child care places and the child care tax credit. Of course, we could not provide those places if we took the shadow Chancellor's advice and cut public spending to 35 per cent. of national income.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Brown: The right hon. and learned Gentleman shakes his head. I refer him to his speech to the British Chambers of Commerce on 13 May 1997, when he called for public spending to be cut to 35 per cent.—a proposal more extreme even than the Letwin plan.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Will the Chancellor enlighten those of us who come from a small business background as to the administrative costs of measures such as the working families tax credit? I understand that he and his colleagues have had the Carter report on that subject for at least two weeks. This vital report could provide support for small firms that find the cost not just of paying wages, but of administering the Government's proposals for the working families tax credit, such a burden. Will he make a commitment to giving relief to those small firms, rather than letting them struggle on in the way that they have?

Mr. Brown: Obviously, we will publish the Carter report's recommendations and deal with it in the pre-Budget report as I have promised. The hon. Gentleman must remember that we have cut small businesses' corporation tax from 23p to 20p, and introduced a 10p band for profits of up to £50,000. We have therefore cut small businesses' corporate taxation by the order of £1 billion.

The hon. Gentleman raises the question of regulations. The two issues that the Conservatives always have in mind are the minimum wage and the working families tax credit. Those measures help to relieve poverty and get people into work. I well remember the shadow Chancellor, when he was Secretary of State for Employment, saying that the minimum wage would cost 1 million jobs and raise inflation by 2 per cent. He went on to say, in 1991, that it would push us out of the exchange rate mechanism. The minimum wage did not cost 1 million jobs; we have created an additional 1 million jobs.

Afghanistan

13. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): What the additional expenditure has been on *(a)* humanitarian aid and *(b)* military action in Afghanistan and surrounding countries since 11 September. [11341]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Chancellor has made it clear that the Government will meet the costs of measures related to our response to international terrorism while continuing to deliver our spending plans within the fiscal rules. Additions to departmental expenditure limits will be announced to Parliament via parliamentary answers in the usual way. It would be inappropriate to give detailed figures about the costs of military operations and related activities at this relatively early stage. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has announced humanitarian aid worth £66 million to benefit refugees in Afghanistan and in the surrounding countries.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the Minister for his reply and hope that we see the figures as soon as possible. May I draw his attention to the World Bank report published this morning? It talks of billions of dollars being dedicated to the reconstruction of Afghanistan and of the need to establish an international trust fund to oversee and co-ordinate that work. Is the Minister aware that it will cost $3 billion to reconstruct the west bank and Gaza over the next two years? Does he agree that it would be better to spend money on reconstruction rather than destruction?

Mr. Boateng: The sum of $700 million was pledged by the international community and international institutions to meet the challenges of the crisis in Afghanistan. We are working with our international partners not only in the European Union, but in the United Nations, to meet the scale of the crisis.

I think that all recognise our contribution—not just the £66 million to which I referred the hon. Gentleman, but the assistance we are giving to Pakistan specifically through writing off some £20 million of debt to the Commonwealth Development Corporation. All that is designed to ensure that our response is a generous one that meets the needs and challenges of these times.

Speaker's Statement

12.30 pm

Mr. Speaker: Before I call business questions, I have a short announcement to make.

In response to concerns expressed to me by a number of Members, I have asked my Chaplain to organise an inter-faith commemoration at 11 am next Wednesday, 14 November, in the Chapel of St. Mary Undercroft. There will be separate Christian, Jewish and Muslim prayers, and a time of silence, during this half-hour of commemoration. I hope that many Members will wish to join me on this significant occasion, as we pray in our various ways for justice, peace and reconciliation.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week, please?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 12 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Animal Health Bill.

TUESDAY 13 NOVEMBER—Opposition Day [5th Allotted Day]. Until about 7 o'clock there will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "The Discrepancies in the Accounts of the Secretary of State's Handling of the Decisions Relating to Railtrack". [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I do not imagine that that comes as a surprise to the Opposition. The debate will be followed by a debate entitled "The Failure of the Government's Stakeholder Pension Scheme".

WEDNESDAY 14 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the Sexual Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill.

Remaining stages of the Football Disorder [Amendment] Bill.

THURSDAY 15 NOVEMBER—Motion to approve a money resolution on the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill.

Motion to update the House Sub Judice Rule.

Motion relating to the Quorum of the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at 4 o'clock.

FRIDAY 16 NOVEMBER—A debate on public bodies on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill.

Motion to approve the Human Rights Act 1998 (Designated Derogation) Order 2001.

TUESDAY 20 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill.

WEDNESDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Consideration in Committee of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill.

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the British Overseas Territories Bill *[Lords]*.

FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to be advised that the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill Committee and remaining stages are expected to conclude at midnight on Monday 26 November. We will table a motion next week to allow amendments to be tabled before Second Reading.

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the details of the business. We are also grateful that the Chancellor has finally let us know that his pre-Budget statement will be made on 27 November. I am sure that that was due to inexorable pressure from the Leader of the House.

Given the universal raspberry that the right hon. Gentleman's announcement yesterday about so-called House of Lords reform seems to have elicited, may we have an early debate on the matter so that we can be quite clear about what, in particular, Government Back Benchers think about the White Paper announced to us yesterday? That might help to inform the consultation that will conclude at the end of January.

As the Leader of the House will recall, the Prime Minister once said that his Government would be "purer than pure". Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he thought that the Prime Minister had financial matters on his mind when he said that, or was he referring to integrity and truthfulness? That would help to inform next Tuesday's debate, and give us something to think about over the weekend.

There has recently been an increasing and regrettable use of holding answers by Ministers. I think all Members—including, I suspect, many Labour Members—have found more and more of late that Ministers will not give a straightforward answer even to a straightforward parliamentary question. Will the Leader of the House look into the fact that there is some evidence that answers are leaked to the press before even being given to the House, and report back to us as soon as possible? That rather arrogant attitude is all too typical of the Government. A holding answer is given, and a reply is then sneaked out to the public in one form or another long before a substantive answer is given to the Member of Parliament concerned. I hope that that will be investigated and reported on as a matter of urgency.

Finally, can the Leader of the House confirm that on Monday 19 November the motion to approve the Human Rights Act 1998 (Designated Derogation) Order 2001 may well be subject to the ghastly and unparliamentary deferred Division procedure? It is utterly unacceptable that such an important and substantive measure should be dealt with in that way. Surely even the Leader of the House would acknowledge, even were he to argue that lesser matters such as statutory instruments should be subject to the procedure—I do not accept that for a minute, but Labour Members have produced such arguments—that an issue of substance and importance such as derogations from the Human Rights Act cannot be subjected to an arrangement whereby a debate can take place on one occasion, followed by a vote several days later.

Mr. Cook: Before I respond to the right hon. Gentleman's questions, it may be convenient to the House if I announce business in Westminster Hall. *[Interruption.]* If the House does not want to hear it, I have no wish to detain the House; but my announcement may be convenient to those who take part in the debates.

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER—Debate on social inclusion and sport.

THURSDAY 29 NOVEMBER—Debate on the report from the Public Administration Committee entitled "Public Participation: Issues and Innovations".

THURSDAY 6 DECEMBER—Debate on the report from the Foreign Affairs Committee on Government policy towards the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia following the fall of Milosevic.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, we have now announced that the pre-Budget report will be presented to the House on 27 November. That is broadly in line with the experience of recent years. *[Interruption.]* I must tell the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) that that happens to be true. The statement is normally presented in late November. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition have been asking for the date of the statement for the past three weeks, and now they have it. I appreciate their gratitude; we shall try to make them happy on future occasions.

I can, in fact, make the right hon. Gentleman happy in responding to another of his questions: there will definitely be a debate on the White Paper on reform of the House of Lords, and I expect such a debate to be held in the other place as well. This is a period of consultation, we want wide consultation, and we certainly want to hear the views of Members on both sides of the House. I hope that by the date that we announce the debate, it will have been possible for the Opposition to reach a conclusion on their own plans for reform of the House of Lords.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned next week's Opposition day. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has repeatedly answered the questions put to him, and he will be happy to come to the House next week and answer them all over again. I should warn the Opposition, however, that there will be a question for them as well. Over the past few days, they have adopted a pose of actually believing that the shareholders' demand for £3.60 a share should be met, although they have been careful not to say precisely that because they know perfectly well that it would cost £1 billion of taxpayers' money—money that Labour believes should be spent on passenger safety rather than shareholders.

On Tuesday, we shall want to know whether the Opposition are willing to put public money into that demand. If they cannot confirm that that is the case, I wish they would stop pretending and expressing crocodile sympathy for the shareholders.

On leaks of replies, two weeks ago the right hon. Gentleman chided me about Ministers going on the "Today" programme before making a statement to the House. I have checked the record. I am pleased to say that no Minister since the last general election—no Minister during this Parliament—has gone on the "Today" programme before making a statement, other than in cases such as Northern Ireland and international terrorism where the subject was very much a matter of public debate anyway. However, two leading members of the Opposition have gone on the "Today" programme to say what they thought about a statement that they had not heard. Perhaps he will draw to his colleagues' attention the same message that I have given, which is that views should be first announced in the House rather than on the "Today" programme.

The right hon. Gentleman has always resisted the deferred Division; he has never liked it. I do not object to him opposing it on this occasion, but I remind him that deferred Divisions have produced much bigger results—a much larger number of votes. If he regards the order as an important measure, it is surely one on which he would welcome the larger vote that we will get on a deferred Division.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I draw to the Leader of the House's attention the campaign by the Central Manchester primary care trust to persuade

[Mr. Tony Lloyd]

vulnerable groups, particularly the elderly and those with conditions such as respiratory illnesses, of the need to have flu vaccinations. I hope that he will tell the House that the Government are fully behind that campaign because it is good for the individual, saves lives and prevents beds from being blocked at the worst time of the winter.

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the local hospital on its campaign. I assure my hon. Friend that the Department of Health and the Government want to ensure that we have as much success as possible in making protection available to elderly people against influenza.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May we have an urgent statement from the Government on the implications of the resignation of the First Minister of the Scottish Administration? The Leader of the House will be aware that the matter that appears to have caused the resignation relates to the First Minister's membership of this House and our rules for Members. May I ask that those implications be explored with a proper ministerial statement and an opportunity for us to cross-question?

As has already been mentioned, there will be a debate on Railtrack, but may I ask that the Government's position on privatised companies—what we used to call public utilities—be explained more fully, particularly in relation to the chaos, confusion and public criticism of what is going on in British Airways and British Telecom? It seems that if we are not careful the taxpayer will pick up the bill for the incredible incompetence of the previous Government in the way that they sold off the family silver, as a previous Prime Minister put it. Can we have an express statement from the Government on their precise view of taxpayers' liability in relation to those shareholders—big institutions and, of course, directors themselves—who may have mismanaged those companies to that extent since the sell-off?

I remind the Leader of the House that the electricity in this Chamber and in this building is owned by a French Government-owned company, so French taxpayers benefit from the charges that we have to pay.

Mr. Cook: On the resignation of the First Minister, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that Mr. McLeish is making a personal statement at 2 pm, and it would not be right for any of us to speculate on the details until we have heard from him. Should any further action be required in this place, we have the machinery to take such action. I am sure that that machinery is perfectly capable of undertaking a charge.

The only thing that I would say at the present time is that, personally, I have had Henry McLeish as a colleague and a friend for two decades. I have come to respect immensely his commitment to public service. I am sure that he will continue to give the same commitment to his constituents.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the debate on public bodies. It is right that those bodies that are appointed to carry out part of the functions of the Government, albeit at arm's length, should be subjected to scrutiny in the House. That is why we have decided that it is right for the House to have a full day's debate on those matters.

For the very reason that the hon. Gentleman suggested, it would not be proper in that debate to discuss the privatised industries. Since they have become privatised, the liabilities that they incur are their liabilities. They are not the liabilities of the Government.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the French National Assembly has this week hosted a convention for organisations in civil society to engage those organisations in the future of Europe debate. Will he consider increasing the role that this Parliament can play in stimulating a much wider debate in Britain about the future of Europe and in particular, as part of that debate, increasing the role and effectiveness of national scrutiny through the Select Committee on European Scrutiny?

Mr. Cook: I assure my hon. Friend that the Government favour the widest possible debate on the future of Europe. Indeed, we now have a period in which to carry through that debate in advance of the intergovernmental conference in 2004. It is important that that debate should range widely: not just over the narrow question of institutional amendments, but over the nature of the Europe that we wish to construct and how to achieve the right balance between the European institutions, the member states and the regional bodies.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Will the Leader of the House make time available for a debate on the plight of arable farmers? That would give hon. Members the opportunity to comment on the fact that the Government failed to pull down the agrimonetary compensation that they could have pulled down at the end of October, and that those farmers—many of them in my constituency—face falling farm incomes, crop prices that are a fraction of what they were just four or five years ago, and nasty foreign imports being sucked into the country because of the weak euro.

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman's last comment is entirely in line with the spirit of the common agricultural policy, which many farmers wished us to join when we signed up to the European Community, but the Government are well aware of the situation in the farming industry and have given great attention to it. That is one of the reasons why we will have a debate on a Bill from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the coming weeks, when I am sure the hon. Gentleman and many others will make their points about the farming industry. It is also why we have created a new Department that brings together the old Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with the wider interests of the countryside to ensure that we can take a wider view in addressing the future of the rural economy.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): My right hon. Friend's commitment to reforming and modernising our democratic institutions is well known, well respected and most welcome. *[Interruption.]* Wait for it. But is he aware that the wholly inadequate proportion of elected Members in the revised second Chamber proposed in yesterday's White Paper almost guarantees that there is not a snowball's chance in hell of achieving the consensus that he seeks on the Labour Benches, never mind across the House or the country at large? Given that more than

140 Labour Members have signed early-day motion 226, does he recognise that there is a contradiction between seeking consensus and forcing an unpopular and unworkable measure through on a whipped vote?

[That this House supports the democratic principle that any revised Second Chamber of Parliament should be wholly or substantially elected.]

Mr. Cook: I much preferred my hon. Friend's premise to his question. On his concluding point, I assure the House that we have put the matter out for consultation. I said so repeatedly in the course of the statement yesterday. This is the first day of the consultation and I therefore think that it might be premature to draw conclusions, but we seek consensus and I hope that the consultation will enable us to get closer to one.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate in Government time on the subject of Government appointments? In the past few weeks, we have seen the scandal of Jo Moore and her remaining in post, and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions apparently making misleading statements to the House, if one is to believe the Rail Regulator appointed by the Government and the chairman of Railtrack, whom the Government were offering the chairmanship of their new body—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman meant to say, "Apparently making misleading statements to the House". I do not think that he would want to attribute that to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The best thing that the hon. Gentleman can do is withdraw that remark and then he can continue with his question.

Mr. Hawkins: I do withdraw that remark. May I say that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions may have been guilty of terminological inexactitude to the House, and we also now have the circumstances that have led to the resignation of the First Minister? Those are important matters affecting the dignity of the Government. Will the Government provide time for such a debate?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman kept twisting his words to come back to the same bogus assertion: that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has misled the House. He will be in the House next Tuesday when he will robustly deny any such allegation, and he will have the full support and confidence of Labour Members in doing so.

Next week's debate arises only because the previous Conservative Government carried through a privatisation of the railway industry that has totally failed—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members cannot now deny that their Government privatised Railtrack. They even provided the basis for administration of the kind that we have put Railtrack into. They provided the basis under which Railtrack turned out to be a black hole that swallowed public money, and they now want us to give it more public money rather than put the passenger first.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): There is continuing concern in my constituency about the number of people on fixed-term contracts. Is there any prospect of a debate on the draft regulations on fixed-term workers, which were due to come into force on 10 July but have now been postponed? I welcome today's publication of the Employment Bill. May we have a debate in the near future about employees' rights so that we can be sure that employers are not evading their legal responsibilities in respect of their work force?

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to confirm that there will be a debate in the near future on the Employment Bill, which includes matters relevant to the regulations on fixed-term workers. My hon. Friend can raise those concerns and any others relating to workers' rights during that debate.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will be aware that the completion of the natural gas pipeline to Northern Ireland is helping to deal with CO_2 emissions. However, Phoenix Natural Gas continues to invest private money in the development of that pipeline although the gas comes from the North sea. I understand that the profit made as a result of that pipeline has not been distributed equitably to different outlets. As a result, Phoenix will receive £500,000. Apparently, because of the regional divisions, there is no equality. Will the Leader of the House have a word with his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry to see whether the regulator should be consulting more with the regulator in Northern Ireland and with the Minister responsible for this matter in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the completion of the gas pipeline. I take on board his point about ensuring that any proceeds are shared fairly. I shall certainly take his advice and draw this matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): May I draw to my right hon. Friend's attention the increasing public interest in the successive drafts of the report on energy policy being prepared by the performance and innovation unit? When the report is completed, will it be published immediately or simply be presented to Ministers for their deliberation? When it is published, will there be a statement to the House? Can he confirm that there will be a full debate on the report? Will it be subject to public consultation or will it simply set out the details of Government policy, which will then be fixed?

Mr. Cook: I anticipate that if a report on energy policy is brought before the House and the public, the Government will be expected to show a lead and indicate the lines of their strategy. It is an important issue and I would expect it to have the fullest exposure in public and in Parliament.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): In view of the widespread concern among our constituents about the state of the health service, will the Leader of the House arrange for a regular debate, say once a month, in the presence of the Prime Minister, so that we can monitor his solemn pledge to the British people at the general election to introduce a world-class public health service?

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

During his busy day, will the Leader of the House look at column 236 of yesterday's *Hansard* where the Prime Minister said that when his Government took office

"there were no new hospitals being built".—[*Official Report*, 7 November 2001; Vol.374, c. 236.]

Will he then study the list of new hospitals opened in 1997 where he will find that at least five new hospitals were opened in addition to myriad other schemes? He will also see that a similar number opened in 1998.

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to remind the hon. Gentleman that he will have an opportunity to debate health in the near future during the Second Reading of the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, which I announced in the business statement. We look forward to every possible opportunity to debate the health service so that we can draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention the facts that we are putting in twice as much in additional resources as his Government ever did; that we have 3,000 new nurses since the last election was called; that every year in Britain, 500,000 more patients receive elective surgery; and that 1 million more out-patients receive appointments. It is a fine record and we intend to build on it.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Had there not been a change of Government four years ago, there would have been no change in the House of Lords. I have always opposed a fully elected second chamber. I did so in the 1980s when there was a feeling among Labour Members that it should be fully elected. I opposed it for all the reasons that my right hon. Friend has given. A fully elected second chamber would be a powerful rival to this House. Will he accept, however, that having only 20 per cent. of members elected is far too low? During the consultation, which he mentioned again today, I hope that it will be recognised that the minimum number of elected members should not be less than one third.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks, which I endorse. We are debating reform of the House of Lords only because of the change in Government. The Conservative party was in power for 18 years and never showed the least interest in any proposal for reform of the House of Lords. I agree that there is a strong case for ensuring—this view is shared by many hon. Members—that we are careful not to end up with a wholly elected second chamber, which would undoubtedly be a rival to the House of Commons and result in a shift of power.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): That would be a good thing.

Mr. Cook: I do not remember the right hon. and learned Gentleman saying that when his party was in office for 18 years. I am repeatedly urged by Conservative Members to strengthen the powers of the House of Commons. It seems odd that they should urge upon us a course of action that would undoubtedly result in a weakening of those powers. On the balance of elected members, as I said yesterday, there is a legitimate area of debate about how large the elected element should be. I expect that to be at the centre of the consultation exercise on which we are embarking.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Does the Leader of the House think that it is conceivable that the chief executive of BMW, the chairman of Railtrack and now the Rail Regulator should all have contradicted the accounts given by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions at the Dispatch Box about his meetings with them? Surely before next Tuesday's debate, the honourable thing would be for the Secretary of State to come to the House and resign in the same way as the Scottish First Minister has today.

Mr. Cook: I am glad that the business statement has given Conservative Members an opportunity to rehearse their speeches for next Tuesday, which is where they properly belong.

Mr. MacKay: This is a serious matter.

Mr. Cook: It is indeed. The right hon. Gentleman is larding out accusations as if they were frivolous. If, as he now claims, the chairman of Railtrack did not come to my right hon. Friend and say that the company would not be a going concern by next November without more cash, he needs to explain why he did not say that. Two days later his officials arrived at the Department to negotiate specifically to secure that additional cash to enable it to continue as a going concern. The conduct of Railtrack, its officials and its chairman in the weeks that followed that meeting was entirely consistent with my right hon. Friend's account of the meeting.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Could my right hon. Friend find time for us to debate the rules governing the fitness of people to be directors of companies in this country and the insolvency procedures? I am asking because, during the past few weeks, about 100 employees at the Zephyr Cams company in my constituency have had to watch while machinery was removed from the shop floor. They have been aware that any revenue flowing into the company has been immediately transferred out of it. All that time, the management has refused to meet or say anything to the employees. The company is now in receivership. The employees fear that there will be nothing left of it for their redundancy payments, and many creditors have been left high and dry.

It has now been revealed that the same thing happened a few years ago, involving the same owner, to two companies using the name Quality Engineering Products, based in Weston-super-Mare. Resources from those companies were transferred to Zephyr Cams, involving £2 million of unpaid debt. Now it is believed that the resources from Zephyr—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I expect brief questions. The hon. Gentleman's question has been far too long; I must ask him to sit down.

Mr. Cook: I am glad that my hon. Friend was able to put that on the record; his comments make a very disturbing story. The DTI is at present engaged in consultation, with a view to changing the law relating to bankruptcy and insolvency. My hon. Friend may wish to

feed his views into that process. Our objective will be to try to present to the House legislation that ensures that those who become insolvent in all innocence have the opportunity to make a fresh start, but that enables us to be robust in identifying and barring rogue traders who have taken advantage of those who supply and work for them.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): It would be helpful if we had a debate early next week on how the Government's proposals on the House of Lords have been contrived. We are entitled to know which of the 243 Labour peers appointed by the Prime Minister were involved in that process. After all, they have a direct interest in ensuring an unelected House. Is it not absolutely intolerable that the two leading Ministers in the formulation of policy appear to be the Lord Chancellor and the Leader of the House of Lords—neither of whom have in any way condescended to stand for election to public office? Is not that shameful, even by the standards of Ceausescu's Romania?

Mr. Cook: It would be an extraordinary proposition that the Lord Chancellor and the Leader of the House of Lords should not be involved in the preparation of the document—*[Interruption.]* I do find that a preposterous suggestion. I am not entirely surprised that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) regards it as common sense, but to everyone else it appears preposterous. I would not want to take any credit for the White Paper from the Lord Chancellor.

This is the second time this week and—I have lost count, but something like—the seventh time in this Parliament that the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) has offered a proposition that is flatly in conflict with his conduct during the 18 years of the Conservative Government, for whom he was a Minister. I have no problem with him saying that he had got it wrong, wished that he had done something different, had changed his mind and had recognised his mistakes, but I rather wish that he would stop expressing his views as though he were right all along and that all the previous Government's mistakes were as a result of decisions taken by others while he was out at the loo.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I welcome my right hon. Friend's promise of a debate on the House of Lords, but given that many Labour Members were still standing following 25 questions on his statement yesterday, as we had to move to other pressing business, should we not have that debate at an early date, before consultation ends? Some of us feel that although it is right to get rid of the privileges of birth, those privileges should not be replaced by the privileges of position and connections. If there were such an early debate, some of us would have the opportunity to show that the argument that the position of the House of Lords in comparison with the Commons would be enhanced by democratic elections is spurious, because no powers can be passed to the Lords unless this House agrees to do so.

Mr. Cook: I do not think that my hon. Friend would find it quite so easy to stand pat on that view if the second Chamber were claiming as good a democratic legitimacy as this Chamber. That is not the nature of the real political world. Of course the debate must be timely. Two weeks from now, we shall be heavily engaged in the anti-terrorism Bill, which we all know is of great gravity and urgency to our people—ensuring that we provide them with the best possible security. I would hope that we would find an opportunity to debate House of Lords reform as soon as is reasonable.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): With the loss of the right hon. Gentleman's former hon. Friend as First Minister of Scotland this morning, and the possible emergence of a job opportunity for him, will he find time for a debate on the remit of the Secretary of State for Scotland's consultation on numbers of Members of the Scottish Parliament, so that we do not lose any more?

Mr. Cook: The issue of numbers of MSPs and, indeed, of Scottish Members of Parliament in this place has been aired on a number of occasions, not just in business questions but at other times in the House—and no doubt will continue to be so aired. Of course, we debated the matter when we passed the Scotland Act 1998, committing ourselves to a reduction in the number of Scottish Members of this Parliament. With that inevitably comes a reduction in the number of Members of the Scottish Parliament. I remind the hon. Gentleman that his party did not object to those provisions in the Scotland Act.

The former First Minister will be making a statement in an hour's time, and he should be allowed to speak in his own words. All I would say is that Henry McLeish was my friend this morning, and he will be my friend this afternoon.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the crisis in the Children's Society in Wales, which announced earlier this week that it was pulling out of Wales, closing all its projects and making all its staff redundant? Will he draw that matter to the attention of his ministerial colleagues and ask them to use any influence that they might have on the Children's Society nationally in order that it reconsiders its decision to withdraw from Wales?

Mr. Cook: I understand entirely the concern that the decision must be causing to my hon. Friend's constituents. I shall certainly draw her comments to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I remind the Leader of the House of Her Majesty's Government's pledge to hold regular debates on London matters, notwithstanding the passage of the Greater London Authority Act 1999. Is not it imperative that we have such an early debate so that we can discuss the future, if there is one, of the public-private partnership for London Underground, the implementation of which is four and a half years late? That cannot all be blamed on the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, notwithstanding his totally incredible statements on Railtrack.

Mr. Cook: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for saying that such matters cannot all be blamed on my right hon. Friend. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the PPP has been so long delayed because of difficulty in reaching agreement with Mr. Kiley and the Mayor of London.

[Mr. Cook]

I remain mystified as to why it is not possible for them to find common ground with us. After all, we are offering £4,000-worth of investment for every household in the Greater London area. If such a sum were offered to my local authority to invest in my area, it would certainly find a way of getting its hands on it.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): In response to three questions from Labour Members, my right hon. Friend has said that the plans for the House of Lords are out to consultation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said yesterday, the most recent Labour party conference voted for a largely elected upper House by something like 3 million votes to a few hundred thousand. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a pretty decisive contribution to consultation?

Mr. Cook: As I recall the entertaining intervention yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), he referred us to the 1976 decision, in which a similar majority voted to abolish the second Chamber in its entirety. So, we have a rich tapestry of guidance from which to draw. I shall obviously listen with great respect to responses from the Labour party and other parties in the next three months.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Has the Leader of the House had the chance to study the evidence given to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee yesterday, in which the Rail Regulator gave a very detailed and well documented account of his meetings with the Secretary of State and Railtrack's chairman and chief executive? Although I welcome the Opposition day debate next week on the mishandling of Railtrack, would not it have been better for the Secretary of State to have come to the Dispatch Box to explain in Government time why their two accounts are so wildly different?

Mr. Cook: That is a question that also falls to the Rail Regulator to explain. On reading his evidence, I was much impressed that the Rail Regulator also blasted Railtrack, stating that it was remarkable that it had kept so much information from him. There is a lot to be explored in the evidence, much of which will take us back to the previous Government, who designed Railtrack in the first place.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May we have a statement from the Minister for the Cabinet Office about the deplorable decision to mount a leak inquiry inside the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to find out who leaked the dreadful e-mail from Jo Moore about it being a good day on 11 September to bury bad news? Is it not quite astonishing that the person who leaked the e-mail might lose his or her job while the person who wrote it retains hers? I would have asked for a statement from the Minister with responsibility for freedom of information, but I think that that post may have been abolished, along with the Government's commitment to open government and public accountability as defences for leaks.

Mr. Cook: As I recall, the statement about the investigation was made by the Cabinet Secretary and not by any Minister at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The hon. Gentleman is a man of great talent, integrity and experience. I do think that the time has come for him to move on to another subject.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I fear that the Leader of the House may not have fully understood the questions about the circumstances this week relating to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I am a new Member and it was my understanding that the validity and accuracy of statements made by Ministers to this House was absolutely sacrosanct. The Leader of the House will be aware that, on Monday, the Secretary of State told the House that no threats were made to the Rail Regulator when they met on 5 October. In public evidence yesterday to the Select Committee, the Rail Regulator clearly said that the proposition that was put to him on that date would have led to his resignation. Will the Leader of the House explain the contradiction between the two statements? If he cannot, does he believe that this is a matter of sufficient importance to require the Secretary of State to return immediately to the House to explain matters?

Mr. Cook: I do not think that there is a single member of the Cabinet who has made more statements to the House or appeared more often at this Dispatch Box since we returned from the recess than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Whatever else the Opposition may complain about, they cannot complain about the opportunities to question him or to put statements to him. So far, I am delighted to see that my right hon. Friend has robustly defended his record. Indeed, it is the record of the previous Government that is on trial, not this Government.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Will the Leader of the House provide time for a debate on how we can secure greater cross-community support within this country for the coalition's military action against the Taliban in Afghanistan? Is he aware that, on 6 November, I asked the Prime Minister which Muslim leaders in this country had expressed support for that military action, and he was unable to name a single one?

Mr. Cook: There have been statements by the Labour Muslim Council and from hon. Friends who are Members of this House and members of the Muslim faith. They have been quite robust in their statements, to which I refer the hon. Gentleman. However, I fully echo his wish that we build the broadest possible consensus—a consensus not only behind the urgent need to bring Osama bin Laden to justice, but to make it clear that this is not a conflict between the west and Islam but between both of us against terrorism. With that in mind, it is a matter of regret that the Conservative party has not signed the pledge that has been signed by other parties. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asked us to build consensus. I cannot think of a better way to build consensus than for us all to demonstrate support for the same pledge.

Points of Order

1.14 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, we had questions to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), asked about the Patrick Carter report. He said:

"The House will know that although Patrick Carter's report has been paid for by the public, it has not yet been seen by the public: it remains a secret document."

In answer, the Minister for Sport said:

"Patrick Carter's report was put into the public domain at 5 o'clock on the Thursday that the decision was made. Everyone has been able to read it and arrive at their own judgment, and a considerable number of people have told my Department that the right decision was made."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 9.]

I must inform you, Mr. Speaker, that I have checked with the Clerk of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, which is currently conducting an inquiry into this very issue. The report is not available to the Committee. Moreover, it was not placed in the public domain. It would seem that the Minister for Sport has inadvertently misled the House, as it was factually incorrect to say that the report was in the public domain. I wonder whether an opportunity might be given to the Minister to come back to the House, apologise and set the record straight.

Mr. Speaker: These matters are for the Minister himself. The hon. Gentleman has put the matter on the record and I am sure that the Minister will take serious note of what he has had to say.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, of which I have given you advance notice, Mr. Speaker. You have on many occasions been concerned at the way in which Ministers avoid questions. Can I draw your attention to an example that many hon. Members on both sides of the House will feel to be particularly outrageous? I tabled a question for oral reply by the Deputy Prime Minister on co-ordination of rural policy—something I was told by the Table Office was still very much the responsibility of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Cabinet Office. I then received a letter saying that the question had been transferred to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Sure enough, when the reply came back, it referred to the Cabinet Office co-ordinating machinery, making it quite clear that the original destination for my oral question was perfectly appropriate. That transfer avoided the opportunity for me to put a supplementary question to the Deputy Prime Minister, which he might have found difficulty in answering, having little rural experience. Will you make representations again to Ministers to stop their over-protective civil servants in their private offices and their political advisers deliberately avoiding difficult questions?

Mr. Speaker: As the House knows, decisions about the transfer of questions are matters for Ministers, not the Chair. However, I have examined the question and the answer to which the hon. Gentleman refers and I sympathise with his complaint. In the circumstances he describes, where the line of ministerial responsibility is not clear cut, I deprecate the transfer of a question tabled for oral answer, which has the effect of depriving the Member of the opportunity to be called to put a supplementary question to the Deputy Prime Minister.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In recent days, I have experienced a total refusal by the Treasury to respond to any questions relating to the administration of Railtrack, even though I have written confirmation from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions that the Treasury has been involved in discussions on the matter. Furthermore, I have tabled a question not specifically about that circumstance but, in broad terms, to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what circumstances he would provide guaranteed security for the debt of a company limited by guarantee. Once again, that question—although it referred in no way to transport matters—was transferred to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. As Members, do we not have a right to question the Treasury about a matter that clearly has Treasury involvement?

Mr. Speaker: As I have already stated, transfers are not generally a matter for the Chair and the best advice that I can give the hon. Gentleman is to be persistent.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have heard the answer given to my earlier question by the Leader of the House. The Prime Minister did not give that information in answer to my written question. This is not a matter of a transfer—

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not my policy to extend questions to the Leader of the House. Perhaps next week the hon. Gentleman can put the same question and see what kind of answer he gets then.

BILL PRESENTED

National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill

Mr. Secretary Milburn, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Robin Cook, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Mrs. Secretary Liddell, Mr. Secretary Reid, Mr. John Hutton and Ms Hazel Blears, presented a Bill to amend the law about the National Health Service; to establish and make provision in connection with a Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health; to make provision in relation to arrangements for joint working between NHS bodies and the Prison Service, and between NHS bodies and local authorities in Wales; to make provision in connection with the regulation of health care professions; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 47].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

That the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 2001, S.I., 2001, No. 2718, dated 25th July 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 1st August, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

BUILDING REGULATIONS

That the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2001, S.I., 2001, No. 3335, dated 4th October 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th October, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Export Control Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

GENERAL RESTRICTION ON PURPOSES OF CONTROL ORDERS

'(1) The Schedule specifies the purposes for which an order imposing controls may be made.

(2) The power to make an order imposing controls is not restricted by subsection (1) if the order provides—

(a) for the order to expire, or

(b) for the provision imposing the controls to cease to have effect,

no later than the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the day on which the order is made.

(3) The power to make an order which—

(a) amends provisions of an earlier order;

(b) revokes and re-enacts (with or without modifications) provisions of an earlier order,

is restricted by subsection (1) only if and to the extent that the order strengthens controls that have already been imposed or imposes new controls.

(4) In subsection (3) "provisions of an earlier order" does not include provisions made by virtue of subsection (2).

(5) In this section "controls" means export, transfer, technical assistance or trade controls.'.—*[Nigel Griffiths.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment (a) to the proposed clause, in line 4, leave out from "order" to end of line 6 and insert—

'(a) has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament, and

(b) provides—

(i) for the order to expire, or

(ii) for the provision imposing them to cease to have effect,'.

Government amendments Nos. 1 to 8, 10 and 12 to 15.

Amendment No. 30, in clause 11, page 7, line 4, leave out from "which" to "shall" in line 5 and insert—

'does not contain any provision made by virtue of (*General restriction on purposes of control orders*) (2), or under section 4 or 5'.

Government amendment No. 16.

Amendment No. 31, in page 7, line 15, leave out from "containing" to end of line 18 and insert—

'an order under section 14(3)'.

Government amendments Nos. 17 to 23.

Amendment No. 36, in schedule, page 9, line 18, after "have", insert—

', or contribute through cumulative impact to having,'.

Amendment No. 32, in page 9, line 19, after "Table", insert—

', or that exportation of the goods might run contrary to any of the criteria of the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports'.

Amendment No. 33, in page 9, line 26, after "Table", insert—

', or that exportation of the goods might run contrary to any of the criteria of the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports'.

Government amendment No. 24.

Amendment No. 38, in page 10, line 2, leave out from "of" to end of line 4 and insert—

'goods or technology anywhere in the world in connection with the development, production or use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.'.

Government amendment No. 25.

Amendment No. 39, in page 10, line 11, at end insert—

E An adverse effect on the sustainable development of the country to which the goods were exported, or the technology was transferred.'.

Government amendment No. 26.

Amendment No. 34, in page 10, line 15, at the end, insert—

'*Economic capacity and sustainable development*

F An adverse effect on—

(a) the economic capacity; or

(b) the sustainable development of the country to which the goods were exported, or the technology was transferred.'.

Nigel Griffiths: As new clause 1 and amendments Nos. 1 to 8, 10 and 12 to 26 are Government amendments, I intend to speak in favour of them.

I want to give the House a clear and detailed explanation of the many and varied issues covered by the amendments, and I apologise because that is likely to take some time. I wish to give the clearest possible explanation of the Government's position, so I hope that hon. Members will keep their interventions to a minimum during my speech. The House will appreciate that I have a great deal of ground to cover and I ask the House's patience, as in most cases I am not likely to agree to give way immediately. The House will be aware that, unlike in Committee, we have only this afternoon, so I have limited time to speak and I wish to give the House the fullest possible explanation in the time available.

For clarity, I should say at the outset that I intend to oppose amendment (a) to new clause 1 and amendments Nos. 30 to 34, 36, 38 and 39. I support new clause 1 and amendments Nos. 1 to 8, 10 and 12 to 26. New clause 2, which will be considered in the next group of amendments, is a consequential amendment to this group of amendments.

At first sight, this group of a new clause and amendments may appear somewhat complex. I assure hon. Members that that is not the case. They provide that the powers to introduce orders imposing trade controls or controls on technical assistance are directly subject to the purposes described in the schedule to the Bill. They are then limited in scope to controls that are similar in effect to those imposed under clauses 1 and 2, on the export of goods and the transfer of technology. This, then, allows the definitions of "controlled goods" and "controlled technology" in clause 9 to be deleted. However, the alterations achieved in new clause 1 and amendments Nos. 4, 8 and 14 result in a large number of further consequential amendments. Let me explain why we wish to amend the Bill in this way.

In Committee there were calls from hon. Members for trade controls and technical assistance controls to be directly subject to the purposes in the schedule. It also became evident in Committee that the definitions of "controlled goods" and "controlled technology" used in clause 9 to achieve that effect could be confusing. There is also a risk that the current structure of the Bill could leave a loophole whereby brokers who arranged for their goods to transit the United Kingdom might be able to claim exemption from the controls. We want to avoid that at all costs. Hence the Government have concluded that it would simplify and clarify the Bill to ensure that trade controls and technical assistance controls are subject to the purposes contained in the schedule in the same way as the export and transfer controls.

The amendments proposed ensure that orders imposing controls on trading goods or on the provision of technical assistance overseas can be made only for one of the purposes listed in the schedule. The first subsection of new clause 1 proposes and states:

"The Schedule specifies the purposes for which an order imposing controls may be made."

The new clause then explains that controls include "export, transfer, technical assistance or trade controls."

That amendment does not widen the Government's powers to introduce controls on trade, or on the provision of technical assistance overseas. Amendments No. 4 and 8 make it clear that controls on trade or on technical assistance are limited, not only by the purposes in the schedule but by the fact that the controls must be connected or correspond to export or transfer controls. Therefore it will not be possible for the Government to impose trafficking or brokering controls and technical assistance controls that are radically different from the export or transfer controls or of no connection with them.

The amendments seek to simplify the Bill, and to tighten it up to ensure that there are no potential loopholes. I know that hon. Members will agree that the Bill is of considerable importance, and it is important to get it right, so I urge hon. Members to support the amendments.

I shall now speak to amendment (a) to new clause 1, and amendments Nos. 30 to 31, as they address similar issues. Those amendments seek to alter the existing provisions in the Bill for parliamentary scrutiny of secondary legislation. Amendments Nos. 30 and 31 seek to replace the negative resolution procedures for orders made under clauses 1, 2, 4 and 5 with the delayed affirmative resolution procedure. Amendment (a) to new clause 1 seeks to subject orders under subsection (2) of the new clause to the draft affirmative resolution procedure.

A very similar set of amendments was debated in Committee last month. I made the general point then that the different scrutiny provisions of clause 11 reflect the distinction between orders that can change the fundamental purposes for which export controls can be imposed, and orders that set out the details of those controls. Clearly, where the fundamental purposes of the Bill are involved, it is right that Parliament should have the opportunity to debate such matters under the affirmative resolution procedure, but the Government believe that the details of the controls are best dealt with by the negative procedure.

Orders made under clauses 1, 2, 4 and 5, for which the negative procedure is provided, will frequently be of a technical nature, such as amendments to orders resulting

[Nigel Griffiths]

from changes to lists of items subject to control. Such changes are usually a result of alterations to the international export control regimes such as the missile technology control regime, upon which many of our export controls are based. They are orders of the type for which the negative resolution procedure is best suited.

There is, rightly, parliamentary interest in the new controls to be introduced under the Bill, which is why we provided the Committee and Parliament with draft dummy orders, setting out how we proposed to use the new controls. That is why I announced last month that the Government would hold a full public consultation on draft secondary legislation before the new controls were introduced next year. That will provide an opportunity for all those with an interest to consider and comment on the new controls to be introduced under the Bill.

We believe that amendment (a), relating to new clause 1, is intended to require that no orders made under subsection (2) of new clause 1 may be brought into force without prior approval of Parliament. We fully accept that draft affirmative resolution procedure for orders made under clause 11(4), which can modify the schedule of purposes, but we do not believe that it would be sensible for that procedure to apply to orders made under subsection (2) of new clause 1.

The object of the new subsection (2), which is currently part of clause 3 of the Bill, as amended in Committee, is to allow the Government to respond to emergency situations by imposing controls with immediate effect that, exceptionally, would not or might not clearly fall within the purposes set out in the schedule. As I said in Committee, the reason for that is that the Government will sometimes have to introduce specific controls under that subsection to deal with unforeseen emergency situations. In such situations, the Government would be required to act without delay and it would not always be possible to achieve parliamentary approval in time. However, no one should be in any doubt that it will ultimately be left to Parliament to decide by the end of 40 sitting days whether to allow the Government to continue to exercise those controls.

1.30 pm

That in itself will always be a significant influence on any Government exercising powers over that short period. I also point out that any order introduced under new clause 1(2) that was approved by Parliament within the 40-day period could not remain in force for more than a year without the further express approval of both Houses of Parliament.

To sum up, I consider that the Bill is a significant and desirable improvement on the existing legislative framework for export controls. That framework does not provide for any proper parliamentary scrutiny of secondary legislation, but the Bill does. As I said in Committee, it is important that we have the right tools for the right job. Accordingly, where the fundamental objectives of the Bill are involved, we have provided for the affirmative resolution procedure. We have also provided for scrutiny by the negative resolution procedure in all other cases.

Given what I have said, I hope that the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) will withdraw amendment (a), and amendments Nos. 30 and 31.

I shall speak to amendments Nos. 36, 32 and 33 together, as they address similar issues. Amendments Nos. 36 and 33 would ensure that orders could be imposed to prevent an adverse effect of a type specified in any of the criteria of the European Union code of conduct on arms exports. I assure the House that the schedule of the Bill will allow us to impose controls on any goods or technology that we need to be able to control in order to meet our obligations under the EU code of conduct.

Like other member states, we impose controls on military items. Dual-use items, of course, are subject to control under the European Community regulation. Such items are the goods and technologies whose export we need to control in order to meet our obligations under the EU code of conduct. They are the goods and technologies that the schedule allows us to impose controls on, but it would not be appropriate to refer to the code in the schedule, as the amendment would require. The purpose of the EU code, and of our consolidated criteria that incorporate it, is to set out the basis on which licence applications are assessed. That is different from the purposes for which controls may be imposed.

I can best illustrate that by referring to the criterion in the code that refers to the risk of diversion to undesirable end-users. That risk is an extremely important factor in making any licensing decision. However, the risk of diversion is not associated with any particular category of goods or technology. So allowing diversion to be included as a factor for which orders could be imposed would theoretically allow the Government the power to control any goods of any description whatsoever.

It is not the purpose of the Bill to enable the Government to be able to control any goods whatsoever. Using the power would also conflict with our commitments to international and EU trade arrangements.

Amendment No. 32 would introduce into the schedule a reference to the risk that goods might have one of the consequences listed in the table contained in the schedule through cumulative effect. I believe that those of my hon. Friends who tabled the amendment had the primary intention of ensuring that the Bill allows the cumulative effect of arms exports on the sustainable development of recipient countries to be taken into account in licensing decisions.

I shall address the issue of cumulative effect more generally. The schedule describes the purposes for which the order imposing export controls or transfer controls can be made. The function of the schedule is to govern the making of orders that specify the goods and technology, or classes of goods and technology, that are to be subject to export controls.

Paragraph 4 of the schedule allows controls to be imposed on types of goods without reference to quantities. A particular item of equipment—a machine gun, for example—may be brought under control, and an export licence would be required for any exports of machine guns, irrespective of the number of guns that it is proposed to export.

There is nothing in the Bill, or in the current orders, that would prevent the Secretary of State from considering the number of other goods of that type—or of other types of arms exported by the recipient—when reaching a decision on an export licence application, where that is a relevant consideration. Such considerations form a normal part of the assessment of whether the proposed end use is

reasonable, and in assessing the degree of risk, for instance, of diversion or of aggressive use against neighbours.

Similarly, decisions on individual licences are considered under the criterion on a case-by-case basis. The cumulative effects of the purchase of arms by recipient countries may well be a relevant consideration in the assessment of a licence application under criterion 8.

As many hon. Members will be aware, criterion 8 of the consolidated EU criteria obliges Ministers taking decisions on export licences to look carefully at the compatibility of any proposed arms export with the technical and economic capacity of the recipient country. In view of that explanation, and of the explanations that I shall give later, I hope that, in due course, those of my hon. Friends who have tabled amendments Nos. 36, 32 and 33 will agree to withdraw them.

I turn now to amendment No. 38. This would clarify the phrase "weapons of mass destruction" and ensure that it refers to

"nuclear, chemical and biological weapons."

I believe that the amendment is unnecessary and that it could be counterproductive, as I shall explain. The amendment would restrict the purposes for which orders could be imposed to activities related to nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. However, it is possible that other current, and future, weapons could cause mass destruction but would not fall into any of those categories.

For example, radiological weapons constructed of conventional explosives combined with radioactive material are not considered to be nuclear weapons, but they could of course have devastating results. That is why the phrase "weapons of mass destruction" allows the possibility of controlling activities related to such weapons, or to any other types of such weapons that may arise in the future.

I hope that the explanation satisfies those hon. Members who tabled amendment No. 38, and that they will agree to withdraw the amendment in due course.

I shall speak to amendments No. 39 and 34 together, as they address similar issues. The effect of each amendment would be to allow the risk of there being an adverse effect on the sustainable development of a country to be the purpose for which the orders could be made imposing controls on goods and technology. In addition, amendment No. 39 would allow the risk of there being an adverse effect on the economic capability of a country to be a purpose for which such orders could be made.

We believe that the amendments are unnecessary, because the concerns that appear to lie behind them are already fully addressed elsewhere in the Bill. Sustainable development concerns are already taken fully into account under the consolidated EU criteria and the national arms export licensing criteria, which we announced to Parliament on 26 October 2000. The criteria were framed by EU member states precisely to cover the range of issues that ought to be addressed in licensing decisions, and they included the issue of sustainable development.

Criterion 8 of the consolidated criteria obliges member states taking decision on export licences to look carefully at the compatibility of any proposed arms export with the technical and economic capability of the recipient country. It further states that any Government must take into account whether the proposed export would seriously undermine the economy or seriously hamper the sustainable development of the recipient country.

All the consolidated criteria will remain the basis for export licensing decisions under the legislation. To remove any doubt about that, we have made explicit provision in clause 7 for all the consolidated criteria—including criterion 8 on sustainable development—to continue to be taken fully into account when decisions are made about export licences.

Moreover, as I explained in connection with amendments Nos. 36 and 32, the schedule will allow us to impose controls on any goods or technology that we need to be able to control in order to meet all our obligations under the EU code of conduct. Adding the provisions of criterion 8 to the schedule is not necessary because we are able, under the Bill as it stands, fully to take into account all the criteria, including the criterion on sustainable development. Clause 7 underlines, for the first time in legislation, the status of the consolidated criteria.

In conclusion, for the reasons that I have outlined, I urge the House to accept the Government amendments.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I suspect that we are in for a long afternoon on a highly technical group of amendments. We shall have an extremely important series of debates this afternoon. All the hon. Members who are present have track records and experience in such matters, so this series of debates will be very well informed.

The Opposition have broadly welcomed the Bill, as have British industry, non-governmental organisations and many individuals, but all of us have certain reservations, hence the large number of amendments. Of course, because we broadly agree, detailed scrutiny is even more important, and that will be the House's function this afternoon, following on from very interesting debates in Committee. It was unfortunate, of course, that half of Standing Committee B's sittings took place in July and the other half in October, because the intervening period allowed a number of changes, one of which was for myself to be parachuted into my current position, which was a great pleasure. I suspect that various changes occurred on both sides of the Committee.

Grateful though I am to the Minister for his courtesy and to his officials for theirs, it was something of a surprise to discover on Tuesday that the Government had rewritten a very large proportion of the Bill. The Minister has very courteously explained why they did so, and he wrote to hon. Members on 6 November, sending official Government notes on the amendments that he was proposing. However, in all my 18 and a half years as a Member, it was the first occasion on which I can recall such a sweeping rewrite to primary legislation so close to Report and Third Reading—a mere two working days.

That lack of time made things very difficult for a lot of people. For instance, it made it very difficult for the Clerks to get the business in order and for the Opposition parties to adjust to the proposed amendments, because it was suggested that certain clauses should be deleted, but many of us wanted to propose amendments to those clauses. We therefore had to work out where those bits of the Bill would be by the time Thursday arrived. It was

[Mr. Robert Key]

very difficult for the public and the non-governmental organisations, charities and pressure groups to follow all the changes.

We all now recognise what the Government have done, and I repeat that I am grateful to the Minister for his courtesy and his explanation of the changes. I am also grateful to his excellent officials in the Department of Trade and Industry, who have been sitting at the end of telephone lines waiting to offer help. I certainly took the Minister's advice and used that facility, and I am very grateful to him because it certainly helped us to make a more coherent response to the changes that the Government had announced. It would be helpful, however, if the Minister could explain why they decided to propose this very big change at the last minute.

I understand the Minister's argument—I follow his logic, and I accept it—but I am bound to ask why he and his officials did not think of the change some months earlier; it would have been helpful if they had. Flattered though we all are that the Minister suggested that the change had something to do with what occurred in Committee, it really would be a first if we had such a large proportion of a Bill rewritten on those grounds. In addition to his courtesy in explaining why he has proposed the change, it would be much appreciated if he could have another go at saying why it had to be left quite so late.

1.45 pm

On new clause 1 and the related amendments, much of the debate in Committee focused on the orders that would be laid before the House and whether that should be done under the affirmative or negative procedure. That is a touchstone argument, and it has arisen time and again. Indeed, paragraph 4 of the DTI's explanatory notes to the Bill, which we all received, state:

"The Scott Inquiry . . . identified a number of limitations in the 1939 Act, including the lack of parliamentary scrutiny of secondary legislation made under the Act and the absence of any indication of the purposes for which export controls may be imposed."

I acknowledge that the Government have gone a long way in seeking to meet those criticisms, and we are very glad that they have, but they have not gone nearly far enough. That is why I decided that we must pursue the issue a little further.

I shall briefly explain what the amendments that I have tabled would do. The Minister has given us a summary, but under the proposed change, temporary orders would require prior affirmation by the House before they could take effect. The Bill, as drafted, makes provision for Parliament to approve temporary orders, but only within 40 days of their taking effect. The Secretary of State could conceivably issue a temporary order to have effect for less than 40 days, which would escape parliamentary scrutiny, so the importance of such secondary legislation would not be recognised.

Of course, the Quadripartite Committee was a tremendous innovation in itself—four Select Committees worked together on this extremely important Bill. We all welcomed that remarkable achievement, as we did its report; it helped us to understand one another. The work of Select Committees is often compartmentalised and there is inevitably a lot of overlap, and I am glad to see Government Members nodding. I hope that that innovative procedure will be used again.

The Quadripartite Committee says in its report:

"The Bill is largely an enabling Bill. The meat of the proposals being made will be in the secondary legislation to be made under the Bill."

Quite so. In Committee, we therefore proposed a number of changes in the guidance on parliamentary approval, but the Government rejected them.

There is a fundamental point at stake, and we must insist that Parliament should retain more control than it will be allowed under the Bill. Furthermore, the concern was expressed in the other place by the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee that the Secretary of State will be given unusual discretion to impose temporary orders under new clause 1(2). We all understand what the Minister said about emergencies, and we do not doubt that, but I have never yet encountered a situation in which the Government have found themselves unable to make the necessary emergency moves, if necessary by introducing primary legislation.

On one occasion during my time as a Member, an emergency Bill passed all its stages in the House in three minutes, so I do not accept that the Government cannot move quickly if they really need to do so. We propose that new clause 1(2) should be amended so that any temporary order must first be subject to approval by both Houses of Parliament, in the same way that Parliament must approve any changes proposed by the Secretary of State to the schedule of purposes.

As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said in Committee, that is not an ideological or policy issue; it is about parliamentary prerogatives and control over the Executive. The House is now going through a very interesting phase, to say the least—it is losing authority to the Executive, and I should like to resist any further losses.

The other amendments follow the first. As was pointed out on Second Reading on 9 July, the Government would be able, under the negative resolution procedure, to decide whether Parliament would be able to debate export control orders. We want to amend the Bill so that any orders—except temporary orders—made under clauses 1, 2, 4 or 5 are subject to the delayed affirmative resolution procedure. That requires a complementary amendment.

Governments often give a standard response to any suggestion. They say that the time of Parliament would be wasted and that the business of the House and the Government would be slowed down by the consideration of minor procedural or technical changes. That is not a substantial argument and, when changes are significant, Parliament must be given the opportunity to consider them. We must also consider what is or is not significant.

There was a good debate in Committee in which the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) moved excellent amendments on orders. He said:

"It is clearly in the interests of good government that we should have the most thorough parliamentary scrutiny. That is not just in the interests of Back Benchers of whatever party, but is in the interests of the Executive, provided that the Opposition do not cause inordinate delay or unreasonable instruction."

When he wound up the debate, he said:

"Given the strong feeling on both sides of the Committee that we want the fullest possible scrutiny, I ask the Department to give the fullest possible consideration on Report to whether aspects of

secondary legislation could be given fuller parliamentary scrutiny. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 18 October 2001; c. 137-140.]

That was significant moment. On the basis that a Minister would, on Report, take the opportunity to repone the issue, a Labour Member said that he would withdraw his amendment. However, the Government have not done what he suggested. The Minister has merely told us that he will reject our amendments. We must take that fact seriously.

It was an extraordinary moment, because I do not recall a similar instance in any Standing Committee on which I have served. A Labour Member sought to withdraw an amendment, but I said that we should not and insisted on a Division. Everyone who had spoken in favour of the amendment, including the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North, had to vote against it. That was no doubt an interesting experience for all the Labour Members concerned.

We are considering amendments that are so complex and diverse that I am sure that we shall have a long debate on this group. However, I wish to comment on the definition of sustainable development.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Before the hon. Gentleman moves on to his next point, will he consider the point about urgency? I have considerable sympathy for what he says about parliamentary scrutiny. It is fundamental and, if I catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope to speak to one of the new clauses that touches on the subject. However, the need for the Government to be able to act with extreme urgency is a real issue. I can think of circumstances in the past when the Government had to act against goods that had not previously been subject to controls but, if they had been exported, could have affected the lives and well-being of British forces. Does he accept that, under those circumstances, the Government must act and must be seen to act immediately? It would be difficult to support any provision that would prevent them from being able to do that. Will he explain why my view of his amendment is misplaced?

Mr. Key: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that interesting and instructive intervention. The House would be very interested in hearing from him how he resolved such problems when he was a Foreign Office Minister. Clearly Governments face such problems, so perhaps he could tell us how they responded when he was a Minister. My contention is that they can always find a way of doing something. In emergencies, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence might be able to act under the royal prerogative.

Emergency legislation is available to the Government and they can use it without the need to return to the House. However, it would help the debate if the hon. Gentleman, who has considerable experience on this matter, explained what happened in, say, the case of Sierra Leone—where there might have been such examples—or Rwanda. I look forward to hearing from him later.

I do not want to hog the Floor, because many Members wish to speak on this complex subject. I have explained why I think that we should press our amendment. The Government have failed to come forward with any further suggestions despite the invitation of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North to do so. I shall listen with great interest to the remainder of the debate,

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Technically the debate on this group of amendments is taking place on the question of whether new clause 1 be read a Second time. I will call the hon. Gentleman to move amendment (a) formally at the appropriate time.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am pleased to take part in this debate on an important Bill. I enthusiastically support it except in one respect. I wish to speak to amendments Nos. 32, 33 and 34. Amendments No. 32 and 33 deal with the same theme, but amendment No. 34 is slightly different in its purpose.

Amendments Nos. 32 and 33 would bring our legislation automatically into line with the European directive on sustainable development. The gap between the EU directive and the Bill derives from the fact that the Bill does not cover sustainable development whereas the EU code of guidance does. My amendments would ensure that, if the code of guidance is changed, it would automatically be incorporated into British law. If, with our consent, the EU thought that other grounds existed to make it necessary to forbid the sale of arms or other services, we would not need to introduce primary legislation in the House.

Amendment No. 34 would simply ensure that sustainable development is covered by the Bill. The Minister owes us an explanation—*[Interruption.]* If the Minister will listen, I shall repeat my view that he owes us the explanation that was not forthcoming either from the Secretary of State on Second Reading or from other Ministers in Committee. We need to know why sustainable development as a ground for banning an export was dropped from the Bill.

In an earlier phase of Government thinking, both the EU code of guidance and the Bill agreed that sustainable development should be a consideration. It was accepted that we should not give approval to activities that would increase poverty, and that provision was in the Bill. However, without explanation the Government removed it from the Bill, which means that the export of arms and inappropriate technology cannot be banned on the basis of sustainable development. That is odd.

2 pm

My central point relates to what the Minister said in Committee. In trying to allay suspicions about why sustainable development was not included in the Bill, he said:

"We have always made it clear that our national criteria and the EU code of conduct on arms exports, which we played a key role in drafting... would remain the basis for export licensing decisions."

I do not understand how that can be so when it is only that which is explicitly banned in the schedule which can be the grounds for stopping exports.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is also difficult to understand the Minister's reasoning when the EU code of conduct for arms export is not legally binding, so no Government will be bound by it anyway?

Tony Worthington: Yes, that is absolutely the case. The code of conduct is simply guidance. The Minister

[Tony Worthington]

said in Committee that if the Government were to ignore sustainable development when making a decision, that could be subject to judicial review, but I doubt whether that is so.

The non-governmental organisations that are interested in this subject and form the United Kingdom working group on arms—Amnesty International, the British American Security Information Council, which is known as BASIC, International Alert, Oxfam and Saferworld—took legal advice on the Minister's comments. It asked whether he was right and the advice the group received from Matrix chambers was that he was wrong. Indeed, judicial review could be called for by a firm if an export is refused on the grounds of sustainable development because only those criteria that are set out in the schedule are relevant. Given that legal advice, which I can make available to him for no fee, I hope that he will reconsider his case.

The Minister also said in Committee:

"They are ignoring the fact that we signed up to the EU code of conduct. We shall not withdraw from it, and a future Government will have to be bound by clause 8(4)."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 17 July 2001; c. 47-48.]

That is not true. The code of conduct offers advice; it has no binding power. Will he also reconsider that, and bear in mind that it goes against Scott's sensible recommendation that the law should contain all such advice. He did not think that we should have to look to advice from elsewhere. He was clear about that.

I have one example in particular on which I should like the Minister to comment. The Department of Trade and Industry is considering an application by a British firm to supply Tanzania with $40 million of air traffic control radar equipment. As that has a substantial military component, it has to receive approval from the Department. The World Bank has condemned the proposal for being needlessly expensive and it says that what Tanzania needs could be obtained for $10 million. The proposal has also been turned down by the International Monetary Fund.

The UK has formed a relationship with Tanzania, one of the world's poorest countries, to help it to wipe out its huge debt. However, at the same time there is a risk that the Government will increase that debt by $40 million. If the criterion of sustainable development is not included in the Bill, that application could be approved, but if it is altered by my amendments, it could not be approved.

The inherent conflict must be causing problems in the Government. The Department for International Development is surely against the proposal because if the project goes ahead poverty would probably increase in Tanzania, so its support is inconceivable. It is also unlikely that the Treasury is in favour of the proposal. The idea of going to Dar es Salaam to negotiate debt reduction and then agreeing to something that adds $40 million to that debt does not sound like prudence, does it? So who does support the proposal, which has been around for a long time? It can only be the DTI.

I am suspicious because the sustainable development criterion has been removed from the Bill and without it we cannot be sure that poverty will be taken into account. I hope that the Minister can explain that omission and assure me that if he cannot alter the Bill today, he will do so in another place.

Dr. Tonge: Liberal Democrat Members broadly welcome the Government and Conservative new clauses and amendments in this group. We are also delighted that many of the issues that they address were raised by Liberal Democrat Members in our amendments in Committee. As the Minister rejected our amendments as unnecessary at the time, it is good to see them returning as Government amendments.

I want to speak to the amendments tabled by me, my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and the hon. Members for Moray (Angus Robertson) and for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). Amendment No. 36 deals with the need for the Bill to provide for thorough consideration of the cumulative impact of arms exports.

The Government's policy is that exports are assessed case by case. Although that is appropriate in most instances, there are situations in which it is vital that the Government assess the cumulative impact of arms exports on a country or region. The need for such an assessment is especially acute when considering the implications of exports for sustainable development, which I shall speak about at some length, as the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) did.

No licence has ever been refused under the sustainable development criterion, largely because it is almost impossible to prove that any single licence will damage development. However, although it may be true that one licence taken in isolation may be of little concern, the combined effect of a number of licences could well have an adverse effect on development.

Perhaps it is necessary to spell this out again to the Minister, as we did in Committee. Developing countries often get into debt, and they are often encouraged to do so by the United Kingdom, which grants them export credit guarantees to buy arms. They spend far too much on the arms sector while spending far too little on health and education, which they neglect. As I said in Committee, education is crucial to the economic and overall development of any country. Development issues have been neglected because of spending on arms. Although one export may not highlight that fact, a series of exports may do so.

A series of exports may be a factor also when evaluating the impact of arms exports on a particular region. Perhaps one export of arms will not have an immediate impact on the country to which it is made, but it may affect overall regional stability. It is therefore crucial that the Bill provides for the consideration of the cumulative effect.

Perhaps the Minister will refer us to other provisions in the Bill, or to other schedules, guidance or other criteria, all of which can be so confusing. If the issue is addressed in all those places, why can we not simply state in the Bill how to address it? I do not know what Ministers are running away from. A provision requiring an examination of the cumulative impact of arms sales would make it so much simpler to interpret the Bill's intent.

On amendment No. 38, I understand the Minister's point on the desirability of substituting the words "mass destruction" for

"development, production or use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons."

However, as recent events have shown, a weapon of mass destruction could encompass almost anything. I therefore believe that we have to be careful when addressing

that issue. Perhaps we should be legislating for the possibilities that we can understand and not for any old thing that may take the fancy of future terrorists. I ask the Minister to reflect on that issue.

Amendment No. 39 takes us back to sustainable development—however defined—which is my favourite subject, and the favourite subject of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie. Yesterday, we had a very interesting debate in the House on the definition of sustainable development and on whether we should accept the Brundtland definition or the Government's own definition in the International Development Bill. Nevertheless, whichever definition we choose, the Bill surely must address the issue.

In the Export Control Bill, sustainable development is the only one of the eight consolidated criteria that the Government will consider before granting an export licence that is not included in the schedule of purposes for export control. Instead, the sustainable development criterion is referred to indirectly in the clause on guidance. In Committee, however, the Minister said:

"The Bill confirms and underlines the status of consolidated criteria, all aspects of which are important."

He also said that the Bill had been so structured as

"a matter of clarity and convenience".

We believe that that sends the very clear political message that the Government do not regard protecting sustainable development as of equal importance to the other purposes. The Minister said that the Bill says it all, but in his statements he has clearly excluded sustainable development as a purpose of equal importance.

The omission of sustainable development was raised in Committee. As the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie said, legal advice has been taken from Matrix chambers by a group of non-governmental organisations. I prefer to read out the relevant sections of the advice that we have received. It is important that we have that advice on the record as it has been given, because I could not put it in the correct legal terms if I tried to paraphrase it.

2.15 pm

The advice identifies three reasons why it is important to include sustainable development in the schedule of purposes. It states that the purposes can be changed only under the affirmative resolution procedure, so a Government could change them only with prior parliamentary approval, whereas the guidance can be changed without reference to Parliament other than it being informed at some unspecified time after the event. The DTI has stated that sustainable development will be protected as it is one of the criteria in the EU code of conduct on arms exports, and in Committee the Minister said:

"Even if a future Government tried to withdraw guidance issues under clause 8"—

which, post-Committee, has become clause 7—

"the EU criteria would continue to apply".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 17 July 2001; c. 47.]

However, Matrix chambers advises that, on the contrary,

"it would be hard to maintain this argument in the face of an express decision to remove the Code from the guidance"

especially as

"even at the EU level the Code does not have legal force."

That is most elegantly put.

Secondly, as an export order or transfer order can be made only for a purpose as elaborated in the schedule, excluding sustainable development from the schedule means that an order could not be made for the purpose of sustainable development. Our advice states:

"However much other matters have to be taken into account, they cannot justify making an order for a purpose which is not listed in the Schedule."

That means that it would not be possible to introduce specific secondary legislation under the Bill to control more tightly exports that could hamper sustainable development, whereas, for example, the Government could introduce orders laying out a more detailed definition of what constitutes internal repression, or any of the other purposes in the schedule. Thirdly, the current arrangement of including sustainable development only under guidance does not satisfy the recommendation of the Scott report that any guidelines or guidance issued by the Government must operate inside the law, not alongside it.

In conclusion, the legal advice suggests that removing sustainable development from the schedule places it in a weaker position than other criteria under law. The omission denies a future Secretary of State the power to introduce controls to protect sustainable development, even if he or she wants to do so. It also means that he or she could remove sustainable development altogether as a consideration, with minimal parliamentary oversight. I thank the House for allowing me to read that advice, as it is important that it is on the record.

We should not have to keep on spelling out the importance of sustainable development. Yesterday, the House debated the International Development Bill: sustainable development, whatever definition is used, is central to that Bill and dear to the hearts of the Secretary of State for International Development and her junior Minister. That Bill was given its Second Reading without encountering any dissent from hon. Members, so it is abundantly clear that sustainable development is close to the hearts of all parties.

Sustainable development is on the face of the International Development Bill. If the Government believe in Departments working together, and if they believe in the joined-up government about which we hear so much, those words must appear on the face of the Export Control Bill, to ensure that no future Secretary of State can interpret the guidance in a different way and bypass crucial sustainable development.

Vera Baird (Redcar): I support the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington). I emphasise in particular my support for amendment No. 34 on sustainable development. I do not propose to repeat the arguments advanced by hon. Members on both sides of the House in respect of that amendment; instead, I will make two minor further points.

It is my view—I invite the Minister to consider it—that the existence of the words "sustainable development" in the consolidated criteria, together with the fact that sustainable development is the only one of the consolidated criteria that is left out of the statutory schedule, make it next to impossible to imply into the schedule a power to legislate to protect sustainable development. It is all too clear that it

[Vera Baird]

has been deliberately, obviously and openly omitted. I suggest that seeking to imply it back in by an indirect mechanism will not work.

I ask the Minister to note that that is not only the view of Matrix chambers, well known and important as it is. It is also the view of the researcher who produced the paper in connection with the schedule, which is in the Library. It states that if there is not a reference to sustainable development in, then it is wholly out and cannot be implied in. The researcher says that the schedule sets out the purposes of export control in legislation, and it limits controls to those purposes and no others.

There is also the argument—it is exactly the argument advanced by the Minister—that is now propounded in support of amendment No. 34. My hon. Friend put it forward against amendment No. 38. He talked about that amendment setting out a list of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and that being a dangerous course because if such a list is put into the Bill, anything that is left out cannot be covered. That argument applies exactly to leaving out sustainable development from the list in schedule 4.

I do not like the term "hoist by one's own petard", and it is not appropriate in this instance, but will my hon. Friend seriously reconsider the matter and provide an explanation? If he will not seriously reconsider the position, why is the obvious need for the term "sustainable development" to appear in legislation not to be recognised? It is clearly the Government's intention to have regard to it. They have put themselves in an inextricably complex position. The simple way out is to add the phrase to the schedule.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Many of the key points have already been made by Members on both sides of the House, so I will not delay the House. I shall merely make a few additional points.

I speak in support of the Conservative amendments, which are important and echo a theme that ran throughout our discussions in Committee. Whatever our views about the arms trade and necessity for controls—there are different views about those matters—parliamentary scrutiny is essential. Later, we shall discuss the core issue of prior scrutiny. In the absence of prior scrutiny, the point has been made by the Members representing all three parties that were represented in Committee that there would be considerable merit in escalating the level of parliamentary scrutiny generally. It was thought that the negative procedure is too weak, and where possible it should be replaced with delayed action; and where there is delayed action, it should be replaced with affirmative action. That is the substance of the Conservative amendment, which is a useful one, and I hope that the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) will pursue it.

I move on to cumulative effects, which are taken up by amendment No. 36. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) made the point well. The current crisis underlines the necessity for having such criteria built into legislation. We are on the brink of at least one new arms race between India and Pakistan. Under current proposals, every export application would be considered individually. However, the problem when there is an arms race is knowing precisely when the cumulative effect is getting out of control.

An individual contract taken in isolation may be beneficial or neutral in its impact, but the exporting country might want to say that the point was being reached where the arming of Pakistan or India, or both, was getting out of control. The cumulative effect is what we must consider.

Similarly, the economic environment is changing rapidly. If there is a major economic shock leading to falling commodity prices, the effects of deteriorating international economic conditions will quickly undermine the conditions under which, for example, the heavily indebted poor countries have had debt relief. The position of many western hemisphere countries, including those in Latin America, is precarious. Only yesterday, I saw figures showing that the debt service to export ratio of many of those countries is close to what it was before the defaults of the 1980s. Adverse international economic conditions could well precipitate a crisis in both groups of countries. If that is the case, we need to consider not just individual export contracts in isolation, but the overall effect of large volumes of arms exports going through the process and destabilising countries' economies. The cumulative impact therefore needs to be built into the language of the Bill.

We have had a detailed exposition of the legal advice on sustainable development that is now available, but was not available in Committee. "Sustainable development" has become a buzz phrase. I was involved in writing the Brundtland report, so I have a vested interest in its interpretation of sustainable development. The key point is not whether or not we accept that definition, but that sustainable development is becoming institutionalised. The International Development Bill builds sustainable development into our legislation. We have passed the point at which it is simply an issue to be discussed by people involved in development; it is now becoming part of public law, and should be recognised as such.

The core point about sustainable development is that if, in future, Ministers wish to introduce export controls on the grounds of sustainable development, they will not be able to do so under current legislation; there are no powers for such action. If, on the other hand, they were succeeded by other Ministers who had little interest in the subject or, indeed, held it in contempt, those Ministers could simply dismiss any sustainable development criteria with perfunctory parliamentary scrutiny. Sustainable development should therefore be built into the Bill. It is inexcusable that the Government should have difficulty with that phrase; indeed, it is inexplicable. I suspect that someone in the Department decided that they did not want woolly-minded environmentalists getting in the way of hard business decisions on arms exports, and decided to strike sustainable development from the Bill. Having done so, they have landed the Minister not only with political, but legal, problems. I hope that he will think about that again.

Tony Worthington: Is not the situation even worse than that? Sustainable development was included in the draft Bill, but the Government decided that it should not become a ground on which exports were banned. In fact, the European Union code of guidance on sustainable development is utterly worthless because it cannot be

taken into account at all as the result of the Government changing their mind between the draft Bill and the present Bill.

Dr. Cable: The hon. Gentleman makes the point eloquently and better than I did. I sincerely hope that the Minister will listen to his own Back Benchers. He may feel that we are creating difficulties for the sake of doing so; I assure him that we are not. I am sure that he will hear strong, sincere opinions from them, and I hope that he will take account of them.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I always find the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) convincing; perhaps he should not have been quite so modest. I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington). Indeed, I was persuaded to put my name to amendments Nos. 32, 33 and 34, which he and my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) tabled. Echoing the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), it is important that the matter is aired.

I raise that with some trepidation because, whenever I am puzzled or in intellectual difficulty, almost invariably I go to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), the Minister for advice. Almost without exception, he removes my doubts. I am sure that that reputation will be consolidated today.

It is in that questioning mode that I express to my hon. Friend the great concern that exists about the sustainable development issue in the context of a Bill that is otherwise extremely welcome. We are seeking to help my hon. Friend remove what seems, in the absence of any other explanation, to be a flaw.

2.30 pm

Sustainable development is extremely important. The spirit of the Scott report suggested that Scott was far from happy, because in his view the purpose of export controls was not set out in legislation. That is what the amendments seek to achieve. I am a little surprised that that needs to be done from the Back Benches. From the draft Bill that was considered previously, our understanding was that sustainable development would be part of the final Bill to be put before the House. I am not entirely sure why it was taken out of the eight criteria considered by the Government.

Admirably, all the other export criteria in the draft Bill, such as the need not to export weapons that could be used for internal repression or human rights abuses, have been included in the final Bill. That is both right and welcome, but it raises the question why there is at present a gap between those on the Front Bench and many hon. Members on both sides in respect of sustainable development.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie explained clearly that if we accept the Bill as it stands, we are being asked to rely not on legislation—not on the schedules—but on guidance. We have seen in the past where guidance has taken us, not least during the Scott inquiry. We want to move forward more positively than that.

Under the Bill, if there were a change in policy, Parliament would not have a say. That becomes particularly worrying when we consider that we may not always—optimistic though I am about the future—have Ministers of whatever political party who are of the calibre of my hon. Friend. If those Ministers change their minds, where does that leave us in terms of legislation? Not, I suspect, where we want to be. As has been pointed out, the EU code is entirely advisory. We want to make matters clearer and the provision mandatory.

Reference has been made to the excellent debate in the House yesterday on the Second Reading of the International Development Bill. Not only is sustainable development at the heart of that admirable Bill, but it was mentioned time after time in speeches in that debate. Most importantly, sustainable development appears in the Bill. It is not for me to speak for the Department for International Development, which we all agree is an excellent Department, but there seems to be a hiatus between the thinking of the Department of Trade and Industry as reflected in the Bill, what we heard in the debate yesterday, and what appears in the International Development Bill. In support of my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie, I am seeking to close that gap.

The Government have been highly persuasive in assuring the House of their commitment to sustainable development, but it seems contradictory that sustainable development is the only one of the consolidated national and European Union export criteria that is not in the Bill.

I read carefully what my hon. Friend the Minister had to say in Committee, through which he piloted the Bill with great confidence. He said:

> "We have always made it clear that our national criteria and the EU code of conduct on arms exports, which we played a key role in drafting, accepted in full and consolidated last autumn, would remain the basis for export licensing decisions."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 17 July 2001; c. 47.]

That is excellent, but we would still like to see it in the Bill. In that same column, my hon. Friend gave some legal arguments. As we have heard today, however, those appear to have been contradicted by Matrix chambers. Many of us would, perhaps, give more weight to Matrix chambers than to, say, Matrix Churchill. In any event, that legal definition that I put to my hon. Friend must be clarified today, because the absence of such a definition would detract quite unnecessarily from what is otherwise an extremely comprehensive and positive Bill.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I apologise to the Minister for coming into the Chamber mid-way through his speech. I can only say in my defence that I have come hotfoot from having some dental work done. I earnestly hope that the novocaine has now worn off and that I shall not slur my words. I am conscious that a number of hon. Members wish to speak in this debate, so I shall adopt that most worrying of parliamentary phrases: "I intend to keep my remarks quite brief." I shall make only three points.

First, it is legitimate to register concern about the considerable degree of rewriting of the Bill that has taken place in a comparatively short space of time. As a broad rule of thumb, it does not inspire confidence when a Department suddenly has to turn round and rewrite so much of its Bill so late in the day. That gives a number of us pause for thought, and it is worth placing it on the record to reinforce the point that was made earlier on this side of the Chamber.

[Mr. Mark Francois]

Secondly, I share the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) about the further trend towards the erosion of the powers of parliamentary scrutiny and influence, be that through the ever-increasing stream of European directives and regulations with which Parliament has to deal, or through the growing tendency of Ministers to ask for powers which negate the requirement for future areas of policy in their domain to be approved by both Houses of Parliament. Our amendments simply seek to retain a greater degree of parliamentary scrutiny over important measures, and they are genuinely worthy of consideration on that basis.

Thirdly, I want to make a brief point about the industry that the regulation, as amended, would affect. The defence industry, which employs more than one third of a million people in this country, is—on one level at least—an important guarantor of our security. On a day when so many hon. Members are, quite rightly, wearing poppies, it is worth remembering that, had there not been a defence industry in 1940, this debate would not be taking place at all. I urge fellow hon. Members to keep that at the back, if not at the forefront, of their minds as we continue our deliberations this afternoon.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I want to speak briefly about the amendments relating to sustainable development.

The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said that Members were present who were very experienced and knowledgeable in regard to these matters, and had taken an interest in them for some time. I have to say that I am not one of those Members; I am new to the Bill, and relatively new to this subject. It strikes me, however, that it is not necessary to think too long before reaching the obvious conclusion that it cannot be right to sell arms to countries that have no means of affording them other than depriving their own people of budgets that sustain the basics of life, such as health and education.

I wanted to speak because some of my constituents have expressed their concern to me. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will help me to explain to them why sustainable development is the only one of the consolidated national and European Union export criteria not to be included in the Bill. He has said that the question is unnecessary, having been fully addressed elsewhere in the Bill; but if that is the case, why not underline it by including sustainable development in the schedule of purposes? That would remove any doubt, it would wipe away any concerns, and I think that it would answer questions raised by other Members about the difference between the draft Bill and this one. I feel that, of necessity, the concept of sustainable development must embrace that of the cumulative impact. The latter is surely implicit in the former.

Perhaps my hon. Friends can also help me to explain to my constituents how we can rely on the EU code of conduct when it has no legal force. That, in fact, is one of our reasons for proceeding with the Bill. The Government have done an awful lot by helping to drive the code through when none existed, but we are going further today, and I think we need to go further than the code of conduct.

I shall ask a final question. If an export or transfer order can be made only for the purposes elaborated explicitly in the schedule, why are we excluding sustainable development from it? Does it not follow that we shall be unable to make such an order?

I should be very grateful if my hon. Friend could help me explain those points to my constituents.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I shall briefly reiterate the position of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, the party of Wales.

We consider this to be an important Bill that tightens up an important area of legislation, and in general we support it, especially because it takes on and responds to so many points made in the Scott inquiry. We also consider it to be a significant step forward because it tries to prevent the transfer of arms by United Kingdom companies and citizens to conflict or human rights crisis zones. We welcome the closing of loopholes, as described by the Minister, and the enhanced scrutiny procedures.

I hope that the Minister will take what I say in the spirit in which it is meant—one of general support. I think that my comments are in line with the overwhelming view of the majority of those who have spoken so far. We in the SNP and Plaid Cymru agree that a number of factors have been identified which, if not addressed, could undermine the Bill's effectiveness. We share the concern felt by many in the House and elsewhere that the draft Bill's reference to the need to consider the consequences of arms exports on sustainable development has been dropped from the final legislation. That point has been made repeatedly this afternoon. That is why the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and I have joined the hon. Members for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) in tabling amendments Nos. 36, 38 and 39.

2.45 pm

Apart from sustainable development, all other export criteria, such as the need not to export weapons that could be used for internal repression or human rights abuses, have been included in the Bill, and rightly so. The Government have justified the omission on the ground that a new provision that gives the Secretary of State powers to issue guidance for consideration during the licensing process covers development issues. However—this point has been made, but it is crucial—although Parliament would have to be fully consulted when changes to the schedule of purposes were made, no such requirement exists for changes to the guidance. It is conceivable that, in the lifetime of the legislation, reference to the need to consider the impact of arms exports on sustainable development could be removed by the Government at any time, without any consideration by Parliament.

Sustainable development as a concept is already becoming recognised in United Kingdom legislation. The International Development Bill received its Second Reading in the House of Commons yesterday. Many hon. Members in the Chamber today who were present yesterday will know that that Bill explicitly refers to and defines sustainable development. I agree with the point made in yesterday's proceedings by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) that the Brundtland definition

of sustainable development would have been preferable. None the less a sustainable measure is included in that Bill.

During the Committee stage of the Bill, the Government repeatedly stressed the importance of the issue. It seems contradictory that sustainable development is the only one of the consolidated criteria not in the Bill. I endorse the point made by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) with regard to Tanzania. The schedule of purposes should contain explicit reference to the need to ensure that arms transfers do not have any adverse effect on the economy or sustainable development of a country.

Government policy is based on assessing licence applications on a case-by-case basis. Although that is appropriate in most circumstances, there are concerns—we have heard many of them this afternoon—that that approach may be too narrow when considering the implications of arms transfers on sustainable development. One contract may not be significant on its own, but if part of a pattern of large-scale procurement its may contribute to a cumulative undermining of the development potential of the recipient state. That should be taken into account in the licensing process.

In the Bill as currently drafted, sustainable development is the only one of the eight consolidated criteria, which the Government consider before granting an export licence, not to be included in the schedule. It is instead referred to indirectly in the clause. That is despite the fact that, according to the Minister:

"The Bill confirms and underlines the status of consolidated criteria, all aspects of which are important."

Earlier, he stated that the Bill had been so structured as

"a matter of clarity and convenience."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 17 July 2001; c. 47.]

Indeed, it sends a clear political message that the Government do not regard protecting sustainable development as of equal importance to the other purposes, such as preventing internal repression.

The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) made many valuable points about the issue of scrutiny. I suggest to him and to any other hon. Members who are interested in the matter that they have a second look at the scrutiny regime in Sweden, which is of particular interest. The Swedes, who brought in legislation not that long ago, have an interesting principle on which to base scrutiny procedure:

"The overriding principle dictating licensing policy is that licences may only be granted if there are security or defence policy reasons for doing so and it does not conflict with Sweden's foreign policy."

Interestingly, it also includes, implicitly, that export licences should not be granted if the recipient state

"is involved in an armed conflict with another state

is involved in an international conflict that may lead to armed conflict

is subject to internal armed disturbances

has perpetrated extensive and serious violations of human rights."

That is particularly relevant when we consider the defence systems and equipment international exhibition that was held in this country on 10 September this year. A number of repressive regimes and countries fighting on opposing sides in Africa were invited to that event. There were representatives from countries currently involved in the conflict in the so-called Democratic Republic of Congo, including representatives from Angola and Uganda. I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to explain whether the updated legislation would allow exports to such countries to continue. I, and many other hon. Members, would be concerned if arms from the United Kingdom could be used in such conflicts.

Amendment No. 36 goes back to the case-by-case assessment outlined earlier. I welcome the fact that the Minister signalled in his opening remarks that that would be taken into consideration. In the spirit of cross-party co-operation, I hope to get some clarification on why that amendment is not acceptable.

Amendment No. 38 deals with the question of different weapons technologies. I am rather confused and would welcome an explanation from the Minister.

Nigel Griffiths: I can perhaps help end some of the confusion. Does the hon. Gentleman know that he is wrong to say that sustainable development is the only criterion not included in the schedule?

Angus Robertson: I bow to the Minister's wisdom, but that does not detract from the case for including it in the legislation. I am happy to continue debating that if the Minister thinks that it is important.

The Minister argued that amendment No. 38 should not be incorporated because it highlights existing and not future or emerging technologies. That is rather confusing because such a proposition would affect much if not all legislation. I do not claim to have a crystal ball that would enable us to produce legislation to anticipate all possible future technological and weapons systems development, but surely we should deal with existing threats and be open to updating legislation as necessary.

I hope that the Minister will respond to the points that have been made by hon. Members from all the parties that have participated in the debate. I look forward to hearing the Minister deal with many of our concerns.

Mr. Lloyd: Some hon. Members have mentioned sustainable development, and I want to put a simple question to the Minister to which I hope that he will respond later.

The House is in favour of sustainable development being caught within the concept of this legislation. Hon. Members have pointed out that the EU code—I have some responsibility for the promulgation of that code—is not legally binding and was never accepted as being so at European level.

Is my hon. Friend the Minister convinced that if sustainable development were used as a criterion for refusal of a licence, it would stand up against judicial review instigated by an exporter facing such refusal? That is a fundamental consideration. Ministers are entitled to protection in using a criterion for the refusal of licences and to know that they can do so without others seeking recourse to the law. Like hon. Members on both sides of the House, I am not yet convinced that it would not be better for the provision to be both extant and in the Bill, so that it is clear not only to the House but to those who implement the legislation and are subject to it.

I turn to amendment (a), which was tabled by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). He asked me a little about my experience of Sierra Leone. My recollection is

[Mr. Lloyd]

that I had very little to do with arms going to Sierra Leone—despite my reputation over the years. It is rather ironic if the purpose of the amendment is to allow the Government to act in a way that is consistent with the spirit of the legislation—the establishment of a licensing system that not only allows the legitimate export of arms, but controls and prevents arms sales that we do not want to occur—because there are some circumstances in which it is necessary for the Government to act, not simply quickly, but effectively and immediately.

It is true that, as United Nations embargoes would be implemented by Order in Council, they would fall outside the provisions of the Bill. However, there are other circumstances to consider, such as the present conflict in Afghanistan. Whatever hon. Members' views on that, it was not foreseen well before the event and could not easily have been planned for.

I can think of other such circumstances. After a period of prolonged but uneasy peace, Ecuador and Peru edged in a matter of days towards war. I also recall the situation in Indonesia with respect to East Timor. I went to East Timor for the referendum on independence. The European Union was faced with a mounting crisis in Indonesia and in relations between Indonesia and East Timor, and at very short notice imposed an embargo on weapons sales to Indonesia.

There are times, therefore, when it is necessary to allow Governments to act instantly. It is right and proper that there should be parliamentary control—in many instances I would be at the forefront of those saying, "Let's not trust Ministers"—but amendment (a) would shackle the Government, preventing them acting in ways consistent with foreign policy objectives and maintaining the security of our fighting troops.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will resist pleas to alter the definition of weapons of mass destruction. He is right in the example that he cited. Technology moves very quickly and we may not be able to foresee future weapons of mass destruction. It would be ridiculous for us to define downwards our capacity to control such technology, which we ought to be restricting. I therefore urge him to leave the words "weapons of mass destruction" in the Bill.

3 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) apologised for being delayed at the dentist. I apologise for being delayed while working in my office and for therefore following on television the speeches of the Minister and of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who courteously referred to the amendments that I moved on 18 October and to some of the remarks that I made at the time.

It is true that I said that thorough parliamentary scrutiny is in the interests of good government, and that that is in the interests of not only Back Benchers of whatever party but the Executive—provided that it is not an opportunity for inordinate delay or unreasonable obstruction. I hasten to emphasise the words "unreasonable obstruction", because it was not until I heard the hon. Member for Salisbury that I realised that *Hansard* had recorded me as saying "unreasonable instruction". May I say immediately that I absolve the Opposition from ever being guilty of unreasonable instruction? I have occasionally suspected that they had an unreasonable lack of instruction, but never unreasonable instruction. He also referred to my comments in withdrawing the amendment, when I said that I hoped that my hon. Friend the Minister would take account of the expressions from both sides of the House that the fullest scrutiny of secondary legislation was desirable.

However, the hon. Member for Salisbury did not quote what I said immediately before that, when I indicated that, in relation to the negative resolution procedure, the Minster made the point in responding to my probing amendment that this procedure would deal purely with technical matters, such as minor changes in detailed lists. That seemed to me to be perfectly reasonable.

On clause 3(2), I recognised that, in the case of emergencies, the delayed affirmative procedure might be the most appropriate procedure, particularly since the Minister had indicated that it would relate mostly to technical matters. I say to the hon. Member for Salisbury that I cannot see the advantage of trying to use something like royal prerogatives in these circumstances, as the procedure to which I have referred would be preferable. On 18 October, I stated that my amendment was intended purely as a probing amendment and that it was my intention to withdraw it. I felt that the Minister had answered a number of points satisfactorily and my amendment, as worded, was not appropriate to be pressed. I was slightly disappointed that some Opposition Members felt it appropriate to seek to deny me the opportunity to withdraw the amendment.

The amendment tabled today by the hon. Member for Salisbury still does not take sufficient account of the Minister's response and raises the suspicion that, in this case, inordinate delay and unreasonable obstruction might be the intention behind it. The hon. Member for Salisbury showed good judgment on many occasions in Committee; I compliment him on his good judgment if he feels that his own party has a vested interest in the position of Opposition parties for some considerable time into the future. However, inordinate delay and unreasonable obstruction may be in the interests of Opposition sometimes, but they are not in the interests of good government. Therefore, I would not be proposing to vote for the amendment.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I have not contributed so far to discussions on the Bill, although I had some part in its genesis when I served on the Foreign Affairs Committee, which considered the matter at an early stage and formed part of the Quadripartite Committee, on which I served for a short time.

I agree with almost everything that the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) said; many of us have a great deal of respect for what he did when in office. One of the principal reasons for that was his advocacy of the EU code of conduct, which was an important advance. But, as he said, it has no force in law. It is a matter of agreement between the EU member states, but it does not fall within our statutes. That is why it is so important that we get the Bill right.

I wish to refer to the question of whether sustainable development should be a criterion and whether it should be in the table in the schedule. The Minister will have some difficulty in persuading many of us that it should

not be there, for this reason. First, the argument against it being included might be that it fettered the discretion of Ministers. Clearly, it does not; it extends the discretion of Ministers to apply what Members on both sides of the House have agreed is a desirable criterion.

The second reason might be that the criterion is otiose because the matter is covered elsewhere. If that argument is to be pursued—that the measure is unnecessary because the guidance can be relied upon entirely to give Ministers the discretion they need to make decisions without fear of judicial review or challenge in the courts—we must ask what the court's interpretation of the absence of that criterion from the list would be and whether it is more likely that it would evince a challenge from those who had had an export licence refused on those specific grounds, if it were on the face of the Bill or if it were not. My answer to that, not as a lawyer but as a layman, would be that it is inevitable that a court would be more easily persuaded that the Minister was acting beyond the express powers given in the legislation, if he was relying on guidance notes that were not on the face of the Bill than he would if he were relying on an express commitment and an inclusion in the schedule.

Therefore I believe that the Minister needs to persuade the House, at the conclusion of the debate, that there is a good reason for not including that criterion in the list. It seems to me that many Members on both sides of the Chamber are not yet persuaded of that fact, and if that is the case he would be well advised to accept the advice that has been proffered, not least by some hon. Members on his side of the Chamber.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I welcome the Bill. It is an important new weapon in our armoury to restrain the merchants of death. However, having read the Standing Committee report, I am in confusion as to exactly who and what would be captured by the scope of the technical assistance provisions, so I should like to speak, if I may, to Government amendment No. 4. If you will bear with me for a short while, Madam Deputy Speaker, I should like to use a concrete example of a situation where I believe that we would all like arms dealing to be captured, but I am not quite sure whether it would be, and would appreciate the Minister's advice.

I welcomed the assurances that the Minister gave in Committee that the Bill had sufficient scope to cover what some might call mercenary activities of United Kingdom nationals, but which might more broadly be called military support activities of UK nationals abroad; I very much look forward to the long overdue Green Paper on mercenaries. Some doubts were nevertheless raised that the courts might not uphold orders placed on such nefarious people, as the language of the Bill is not sufficiently precise. Therefore it is important in this debate to state that it is the will of Parliament that, as far as possible, such traffickers in death be captured by the Bill.

At this time of the terrible conflict in Afghanistan, it is important that we do not forget other regions of the world where irresponsible arms dealing, against the will of the international community, is leading to death and destruction. I am thinking particularly of the terrible civil war in the Congo, where other African states that should know better are systematically looting a country that is already on its knees. Zimbabwe is one of the vultures at that feast—or rather, Robert Mugabe's henchmen are profiting while that war bankrupts their own country.

It is a little known fact that the main arms supplier to Zimbabwe and its adventure in the Congo is a UK resident, who runs his huge business empire from the royal county of Berkshire—from genteel Ascot and Windsor, to be precise. I should like to use his example to illustrate why the House should support the Bill, and to place in context my request for clarification from the Minister of the Bill's precise scope.

Outside the sports pages, hon. Members would not find much reference to that gentleman, Mr. John Bredenkamp, in the UK press. With a fortune estimated at £400 million, he has deep pockets, expensive libel lawyers and a dangerous reputation. He is also extremely clever and careful, and does not readily leave end-user certificates lying around. Therefore it is safer for the press to chronicle his handling of sports stars—including Ernie Els and Francois Pienaar among many others—through his sports agency, Masters International, than his handling of arms. However, Mr. Bredenkamp has long had form of a distinctly unsporting kind, and he is exactly the sort of person based in this country whom the Bill should tackle.

A former tobacco farmer, captain of the Rhodesian rugby team and member of Rhodesian special forces, Mr. Bredenkamp was a key figure in sanctions busting, so long ago, for Ian Smith, and when the regime changed he quite simply changed his allegiance. In 1994, the activities of Mr. Bredenkamp's then company, Casalee, were exposed by a courageous Channel 4 "Despatches" programme.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are actually discussing, in this group of amendments and the new clause, the general restriction on purposes of control orders. It may be more appropriate for the speech that he is currently delivering to be made at Third Reading.

Paul Farrelly: I wanted, Madam Deputy Speaker, to deal with the scope of the orders that might be made under the technical assistance regime, which I understood to be part and parcel of the Government amendments.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am concerned about the extent of the detail that the hon. Gentleman is giving.

Paul Farrelly: In that case, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall try to skip some of the detail, and get to the nub of my argument.

The activities of Casalee have been well documented but, although he denies it, Mr. Bredenkamp is one of the major suppliers of arms to Mr. Mugabe. He is a key backer of ZANU-PF, and of a potential successor to Robert Mugabe. His companies are reliably believed to have supplied arms and equipment used by the Zimbabwean army, the Interahamwe, and the Mai-Mai tribesmen in eastern Congo. Many of those arms subsequently have found their way back to war veterans, and have been used in attacks on white-owned farms.

In return, Mr. Bredenkamp has been a major beneficiary of Mr. Mugabe's largesse in Zimbabwe and the Congo. He is a major mover and shaker in southern Congo, and he has been awarded valuable diamond, cobalt and other mineral concessions. He has recently come to the attention of the United Nations panel investigating profiteering from the war in the Congo.

[Paul Farrelly]

My hon. Friend the Minister has rightly said that the Bill should complement international co-operation between the UK, Europe and the UN in curbing arms dealing in world trouble spots. However, the matter of the scope of the technical assistance provisions in the Bill is relevant in connection with the very clever way in which Mr. Bredenkamp has structured his African involvement.

Mr. Bredenkamp runs his master company, Breco Services, from Berkshire. His African activities are run through several separate companies based in Harare, in particular through one called ACS International. Mr. Bredenkamp therefore appears to break no UK laws, embargoes or restrictions—however formal or informal—by ostensibly keeping all his African arms-dealing activities offshore. Although UK policy is not to license arms sales to Zimbabwe, Mr. Bredenkamp is clearly able freely to subvert that policy.

I should be grateful for an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that the Department of Trade and Industry, by means of the Bill, will have the necessary powers, in conjunction with the Home Office and the Foreign Office, to investigate empires such as Mr. Bredenkamp's. I hope that it will use those powers to take such measures as are necessary to curb organisations that are structured in the same clever way.

I hope too that my hon. Friend the Minister will assure the House that the relationships between Mr. Bredenkamp and any similar organisation will also be allowed to be examined under the Bill, as will the role of any UK company, including British Aerospace, in the supply of arms and military logistics to world trouble spots. The House will remember the controversy regarding the sale of Hawk aircraft parts to Zimbabwe by British Aerospace.

Finally, there is one further twist with regard to Mr. Bredenkamp on which I should appreciate my hon. Friend's learned advice. Mr. Bredenkamp has rights of residence in the UK, but I understand that he is not a British passport holder. Instead, he holds Zimbabwean and Dutch passports. Is he caught under the definition of the Bill as a United Kingdom person who would then be subject to the technical assistance provisions?

I should appreciate advice on that question, as I am sure that the House would agree that the Bill should be able to rein in precisely those activities that I have described—activities that mean that merchants of death use our country as their base, to the detriment of peace and stability in the rest of the world.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I spoke on Second Reading in support of the Bill, and I am grateful for the opportunity to make some brief comments about Government amendments Nos. 39 and 44, which would remove direct reference to sustainable development from the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Minister said earlier that that reference was unnecessary because the issues connected with sustainable development were addressed in other parts of the Bill. I should welcome further reassurance that that is the case, but other hon. Members from all parties have emphasised their concerns and advocated that the Bill should expressly cover the matter of sustainable development.

Reference has also been made, and rightly, to yesterday's Second Reading of the International Development Bill. The question of sustainable development formed a central part of that debate, one of the features of which was the recognition that definitions of sustainable development were themselves subject to political debate and to change over time.

In the 1980s, the Brundtland report defined sustainable development as development that did not prejudice the ability of future generations to meet their needs. However, one of the issues that has arisen from international development debates is that, when we talk of sustainable development, we should also talk about economic development that allows the society involved to sustain itself for many years to come. So sustainable development is not a clear concept; it is itself subject to change.

3.15 pm

The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who speaks for the Opposition, said that it is necessary to balance the needs of the Government to be able to govern and take decisions with those of Parliament to provide effective scrutiny of the Government's actions. That important balance has to be struck, and it should concern us all, but this issue does not necessarily fit the schema of striking a balance between the Government and Parliament. I suggest that the balance that needs to be struck in considering how to refer to sustainable development is that between our ideals and aspirations and what is practicable and workable in the real world.

We should remember that the last time that a Bill to control arms exports was introduced in the House was 1939. Whatever legislation we pass today will need to last for a very long time, so we must at least consider whether terms that are not as robust as they might be to sustain changes in their definition over time perhaps need to be deleted from the Bill.

Some people will find it curious, perhaps even ironic, that we might remove reference to the adverse impact on sustainable development as a ground for restricting arms exports, while talking about introducing more joined-up thinking into government and while strengthening our commitment to sustainable development under the International Development Bill.

I have tried to consider both sides of the argument, and I may be minded to accept the Government amendments, but before doing so, I should like the Minister to give further assurances that the commitment to sustainable development runs as a golden thread through the Bill and the work of the DTI, the Department for International Development and the Treasury, as well as all our attempts to improve the condition of people across the world.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I must apologise for turning up late for this debate—unfortunately, in the best words of any film, I was unavoidably detained.

Having served on the Committee, I am interested in two important aspects of the Bill, the first of which is the way in which the long-term scrutiny will be carried out. We discussed the importance of timing at great length. What shall we do if the Government are unable to hit their targets in the scrutiny period? Assuming that 57 per cent. of the applications are considered and that the rest are not in the time allocated, how do we then manage to bring

into play the longer-term licence applications? That may be a problem because they cannot be considered retrospectively—people will have to look ahead.

Many of those issues will hinge on the movement of technology. We now discover that some companies' computer software can be bought for £5 in Hong Kong. That shows that technology develops extremely quickly in this country and throughout the world. One of the problems that must be considered is whether the amendments can be held up in law, given that we discovered in Committee that they cannot in many cases. Given the supersession of Europe, it is very difficult to understand how we as a Parliament can consider such matters in the longer term.

Longevity is central to the Bill; it needs to be sustainable for as long as possible. Although the Bill is overdue, it has been superseded by human rights and other legislation.

In Committee, we even discussed the export of cows in formaldehyde. I think that they should be exported, but that is a personal view. How does one give a licence for a work of art? For example, Greece seeks the return of the Elgin marbles, but could we scrutinise such an export licence in such way that the best interests of the United Kingdom remain at the forefront of people's minds?

Although many of the amendments have merit, it is up to Parliament to scrutinise each one of them so that we can police and monitor the Bill. Will the House have the time and the ability to scrutinise complicated issues so that they are examined properly? The answer is probably no. It worries me that the Government want to be able to pass measures as quickly as possible without their receiving the necessary scrutiny.

In Committee, the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) made an interesting point about East Timor and Hawk jets. I have not quite got to the bottom of the difference between a Hawk 100 and a Hawk 200, but would a licence cover the point that those jets are a dual-purpose piece of kit? The jet can be used as a trainer or as a fighter and bomber, and I do not understand how the House will be able to consider those points in the depth that is necessary for us to be able to take a decision. I am not an expert in chemistry but dual-purpose kit from chemicals is another of the biggest problems that we face. We have had our fingers burned so often that we need a usable and sustainable Bill that Governments will be able to stand by for a long time to come. If they cannot, that suggests that the Bill will be flawed even before it comes into force.

For the longer term, we need to consider the points that I have raised about technology, dual-purpose kit and the way in which licences are introduced. If we do not get the Bill right, we shall suffer for a long time and, especially, under European legislation. Such legislation will be draconian if we are not careful.

Mr. Key: The House has heard a number of firsts in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) may have been unavoidably detained, but he was a loyal attender in Standing Committee. He has scored a first. As far as I am aware of, he is the first person to have mentioned the export of works of art in the debate. I congratulate him. We should not forget that the Bill is also about the export of works of art.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) scored another first. He is a doughty man of Surrey, a good grammar school boy and he has made many contributions in the debate. However, it is absolutely astonishing that he should pop into the Chamber to say that he has been watching us on telly and to make a derogatory speech before popping back to watch us on telly again. If he is out there, let me tell him, "We are still at it. How's the tea break?" That was a first, and I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his sheer audacity.

However, the hon. Gentleman hit a nail on the head when he talked about unreasonable instructions and interventions. The point is that technical and minor provisions in the Bill matter most. There have been some brave words spoken on both sides, but those brave words might lead to lawyers' paradises if we are not careful. *[Interruption.]* Ah, I welcome the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North back to the Chamber. I am envious of his opportunity to take a tea break or whatever it may have been that detained him in his room.

The problem of defining the small print and the detail has been repeatedly mentioned. It is always a pleasure to hear from the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly). I used to read him assiduously when he was business editor of *The Independent on Sunday* and *The Observer*. I have a feeling that his case was a continuation of previous investigations. The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) put his finger on the button when he said that the problem was getting the balance right between the ideals and aspirations, and what is practical and workable.

The Minister must explain why sustainable development is not mentioned in the Bill when it was included in the draft version. I am going to throw him a lifeline: I suspect that the DTI has been framed by other Departments. The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) and I, as former Ministers, recognise when a Minister has been framed. I suspect that the Minister and his officials were told to remove the reference to sustainable development before other Departments realised that they, too, had a problem. It is tempting for the Opposition to row in with those who want to cause serious trouble, but I shall resist that if the Minister gives a credible explanation of why it is not mentioned.

It is important that the Minister recognises our disappointment in Committee when he did not give us a word of explanation for that decision, even though I made a gentle request for it when I said:

> "I should be very grateful for a brief explanation as to why that clause disappeared from the draft Bill".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 18 October 2001; c. 148.]

If the Minister can give us a convincing answer to that, I will be the first to be pleased because I recognise the Government's difficulty.

The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who has, I think, also caught an early plane back to the north, made an interesting point about the Swedish system. There are problems with it, because that system did not stop Sweden exporting fighter aircraft to South Africa as part of a multinational arms deal, so I am not sure that it has much to commend it.

[Mr. Key]

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) was a little wide of the mark, however, when he said in last night's debate that the answer lies in Brundtland. He stated:

"I am sure that the Minister is familiar with the Brundtland definition, which states that sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. That has been accepted as the standard international definition of sustainable development for many years."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 319.]

My goodness, if that is a legally watertight definition that the Government are expected to include in the Bill, I am in the wrong profession; I should definitely have been a lawyer. The Brundtland definition is full of aspiration and miles away from practicality. If the Government are being urged to adopt that, I have great sympathy with them.

In last night's debate on Second Reading of the International Development Bill, I read with great interest the explanatory notes that had been prepared by the Department for International Development. Paragraph 19 states:

"The terms 'poverty', 'sustainable development' and 'welfare' are not defined in the Bill. It is considered that to do so might reduce the United Kingdom's ability to offer assistance. Subsection (3) of clause 1 ensures that the Secretary of State will not be bound to take a view of sustainable development that is exclusively or excessively economic on the one hand or exclusively or excessively environmental on the other."

Clause 1(3) of that Bill states:

"'sustainable development' includes any development that is, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, prudent having regard to the likelihood of its generating lasting benefits for the population of the country or countries in relation to which it is provided."

It sounds as though the Secretary of State for International Development has had a chat with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as prudence was cited in the definition as an important reason why Ministers should or should not act. I can see why people believe that such a broad definition is not acceptable.

3.30 pm

Moreover, in reply to yesterday's debate, the Under-Secretary of State for International Development, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn)—whose credentials on the issue are surely impeccable—said:

"I think that we have to ensure that the concept"—

of sustainable development—

"is not captured either by those who take an entirely economic view of sustainable development or by those who see it principally as an environmental concern—something that I learned very forcefully when I was in Indonesia, where the economics of sustainable livelihoods in a forest community are about trying to balance those two sometimes competing demands. I think that clause 1(3) is not so much a definition as a safeguard against the narrowing of that concept by anyone who has a particular definition favouring one concept or the other."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 335.]

As I said, the Opposition are offering the Minister a lifeline. We do not wish to oppose new clause 1 or to support amendments that would tie his hands to a definition of sustainable development from which only lawyers could benefit and which would detract from the judgment of the relevant Secretary of State. The matter now rests very much with the Minister. The House is owed an explanation of why the Government left out the paragraph on sustainable development from the table to the schedule, and I hope that the Minister will be able to put us right.

Nigel Griffiths: One of the great pleasures of being a Minister is the opportunity to listen and respond to the many thoughtful and well-informed speeches made by colleagues who take a great interest in the issues under debate. We have heard a number of such speeches today. We have also heard comments expressing our constituents' concerns about these issues. I shall address some of the issues that have been raised in the debate, almost in the order in which they were raised.

Some hon. Members mentioned the time factor in the tabling of some of our amendments. I think that I have explained fairly clearly that, in Committee, certain aspects of the structure were unclear. Hon. Members suggested that the schedule should be applied to clauses 4 and 5. Taking those concerns on board with the Government's own concerns about the Bill's structure creating the risk of a loophole in the control powers, we concluded that it was necessary to amend the Bill as we are proposing in new clause 1.

There is no question of the Government trying to rush through amendments at short notice. I wrote to members of the Standing Committee to explain that the new clause had been tabled partly in response to concerns that were expressed in Committee. I believe that the new clause is a necessary simplification and clarification of the Bill.

I thank the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) for his kind offer of a lifeline. I shall not be taking him up on that offer, but I will allow him to save the lifeline for the Conservative party, which will have more need of it than I do. I also did not license the parachute that he mentioned in his opening remarks.

I want to make one thing very clear on sustainable development. This Government have done more than any previous Government to promote the interests of the third world, both by spearheading the international campaign to relieve third-world debt—which has had a tremendous impact—and by providing a lead in writing off debts. We have led the drive to ensure that the people of the third world have a right to health, education and freedom from poverty. It is with that in mind that I should like to deal with some of the comments that just do not stand up.

It is not true that sustainable development is not fully covered in the Bill. It is clearly included in the criteria against which applications are considered. It is not true that the Government cannot refuse an export licence on grounds that are not included in the schedule. I hope that my colleagues are reassured on that point. It is not true that sustainable development could not be a factor in a judicial review. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), for whom I have great respect, put to me the direct question: would the use of sustainable development as a basis for the refusal of a licence stand up to judicial review? The answer is yes, it would.

There are legal opinions on this issue, but I do not have to remind the House, which is replete with lawyers, that an opinion is exactly that. An opinion is not a legal fact, otherwise cases would never reach court.

Dr. Cable: Has the Minister seen the contrary legal opinion? Before reaching a firm conclusion, is he willing to review it?

Nigel Griffiths: I have seen the opinion. The NGOs who commissioned it did me the great courtesy of coming to my office to discuss it with me. I am not a lawyer and so cannot pass legal judgment on it, but the opinion has been seen by the Government lawyers and it is that which has allowed me to respond so robustly and, I hope, helpfully. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central for having raised that issue and enabling us to put our position clearly on the record.

Tony Worthington: I am not convinced by the Minister's argument. There is clearly a difference of opinion, so it would seem sensible for the Government to put the matter beyond all doubt by adding sustainable development to the criteria, so that we have no court problems in future. One of the benefits of scrutiny by parliamentarians is that we can get rid of the ambiguities that the Minister admits remain.

Nigel Griffiths: No words spoken in the House and no Act of Parliament put anything beyond doubt. We know that from the plethora of court cases that arise. It is important that hon. Members respect the fact that when direct questions are put to me and I answer yes or no, we put beyond doubt the issues raised and we make clear our opinion on a legal opinion. The world is replete with legal opinions.

Many hon. Members raised the question of sustainable development, and rightly so. Several pointed out, wrongly—I am sure that that was because they have misread briefings or the Bill—that sustainable development is the only one of the consolidated EU criteria that is not included in the Bill.

Dr. Cable: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Griffiths: No. I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman and I want to make some progress. I do not know whether he was one of those who said that—we will check *Hansard*—but several hon. Members did, and at least one is willing to admit to having done so.

Let us be clear. Another of the criteria that is not listed in the schedule is criterion 7, which covers diversion. I explained that if diversion were to be listed in the schedule, it would give us the power to impose controls by order solely on the grounds that the goods might be diverted, which would in effect allow us to control all exports of any goods because any goods might be diverted. That goes to the heart of the distinction between the schedule, which allows us to impose controls, and clause 7, which requires us to take the criteria into account when taking licensing decisions.

Nothing in the Bill will affect one jot the Government's current ability to take criterion 8—sustainable development—fully into account. The Bill makes it clear that matters in the schedule are not the only matters that can form the basis of a licensing decision. The purposes essentially determine the reasons for which controls can be imposed on particular goods and technology.

Another issue was raised in that context.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Nigel Griffiths: I shall finish what I was saying and then give way.

It has been said that no matter how benign, effective or otherwise I am as a Minister, or the Government are, a future Government may choose to ignore the EU criteria because they are not in the schedule. Even if a future Government tried to withdraw or water down the guidance on the criteria in the Bill, the EU code of conduct on arms exports would continue to apply until specifically withdrawn by the EU in its common foreign and security policy formation. I see no prospect of that happening. If anything, the direction of continuing discussions within the EU is to strengthen the code.

Mr. Berry: Does my hon. Friend not accept that there will be less doubt if sustainable development is one of the criteria in the Bill?

Nigel Griffiths: There may also be less flexibility. It is important to ensure that the EU code of conduct on arms exports is applied throughout the EU and is strengthened. We have been at the forefront of that process.

The issue of Lord Scott's opinions has been raised. The Bill clearly addresses his criticisms by setting out in the schedule the reasons for which controls may be imposed on the export of goods, the transfer of technology, the provision of technical assistance and trade in goods, and further by making it clear in clause 7 that the consolidated criteria will continue to inform day-to-day decisions on export licences.

Angus Robertson: Will the Minister clarify whether he is asserting that the EU code of conduct is legally binding?

Nigel Griffiths: The Government are taking into account, and must do so, the consolidated criteria in the EU code of conduct. We have done that, and are continuing to do so. I have made it clear that the possibility of a future Government changing the policy and trying to duck their responsibilities is virtually non-existent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) referred to some specific examples, but as he knows, I cannot comment on individual cases. However, he raised an important point of principle on which I think the House will want to have the Government's views on record. I can assure my hon. Friend and the House that the Bill will give us the power to control UK citizens and anyone operating in the UK, which I think was the point that he was making. He was concerned about someone who was not a UK citizen who was a trafficker and broker in arms to arms-embargoed destinations such as Zimbabwe. Such people will be caught. That is important.

[Nigel Griffiths]

I shall ensure for the benefit of the House—

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Griffiths: No. I want fully to answer the point that my hon. Friend made. No doubt will be created by the current formulation in the Bill. The code is not legally binding, but there is no realistic prospect of any Government withdrawing from it. It is a political commitment, and one that causes me to urge on the House acceptance of the Government's amendments and the rejection—

Mr. Lansley *rose—*

Nigel Griffiths: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman because he has not been in the Chamber throughout the debate.

I ask the House to reject the amendments that have not been tabled by the Government for the very good grounds that I have set out.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time.

Amendment proposed to the proposed new clause: (a), in line 4, leave out from "order" to end of line 6 and insert—

'(a) has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament, and

(b) provides—

(i) for the order to expire, or

(ii) for the provision imposing them to cease to have effect,'.—*[Mr. Key.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 117, Noes 251.

Division No. 51] **[3.45 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Annette
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul

Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McKechin, Ann
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. John Heppell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause added to the Bill.

New Clause 2

EXERCISE OF LICENSING POWER UNDER CONTROL ORDERS

'(1) In deciding how to exercise a licensing power under a control order in connection with controls imposed by virtue of paragraph 4, 4A, 4B or 4C of the Schedule, regard shall be had, among other things, to any potential consequences of the activities being controlled that are of a kind mentioned in the Table in paragraph 4D of the Schedule.

(2) Otherwise, nothing in paragraph 4, 4A, 4B or 4C of the Schedule limits—

(a) the reasons which may justify a decision to grant or refuse a licence or to exercise any other licensing power under a control order in any particular way; or

(b) the matters to which regard may be had in the exercise of any licensing power under a control order.'.— *[Nigel Griffiths.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Nigel Griffiths: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 3—*Licence revocation and end-use controls—*

'(1) The Secretary of State may revoke, suspend or amend any licence issued under any of the powers conferred by this Act where any of the parties referred to in the relevant licence fail to honour their export licence obligations.

(2) The Secretary of State shall revoke any licence issued under any of the powers conferred by this Act where the execution of the licence:

(a) results in any of the consequences referred to in the Table in paragraph 4 of the Schedule, or

(b) results in consequences which contravene any of the consolidated criteria relating to export licensing decisions announced to Parliament by the Secretary of State on 26th October 2000.

(3) For the purpose of sub-section 1 "export licence obligations" will include, but not be limited to, end-use undertakings stipulated in the relevant licence or end-use documentation.

(4) Upon the revocation of a licence, all future exports of goods, transfers of technology, provision of technical assistance or trade in controlled goods authorised by or relating to the licence shall be cancelled.

(5) The Secretary of State may by order make provision for follow-up monitoring of the use made of goods exported, technology transferred, technical assistance provided or goods traded, in order

to establish whether the end-use commitments entered into as a consequence of applying for an export licence (required by an order under section 1, 2, 4 or 5) are being honoured.'.

New clause 4—*Prior parliamentary scrutiny*—

' As part of the licence application process required by an order under section 1, 2, 4 or 5, the Secretary of State may take advice from a Parliamentary Select Committee.'.

New clause 6—*Prior parliamentary scrutiny*—

' The Secretary of State may consult with any Select Committee of the House of Commons or the House of Lords before a determination regarding an application for a licence required by an order under section 1, 2, 4 or 5 is completed.'.

New clause 7—*Revocation of licences*—

'(1) Any licence or Community Licence granted under this Act, or having effect as if so granted, may be amended, suspended or revoked by the Secretary of State at any time and in such circumstances and on such terms as she thinks fit by serving notice to that effect on the holder of the licence or Community Licence.

(2) For the purpose of this clause "such circumstances" and "such terms" will include, but not be limited to, breaches of the end-use undertakings stipulated in the relevant licence or end-use documentation.

(3) With immediate effect from the date of revocation,—

(a) any further exports of goods, transfers of technology, provision of technical assistance or trade in controlled goods authorised by the licence, and

(b) the provision of further equipment, technology, training, transport or technical, promotional, or financial assistance in support of goods, technology or technical assistance already supplied under the relevant licence shall be cancelled.'.

Nigel Griffiths: New clause 2 is a Government new clause, and I shall explain why it is necessary. I shall also explain why I consider that new clauses 3, 4, 6 and 7 should be withdrawn.

New clause 2 follows as a consequential amendment to the group of amendments relating to new clause 1. In effect, it replicates the second half of the current clause 3 relating to the reasons that may be taken into account in decision making on export licences. I urge hon. Members to accept it.

New clauses 3 and 7 deal with licence revocation and end-use controls. Both would give the Secretary of State the power to revoke, suspend or amend any licence issued under the Bill. They also allow revocation where obligations under end-use undertakings were not honoured, and require the Secretary of State to revoke the licence if its execution had any of the consequences listed in the table of the schedule or contravened the consolidated criteria.

4 pm

New Clause 3 would allow the Secretary of State to make provision by order for end-use monitoring of any exports under the licence; new clause 7 to cancel the provision of various goods or services in support of any goods, technology or technical assistance already supplied under a licence with effect from revocation. The new clauses are unnecessary, because the Government already have powers to revoke, suspend and amend export licences. Those powers will be carried forward in the new Bill.

It might be helpful if I explained the present position, and the position under the new Bill. Under the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939, the Secretary of State has power to revoke, suspend or amend any form of licence, whether open or individual. Those powers apply to licences themselves. Details of revocations are included in the annual reports on strategic export controls. Revocation might take place when there is clear evidence that an undertaking given by the end user is likely to be broken because the situation in the recipient country changes significantly after a licence is issued. Revocation might also apply when new information comes to light after a licence has been issued that would have led to the refusal of an application.

If we had reliable evidence of a past breach of an end-use undertaking or the risk of diversion in relation to a specific destination, those factors would certainly be taken into consideration in the assessment of any future licence applications involving that end-user destination.

As for the new Bill, the dummy orders with which we provided the Committee contain revocation, suspension and amendment provisions. The dummy orders on the export of goods, the transfer of technology and the provision of technical assistance—all of which are mentioned in the new clause—provide for the revocation of licences in article 10(5) on page 10. The dummy order on trade in controlled goods provides for revocation under article 5(2)on page 4. The example we have provided of a dummy order giving effect to an embargo includes revocation in article 4(2) on page 2.

The circumstances in which revocation would be considered are the same under the Bill as in existing legislation. The power of revocation, suspension and amendment follows the well-established precedent established in the 1939 Act, in which related secondary legislation also contained the revocation provisions. As for the Exports of Goods (Control) Order 1994, a copy of which we supplied to the Committee before the recess, article 7(1) mentioned the revocation control. Decisions to revoke licences are made by the Secretary of State on a case-by-case basis, in the light of all the relevant information.

As I have said, if there were reliable evidence that an end-use undertaking was about to be breached, revocation would be considered. If new information came to light that would have led to a refusal against the consolidated criteria, revocation would be considered. If circumstances changed significantly in the end-use destination, revocation would be considered.

Revocation is of course a serious step, with significant consequences for the exporter as well as the UK's reputation as a supplier. All such decisions to revoke need to be assessed carefully. Revoking a licence will prevent the export of any as yet unexported items covered by the licence. What the consequences would be for other non-licensable items related to items exported under the licence would be a matter for the relevant contract, which is of course a legal and commercial matter between the exporter and the customer, rather than the licence. Rather than imposing an obligation to revoke licences in the event of any of the consequences listed in the table of the schedule, or contravention of the consolidated criteria, we should take those factors into account at the licensing stage. We already do that.

Failure to take the relevant factors into account in either case would open the decision to possible successful legal challenge. Imposing an obligation to revoke licences in certain circumstances would also impose an obligation on

the Government to carry out end-use monitoring of every export. The Government do not believe that the end-use monitoring issue needs to be addressed in new primary legislation. Of course, it is important that arms exported from the UK should not be misused or diverted to any undesirable end-users. Although it is difficult to see what the measure could practically do to minimise the risk of that happening, the Government have already shown that they are ready and able to monitor the end use of defence exports in circumstances where that can make a genuine contribution to our efforts to prevent diversion or misuse and, as I have explained already, we possess the power of revocation.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Can my hon. Friend tell me whether that power has ever been used?

Nigel Griffiths: Yes. I assure my hon. Friend that the power has been used. It is one of the criteria that I as Minister and my predecessors have taken into account. I will send him the section from the annual report that we produced that shows a number of licences that have been revoked for that purpose. I am grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to explain that clearly to the House. It is a real power: a power that has been used, not a power that has perhaps lapsed or is ineffective. The key is that the Secretary of State possesses the necessary powers. The Bill itself does not need to include detailed provisions about that matter, and I invite hon. Members not to press the new clause.

New clauses 4 and 6 on prior parliamentary scrutiny provide for the Government to take advice from a parliamentary Select Committee on export licence applications in advance of licensing decisions. The Government's response to the Quadripartite Committee in July this year set out the reasons why we believed that such a system of prior scrutiny would not be right in principle, and could not be made to work in practice without having a significant adverse impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the export licensing process. The Government have made it clear that they see Parliament's role as one of scrutinising decisions after they have been taken and inputting it into policy, not taking part in the decision-making process itself.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I am intrigued by the impact that prior scrutiny would have on the efficiency and good working of the export licence department. My colleagues in the Select Committee on Trade and Industry have considered the matter over the previous two Parliaments and will probably return to the issue in this one. Over the years, we have found it very difficult to see what additional problems could be visited on the poor civil servants in that department. Perhaps my hon. Friend could be explicit as to which sections, which areas and which difficulties are likely to create extra work for those poor civil servants who have been grossly burdened over the years. The fact is that the improvements have increased efficiency. I would like to know how there will be a regression in the service as a consequence of prior scrutiny.

Nigel Griffiths: I would be happy to take my hon. Friend on a tour of the department to give him a number of examples, but to answer his point directly, it is vital that there should be no delays when decisions are taken on licences. We have set targets to clear decisions in 20 days, but as he and the House know, consultations will take place, especially on those licences where we are determined to ensure that there is no risk of diversion of end use, where we are determined to avoid an embargo, and indeed where circumstances have changed in the country. We are determined to ensure that the input from colleagues at the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and indeed the Department for International Development are firmly taken into account. Having considered the Quadripartite Committee's evidence, we have concluded that further delays would be introduced. I do not have to tell my hon. Friend about the necessity of convening a Committee and supplying papers to its members so that it could meet to consider them. It is interesting that very few legislatures have any form of prior parliamentary scrutiny. My hon. Friend nods in acknowledgement. I have some criticisms of those that do. It is vital that Parliament has the ability to hold the Government to account and in my remarks I do not mean to underestimate either the concern or the need to ensure that there is proper scrutiny.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): My hon. Friend mentioned other Parliaments. The largest arms exporter in the world is the United States and it has a system of prior scrutiny, which some of us have had an opportunity to study at first hand. If the largest arms exporter in the world does not find it a problem, why should this Government?

Nigel Griffiths: I know that my hon. Friend has real concerns about this. Let me refer her to some of the key briefings that we have had on this matter. One of them freely acknowledges that the United States has prior parliamentary scrutiny, but says that enforcement is ineffective in far too many cases. That is one of the key problems of the American system and anyone who prays it in aid.

We want an effective system and that is why we have taken key decisions in the Bill to ensure that we have the most practical and tough regime. Parliamentary scrutiny at the appropriate stage is important. Our annual reports on strategic export controls have opened up the Government's export licensing policy and brought about unprecedented scrutiny and debate. I know that hon. Members have widely welcomed the reports and that industry and other non-governmental organisations have been complimentary.

I am pleased that the Bill will make the publication of an annual report a statutory requirement. In view of all that, I ask hon. Members not to press their new clauses. For the reasons that I gave, I commend new clause 2 to the House.

Mr. Key: It is not my intention to oppose Government new clause 2, but I need to concentrate on it for a few minutes because it has changed significantly the wording and the Government's message in this legislation. I need to understand exactly what the Government mean.

In Committee, there was an interesting exchange between the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and the Minister. The hon. Lady said:

"I must dispute the Minister's claim that subsection (4) covers actual people. We are talking about people who are training to be mercenaries and to fight, perhaps with their bare hands. We are not talking about goods and services or technology of any description

[Mr. Key]

The Minister replied:

"I should not have to tell the hon. Lady that mercenaries need equipment and technology; they thrive on it. They do not generally go around using their bare hands; they are well armed. It is clear from the examples that we have been given of websites and from advertisements that people will not train in America without the equipment that the hon. Member for Salisbury mentioned. It is important to note that people provide services, and mercenaries provide a despicable service that requires an infrastructure."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 16 October 2001; c. 99.].

That is significant because new clause 2 refers to paragraph 4D of the schedule. Paragraph 4D says that regard shall be had to

"(a) acts threatening international peace and security".

New clause 2(2) says

"nothing in paragraph 4, 4A, 4B or 4C of the Schedule limits . . .

(b) the matters to which regard may be had in the exercise of any licensing power under a control order."

I ask for clarification because there seems to have been a change. In the interests of their legislation, the Government needed to change the wording.

4.15 pm

I drew attention in Committee to the European Union June 2000 agreement on the control of technical assistance related to weapons of mass destruction, and pointed out that it embodied important principles. In paragraph 45 of command paper 5091, technical assistance is defined thus:

"Technical assistance, as defined in the joint action, means any technical support related to repairs, development, manufacture, assembly, testing, maintenance, or any other technical service and may take forms such as instruction, training, transmission of working knowledge or skills or consulting services and includes oral forms of assistance."

The hon. Lady knew that the EU had included people in its documentation and that the Bill, as drafted at that time, did not. However, the new wording seems to include people. If that is so, I warmly welcome the fact, but must therefore assume, unless it is explained otherwise, that that covers the problem of mercenaries.

I perceive that although we signed up to that EU document, there is a gap in the Bill concerning mercenary activity. The Foreign Enlistment Act 1870 prevents British subjects from serving against countries with which the UK is at peace. However, there has been no successful prosecution under that Act since its introduction more than 130 years ago.

The Government's lack of power to regulate mercenaries was demonstrated in December 1989, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the international convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries. According to the former Foreign Office Minister, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), whom I am glad to see in his place, the Government had no plans to sign the convention. In a written answer in 1998, which I do not for one moment expect him to remember, he said:

"We have no plans at present to sign and ratify the International Convention against Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. We have doubts concerning its legal enforceability in the United Kingdom. We are looking at options for national domestic regulation of military companies."—[*Official Report*, 15 June 1998; Vol. 314, c. 16W.]

Then we had the Legge report on the Government's handling of the situation in Sierra Leone and the activities of Sandline International. At that stage, the Foreign Office promised:

"To issue within 18 months a Green Paper on mercenary activity, taking account of discussions with our partners in the UN, the EU and other international fora. The Paper will address both the international and the UK context."

That was in the second report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, session 1998-99, on Sierra Leone, Cmnd. 4325. The Green Paper has yet to emerge.

On 6 April 2001, in a written answer at column 298W, the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), whom I am also delighted to see in his place—I would not for one moment expect him to remember what he said all that time ago either—expressed his regret that the Green Paper expected in November 2000 had not been published.

I then raised the matter with the Home Secretary during a statement on terrorism a few weeks ago. Since then, we have been told that the Foreign Office is making some progress on the matter. On 29 October, the *Financial Times* reported:

"The Foreign Office said yesterday: 'Work on the green paper is now well advanced and we hope to be able to inform parliament about its publication soon.'"

My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) has received a written answer this afternoon from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that said that progress was being made and that it hopes to have something to report soon.

We all want to address the problem of mercenaries; we are agreed on that. Is this an opportunity for mercenaries to be brought into the scope of the Bill? The Minister was clear in his courteous and detailed explanation why they were not included previously. My sole purpose in raising the question is to get an answer in this debate to the query about mercenaries.

Mr. Berry: In speaking primarily to new clause 7 and the issue of revocation, I do so in the spirit of my speech on Second Reading. I warmly welcome the Bill. Together with other Government measures taken over the past four years, we now have a policy on arms exports and an attitude to controlling exports that did not exist previously. That contrasts sharply with the regime prior to May 1997. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I thought I had better get the "Hear, hears" at the beginning.

It is in that spirit that I wish to say that friends and supporters of what my hon. Friend the Minister is doing feel that we have a responsibility to point out ways in which the Bill can be improved. With other colleagues, I tabled new clause 7 in that spirit. I believe that the Government should have the explicit authority to revoke licences where end-use undertakings or other licence obligations have been broken. That should be an explicit authority in the Bill.

I heard what my hon. Friend the Minister said; namely, that the Government already have the power to revoke licences and that the new clause was unnecessary. If we look at past experience, we can see why some of us feel that the Minister is perhaps being slightly optimistic. With others, I had the pleasure of serving from the beginning on the Quadripartite Select Committee and we looked at

recent experience. When I am told that the Government have no problems in revoking licences, I think of some examples that the Committee looked at in depth—in particular I think of Hawks spare parts, Indonesia and Zimbabwe.

First, I wish to refer to Indonesia. In July 1997, the Government announced new criteria to be applied to arms exports. These were warmly welcomed by all those who felt that it was time to get the trade under firmer control. I very much welcomed the criteria announced at the time. The Government said also at the time that it would be neither realistic nor practical to review existing export licences. The one area where that caused most concern was the existing outstanding licences for arms exports to Indonesia.

In May 1997, the Labour Government inherited 125 active export licences for Indonesia. I will not explain how we got into that position; others may wish to comment. As hon. Members know, there was particular concern about the export of Hawks to Indonesia, given the human rights violations in East Timor. The Government's view was that it was not realistic or practical to review existing licences. The Quadripartite Select Committee interviewed Ministers and produced a report that commented on the matter.

The Committee did not think it impractical to review 125 licences, but we made a note that the reason the Government felt that it was not realistic was based on legal advice about the potential for legal action by exporters if individual licences were revoked. We requested sight of that advice and, perhaps for perfectly understandable reasons, the Government declined to respond to that invitation. That is one example of where there is doubt about the Government's ability to revoke export licences if they so wished. In that case, we had a change of Government and a change of policy. That new policy was applied to new export licence applications—and full credit to the Government for applying it—but the Government felt that they could not review existing licences for fear of legal action.

The second example is much more recent. There were similar concerns about end-use and contractual obligations regarding the transfer of Hawk spare parts to Zimbabwe in February 2000. I shall briefly quote the relevant part of the Quadripartite Committee's report of July 2000:

"On 24 February 2000 the seven outstanding licence applications for Hawk spares were granted. It is not disputed that Hawks have been used in the intervention in the DRC, and there remains a clear risk that they might be used again. Without these spares it has been widely reported that two of the Hawks would be unable to operate . . . The particular difficulty seen by the Government in the case of the Hawk spares arose from the contractual obligation on BAE Systems to facilitate the supply of spares for 15 years after delivery of the aircraft."

As it happens, that contractual obligation was subsequently overridden by a ministerial licensing decision and an arms embargo was announced in May, but in February the argument was, "Gosh, we cannot go ahead with what we would like to do—restrict spares supplies to Zimbabwe because the aircraft are being used in the Democratic Republic of Congo—because of legal obligations". In the report of the Quadripartite Committee published in July 2000, that discussion was noted word for word.

The key issue is that when the Government are deciding whether to revoke an export licence due to, for example, a breach in end-use undertakings, the Government must not be compromised by the risk of legal challenge by the exporter. The Minister, in good faith, has said that he does not believe that that situation need occur, given the Government's existing powers. I have provided him with two examples—there are others, but I shall keep my comments brief—where real concerns were expressed by Ministers at the highest level to the Quadripartite Committee about the Government's existing legal powers. By amending the Bill to include the power to revoke licences for breaches of export licence obligations, the Government would lessen the likelihood of legal challenge and send a clear signal that problems associated with end use were taken seriously.

I am pretty sure that there is no disagreement on that. In article 10(5) of the dummy order on export of goods, transfer of technology and provision of technical assistance, the following statement appears:

"Any licence or Community Licence under this Order, or having effect as if so granted, may be amended, suspended or revoked by the Secretary of State at any time and in such circumstances and on such terms as she thinks fit by serving notice to that effect on the holder of the licence or Community Licence."

Those words happen to be the same, word for word, as the first subsection of new clause 7.

Roger Casale: Will my hon. Friend clarify his argument? Is he saying that, in the instances that he has mentioned, the licences should have been revoked simply because there had been a change of policy and a change of Government, or had there been material changes in the use to which those arms were being put and the circumstances in which they were being used?

Mr. Berry: Because of legal considerations, the Government felt under some obligation to supply spare parts that was contrary to the stated aims of the Government's arms export policy. That is the concern: that there was a conflict, arising from the fact that the Government did not believe that they could interfere with existing licences. For example, in the case of the supply of spare parts for Hawks in Zimbabwe that were used in the DRC, the company had an inherited legal obligation to supply spare parts, so the Government felt that, despite the fact that it was contrary to their policy, they could not act.

Given that the words that form the bulk of new clause 7 are already in the dummy order that the Government have published, how about another cut-and-paste job?

Given that the dummy order makes it clear what powers my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wants and will take, I do not understand why those powers cannot be specified in the Bill. A similar argument arose in the previous debate, but we must not forget that problems have arisen in recent times over the revocation of licences. It is not entirely accurate to say that the Government have all the powers that they need, as the Select Committee evidence makes clear.

The power to revoke licences is vital, and should be included on the face of the Bill.

4.30 pm

Dr. Cable: I wish to speak to new clause 3, which goes over much of the ground with regard to revocation set out so authoritatively by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), and to new clause 4, which deals with the separate and important issue of price scrutiny.

With regard to new clause 3, many hon. Members are struggling to understand how the Government can use the excuse of legal difficulties to explain what they could not follow through on licences, yet at the same time assure people that no legal problem existed. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) pursued the question of the Hawk aircraft and Indonesia, and the Zimbabwe case has also been mentioned. Until the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) intervened a few minutes ago, I had not been aware that the revocation powers had been used successfully. I should be interested to know in which cases those powers had been used, as the impression given in the past was that serious legal difficulties attended their use.

However, the legal difficulties do not affect only those seeking to impose controls. The industry is naturally concerned about its reputation, but any export control system will mean that licences will be revoked occasionally. That is the nature of the industry, as I am sure that those involved are well aware. We believe that clarity in this matter would aid both the industry and those who want to impose controls. Therefore, we should set out clearly and explicitly what revocation means, and under what circumstances it can be invoked.

Regardless of one's views about specific cases or the merits of tougher controls, clarity is to be preferred to the rather mysterious and opaque processes that the Government appear to favour. That is why new clause 3 sets out the circumstances in which the Government would have discretion to revoke licences, and the circumstances in which licences must be revoked. When the breaking of end-use undertakings leads to revocation, the new clause specifies what effect that revocation would have. It would also give the Secretary of State specific powers to follow up and monitor the use made of exports. New clause 3 would therefore make the process much less opaque, and that greater transparency would be more satisfactory for everyone involved.

I am not a lawyer, but the non-governmental organisations have sought advice about the legal implications of the Bill. They have been told that the law is difficult, and that it is becoming more so. That is because more precedents have been established in which abuse of power is cited as grounds for disputing Government actions. That approach is becoming increasingly entrenched in the courts, where it is argued that the legitimate expectations of private persons often can be overridden where statutory duties or overriding policy interests are involved. It will become increasingly difficult for the Government to use their legal powers—such as they are—unless that problem is taken account of properly.

In normal circumstances, the Government would argue in a legal action that there had been a material change of circumstances, but that may not be adequate to allow the Government to enforce their authority in this regard. We want the Government to explain more clearly what their legal powers are, and they should give the House some examples of how those powers have been imposed successfully without causing serious friction.

I should also be grateful for a description from the Minister of how the Government are taking account of the way in which the law is developing. That development and the scepticism of judges are, arguably, making it more difficult for the Government to introduce powers such as those needed for revocation.

New clause 4 involves prior scrutiny—an important issue. I shall not speak at length about that because other hon. Members who have chaired Select Committees or served on the Quadripartite Committee have studied that issue in detail. I shall summarise the key arguments, as I understand them. There has already been something of a game of ping-pong—the Quadripartite Committee reported in July and advocated prior scrutiny and the Government responded to that suggestion, and in a second round the Quadripartite Committee addressed the concerns that were expressed. An iterative process has already taken place, and many of the Government's objections to prior scrutiny have been very carefully considered. I hope therefore that the debate will be somewhat more advanced than those in the earlier stages.

As Labour Members have said, precedents for prior scrutiny exist in the very different political environments of the United States and Sweden. The Government keep arguing that because holes exist in the American system, we should not learn any lessons from it. I have never understood the logic of that argument. There may be holes in the American control system, but that probably has nothing to do with prior scrutiny, which is intended to serve other objectives.

I shall briefly summarise the three arguments that the Government have adduced for not ceding prior scrutiny, the first of which is constitutional. They argue that Parliament, acting in its legislative capacity, may duplicate or conflict with the Executive's role. People who specialise in public and constitutional law have given their advice and they see absolutely no problem with that. Perhaps the Government will explain in a little more detail why they view that as an immovable barrier. That is not at all clear to the lawyers, let alone to the generalists.

The second issue is commercial confidentiality. At the very worst, the integrity of Members and their ability to maintain secrets is being questioned, but perhaps that is not what the Government are worried about; they are probably worried about inadvertent leaks of confidential information. That issue has been argued through before and several key points have been made. First, a good deal of what might be viewed as important commercial information is already released in advance of a licence being agreed. I understand that the publisher of Jane's catalogues already has a process whereby information is exchanged. Codes of conduct and protocols have been developed, and there is not necessarily a problem.

Many of the issues that matter most to business involve the financial details of contracts. There is no reason why prior scrutiny should necessarily involve Members of Parliament considering those details. In any event, the flow of information is controlled by Her Majesty's Government and by the Minister, so MPs involved in scrutiny do not have unlimited access to all the information. If the process can be managed, with those necessary safeguards, most of us are far from clear why Members who serve on the Quadripartite Committee cannot be entrusted with safeguarding the necessary commercial information.

The third argument that is adduced is that the process causes unnecessary delay. Again, it is far from clear why that should be so. The hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), who is Chairman of the Trade and Industry Committee, has already defused that argument in his witty way.

The scrutiny process operates in parallel to that in the civil service, so we are not talking about additional time; there is no inherent reason why we would add to the 20-day process, and those applications that are, in any event, highly politically controversial will not be completed within the 20-day rule. Most of those arguments have already been addressed by the Quadripartite Committee, which, as the Minister knows, is an all-party Committee of respected Members from both sides of the House. I simply hope that he will deal with that all-party wisdom slightly more sensitively than he did during the debate on the previous group of amendments and that we can make progress.

Mr. O'Neill: I take on board the point, made by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) about the ping-pong process that we have undergone. The issue has been lobbed over the net, one way and another.

I want to speak to new clause 6, and it is fair to say that the experience abroad is variable to say the least. I do not necessarily think that we should pray in aid precedents from elsewhere.

Sweden has a sanitised committee made up of the great and the good and it is chaired by a member of the royal family who may or may not have expertise in such matters. I have been a great supporter of things Swedish and certainly the great traditions of the Swedish Social Democrat Governments of the past. However, on this issue, the Swedish experience is not particularly valuable or one that we should replicate in the United Kingdom. The committee there does not enjoy much confidence from Swedish non-governmental organisations.

In the United States, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is very much under the control of its chairman. When we were in the United States, the committee had a Republican chairman, Jesse Helms, at the time of a Democrat presidency. To say that the committee became a political football is an understatement.

We must also recognise that the Foreign Relations Committee has a high financial threshold. I think that it examines only those contracts worth more than $14 million, which is a pretty large sum. However, that means that many small, nasty contracts can be swept under the table without anyone knowing about them. The scale of the American task, and the manner in which it is applied, does not lend itself to the type of prior scrutiny that we seek.

As a Quadripartite Committee, we do not seek the power to instigate inquiries. In some sensitive contracts, it would be to the advantage of all concerned to have a broader degree of scrutiny and consultation.

Before the election, we gained the impression that we were beginning to make progress. Indeed, paragraph 33 of the Quadripartite Committee's report of 1 May said:

"We were pleased to have the Secretary of State's assurance that the proposals for parliamentary prior scrutiny we had made in our March 2001 report could indeed be introduced without primary legislation. We continue to recommend strongly that they should be so introduced."

Previous Secretaries of State for Defence, for Trade and Industry and for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs were of a different cast of mind to the new lot. I realise that my hon. Friend the Minister does not have the final word on all these matters in the high levels of government. Our friendship of more than 25 years will not be prejudiced if I say that he has to run around collecting the money while someone else winds the organ.

Many of us are disappointed that the Government have stepped back from dealing with the issue in the way that we had hoped. In their response to the Select Committee—in Cm 5141—they go over the top. In responding to a point about "Principle", a sentence begins with the word "However". It was obviously not written by my hon. Friend the Minister; he went to a good Scottish school and we were always told never to start a sentence with "however". I shall ignore that small point.

The response to the Quadripartite Committee's report says that

"the Government strongly believes that bringing the Committee into the export licensing process, regardless of the formal status of the Committee's recommendations to Ministers, would in practice be bound to blur this responsibility. The Government therefore remains of the view that, as a matter of principle, it would be wrong for Ministers to be required to consult Parliament before taking decisions in individual cases."

The truth is that the Executive do not wish to share responsibilities with the legislature.

4.45 pm

The Government went on to identify several arguments. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) touched on confidentiality. Select Committees are consulted on a variety of matters. They are regularly consulted on a need-to-know basis on security, foreign affairs and defence. Cynics might say that hon. Members are put on a Committee only once they have received security clearance and dubious candidates are not successful, although I am not certain of that.

On commercial confidentiality, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry takes evidence and is sometimes given sight of documents that are commercially sensitive. That privilege is not abused.

Mr. Battle: Many applications resemble what in local government terms would be called outline planning permission. They are not detailed applications. Would not it be appropriate for outline plans to be considered by Committees? That would resolve many problems that are presented as obstacles to prior scrutiny.

Mr. O'Neill: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which I shall return to in a moment.

On confidentiality, the Intelligence and Security Committee comprises several hon. Members and representatives of the other place. It is a hybrid Committee, but it deals with matters of great sensitivity. At least two of the participating Departments in the export licence procedure are regularly involved in it. We could be precious and say that the Government's position is insulting to the integrity of hon. Members, but it would be better to explain that we are already involved in the process. There is no need to make a major change to our responsibilities.

We heard that legal concerns are important and that we will create uncertainty for exporters. Any hon. Member who has been confronted by a business in their

[Mr. O'Neill]

constituency which is trying to get an export licence will know that they are not innocents abroad. Sometimes they do not prepare themselves as well as they might, but they are aware of the legal uncertainties. It is a bit rich for the Government to accuse us of adding to those.

The other argument is that prior scrutiny will make subsequent scrutiny more difficult, but we would probably not need to give the matter further consideration. We also heard about the old sore of processing delays. That is plumbing new depths in civil service cynicism. If there is sensitivity or difficulty, the DTI et al will move with glacial speed. Weeks become months and months become years. A coup can be followed by a counter-coup, the bad guys become the good guys, and we are not sure whether our enemy's enemy is still our friend. Some of us were involved in defence debates when the late Alan Clark was the Minister who sold everything to everybody, although I accept that he did that at the highest possible price. We recognise the pre-Scott days. Tactics are available if people want to use them.

The argument about resource implications is even worse than the argument about delays. I think it was a Victorian academic who promulgated a list of reasons for not doing what one does not want to do. I think that unripe time was the only cliché omitted from the list.

The Government are missing a serious opportunity. We hear much about the exclusiveness of the Executive, but the Executive now have an opportunity, on a sensitive subject, to share some power and influence with the House, the legislature. We are not demanding that the Executive consult. We are simply saying that they "may consult"; there is no obligation. We are not even saying that they should consult with the Quadripartite Committee; they could consult any of the Committees with the relevant expertise. New clause 6 would provide Ministers with the maximum possible flexibility. It is a very modest amendment.

I would like to think that this discussion will continue. Although we rightly praise the Government for their openness and transparency in so many aspects of the export licensing process, it is becoming ever more apparent that there will always be sensitive issues. There are not many such issues; as we heard, on current reckoning, they number about 50. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said, many of those issues can be addressed essentially as outline planning permissions, as applications about applications. For those reasons, I believe that the Government are missing an opportunity.

Some of my colleagues on the Trade and Industry Committee and I have been nominated for the Quadripartite Committee. Some of us will be suggesting that one of the early items on the agenda should be to invite to the Committee assorted Secretaries of State and others, such as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, to justify the nonsense that was given in the July reply and which I have been trying to highlight.

Although I do not think that the issue is worth pressing to a vote now, I think that it will continue to engage the House. We have got our teeth into the issue and we are not going to let go. We also require much better arguments than the ones we received in the Government's July reply, which was disappointing and unnecessarily heavy handed. We could have reached a better compromise and it would not have greatly undermined the Executive's authority. As we say about devolution, power shared is often power, and authority, enhanced. I hope that my hon. Friend will take that message back to his colleagues in the Departments and Ministries. As I said, the issue will not go away.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: One of the points that the Minister may be missing is that it should be up to Parliament to decide whether an export licence should be granted for an item of national importance—I dare not mention the cow in formaldehyde again. If this Government or a future Government decide to export an item of national importance and they get it wrong, they will be held to account. However, if they allow a proper debate in the House on granting a licence, the House itself will have to decide whether to allow the item to go overseas. The House should be able to make such decisions, as the issue encompasses not only arms but technology, works of art and a plethora of other items for which you as a Minister—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a relative newcomer to the House, but he must use the correct parliamentary language.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Dual-purpose items are another aspect of the debate. Turkey, for example, has a licence to make Land Rover vehicles. Most people think that Land Rovers can do anything, but they may not appreciate that the vehicles have a dual purpose as a weapons base. If we had a problem with Turkey, how could we revoke that licence? Turkey is a NATO member and has many other ties to the United Kingdom. Would the Government be able to revoke its licence? The Minister may be able to sort out the issue, but I do not think that he can. I think that he will discover that the United Kingdom would be placed under enormous pressure by Land Rover and those using those vehicles to continue the licence. I believe that some of the new clauses in this group would provide for greater scrutiny in granting overseas licences. One cannot license a dual-purpose piece of kit in one way and then revoke the licence in another. For the House not to have the chance to scrutinise such matters is a great shame. We should be able to do so.

Ann Clwyd: This afternoon, I have listened to a lot of sensible comment and heard a lot of nonsense as well. I do not see where the export of art comes into the Bill—perhaps I have missed something. HON. MEMBERS: "It is there". Oh is it? I find it strange that art comes into an arms export Bill. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can explain.

I rise in the spirit of assisting the Bill and the Minister. All of us who served on the Quadripartite Committee—we expect to do so in future—heard all the arguments over a period of months. With my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), I visited Sweden and the United States. We were less impressed by the Swedish system of

prior scrutiny than by the US system. Certain committees in the United States told us that they could pull the plug on a licence at any time, without fear of penalty—indeed, if they found that conditions in a certain country had changed, they could do so rapidly. That is what I am going to suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister.

For many years, I sat in the Chamber listening to arguments in support of the export of arms to Iraq. If the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) had been a Member of Parliament at the time, he would have been as frustrated as many of us here today were then. We knew that exporting arms to Iraq in the 1980s and through to 1991 was a ridiculous thing to do—everyone knew the political and human rights situation in that country. I strongly believe that if Parliament had been given the opportunity to vote on the export of those arms, they would never have been exported.

Wisdom does not rest solely in Whitehall. My hon. Friend the Minister should see that our suggestion might serve him in future as a means of getting himself off the hook. All Governments make mistakes selling arms to certain countries—Labour Governments are no exception. Under the Conservative Government, the great scandal was the sale of arms to Iraq at a time when all informed Members knew that the regime could not and should not be sustained.

Forty Back-Bench Members drawn from all three major parties served on the Quadripartite Committee, which encompassed four Committees, as the House knows. After months of careful examination and visits to two countries that operate a system of prior scrutiny, they concluded unanimously that it was both possible and highly desirable to establish a system of prior parliamentary scrutiny in this country. It is worth noting that the Quadripartite Committee included former Defence Ministers.

Initially, we were disappointed by the negative response from the four Secretaries of State, but when the former Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), appeared before the Committee—I think it was at his last appearance—he said that the Government were listening and that there was an open door. He gave us the strong impression that the Government would support our recommendation. We took on board some of his concerns and objections and in March we offered a refined proposal to the Government. That is the background to the amendment.

5 pm

The introduction of prior scrutiny would enhance ministerial accountability and would improve the system of checks and balances in the arms export licensing regime. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) mentioned Indonesia. I was much involved in questioning the Conservative Government on the export of arms to Indonesia. They ignored human rights abuses that were taking place in East Timor, Jakarta, Aceh, Irian Jaya and many provinces of Indonesia. There was the attempt by East Timor to assert itself as a separate country.

Despite the repeated assurances that were given to the UK Government over the years that UK-supplied equipment would not be used in East Timor, of course it was used. It was used in the water cannons that were used on the streets of Jakarta to spray the students who were demonstrating with red dye so that they could subsequently be picked up by the military and the police. Hawk jets flew over Dili twice. They were used as part of the intimidation of the people of East Timor at a time when they were striving peacefully for independence.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood said, the Government continued to supply spare parts. I remember well a conversation with the then Foreign Secretary, when we asked what his reasons were. He said that he had legal opinion. We also had legal opinion, and the opinions did not coincide. We have never had sight of the then Foreign Secretary's legal opinion, as my hon. Friend said, not even in the Select Committee. We believe that that opinion could have been challenged. If it had gone to some form of judicial review, the Government would have been in a spot of bother.

One of the powers of the United States is the ability to pull the plugs at any time. I am pleased to hear the Minister say that it is possible to revoke licences if circumstances change. However, would anyone in the House now be sending arms to Israel, for example? If Members had been asked whether they would agree to send arms to Israel, I do not believe that more than a handful would have agreed that it was a good idea. Nevertheless, two export licences were issued for components for combat helicopters and related technology to Israel in 1999–2000. Two open individual export licences are currently in force for the same equipment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil mentioned the objections that the Government had to prior scrutiny. The legal advice that we have had is clear. It is that there is no constitutional impediment to prevent Parliament legislating so as to give itself a role in scrutinising arms export licences. Sub-delegation of the decision-making function need not be an issue as long as explicit reference is made in the Bill to the fact that such a role would be advisory only. The wording in new clause 6 is careful. It makes it clear that the role will be advisory only.

Much progress has been made in opening up the UK export licensing system to parliamentary and public oversight. However, it is entirely retrospective; it is taking place after licences have been granted. There is obviously a role for a parliamentary Committee to scrutinise export licensing decisions before they are granted so as to provide advice to Ministers in difficult cases.

We are talking of only a few contentious licences, not 12,000. We are talking of perhaps 80 to 100 in a year, and perhaps even fewer. The Government spelt out their objections to the first report of the Quadripartite Committee, but they subsequently moved the goalposts. They objected to a certain aspect of the recommendations, but when we responded, the goalposts were moved again. Many of my hon. Friends have knocked the question of commercial confidentiality on the head. We are constantly shown commercially confidential material; it has not leaked from the Quadripartite Committee, for example. Representatives of the defence industry have admitted that commercial sensitivities typically concern pricing data and detailed technical specifications. Beyond requiring information on approximate value, where there are concerns about impacts on sustainable development, that type or level of information would be largely irrelevant to a Select Committee giving prior scrutiny to contentious arms licences.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil talked about commercial competitiveness, and my hon. Friend the Minister raised the possibility of a delay. Giving Parliament

[Ann Clwyd]

an advisory role in reviewing licences would not delay the process beyond the target of 20 days per application by adding 10 days to processing. Applications for licences that are most likely to be of concern to Parliament already exceed the 20-day target. I am therefore afraid that the argument about delay must be knocked firmly on the head.

If prior scrutiny causes undue delays, as some argue, as well as damage to the defence industry and harm to bilateral relations, why do the United States Government not feel that it is an issue? As I said earlier, the United States is the largest arms exporter in the world. Whatever the presidency, it is mindful of its defence industry, bilateral relations and operating efficiently. If prior scrutiny is not a problem for the United States or Sweden, I do not understand why it should be a problem for us. I hope that, in due course—perhaps even tonight—the Minister will clarify his reasons for believing that the United Kingdom is a special case.

Mr. Lloyd: I, too, had not realised that the Bill controlled the export of artworks and was fascinated by the concept of dual-use Picassos. I was also fascinated by the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) about the role of the royal family in export licensing. In this country, we are considering the role of our royal family in judging hospital architecture; perhaps that is a comment on the relative values of the Swedes and the British.

New clause 6 goes to the heart of the debate about the relationship that we as a society want with the Executive through a democratically elected Parliament. As the Minister knows, I am one of a number of Members in the Chamber—my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) is another—who have engaged in the art of licensing. Of course, practical issues are involved, but we must consider whether prior scrutiny is desirable and helpful. I have enormous respect for the Minister, and urge him to consider the fact that Ministers themselves may be advantaged by that form of engagement with parliamentary colleagues. That point is profoundly important. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West will remember the lonely Tuesday nights and Wednesday mornings that he spent as a Minister; perhaps, at 3 am, he had a red box full of all manner of things and was under enormous pressure to issue or refuse export licences. Ministers are under genuine pressure.

I shall comment briefly on the arguments against prior scrutiny. One of the issues is confidentiality, which is extremely important for Government. It is not the role of Government to breach confidentiality. It is vital that the position of trust assumed by Government is reflected by those in the parliamentary domain who engage in scrutiny. Ironically, in almost every case in which controversy has arisen, information was leaked into the public domain not by the Government, but often by aggrieved manufacturers with an interest in seeing the matter go forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil noted that through the Intelligence and Security Committee, we already entrust parliamentary colleagues to examine some of the most detailed and secret aspects of Government activity. We could replicate that level of trust by allowing a Committee of trusted Members of both Houses to engage in prior scrutiny. Confidentiality is not a problem that need detain us.

Delay is another issue that has been mentioned. I know from experience that when the Labour Government came to power in 1997, we were faced with an enormous backlog of licensing decisions from the previous Government, who had under-resourced that system which, to be brutally honest, may have operated a little more cavalierly in the near past. The strong improvement that the Labour Government made in the process by tightening controls had a knock-on effect. I pay tribute to those in the various Departments responsible, who faced extraordinary levels of work.

Delays were rarely caused by Ministers, because they would have the relevant paperwork for a relatively short time. I see no reason, either in logic or in the process, why the same time frame would not allow a Select Committee to examine licence applications on their way to the Minister concerned. The problems are not insurmountable and are not a serious limitation on the viability of such scrutiny.

Only a limited number of export licences are genuinely controversial or difficult. They can be difficult for Ministers even if they are not controversial, because they may not be widely known. I know that it would be greatly to the advantage of Ministers, who after all are politicians and represent the political system, to have the advice of trusted and senior colleagues. I have wrestled with such decisions myself and I have known how difficult it is to come to a firm conclusion, sometimes because complex information and uncertainties or unknowns are involved.

In such circumstances, I would have greatly welcomed the opportunity for an exchange of information or an exchange of view with others who also recognised the need for public accountability. The one difference between a Minister and the civil service is that, in the end, a Minister must be prepared to account for every one of those decisions in this place and in the public domain. Parliamentary colleagues understand that, and it is not the role of the civil service to second-guess that job.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to give the matter serious consideration. I do not expect him to come to the Dispatch Box tonight and tell us that there has been a change of thinking. I am aware that the issue must also be considered by various members of the Cabinet. However, the argument will not go away. I am convinced that ultimately there will be prior scrutiny through the parliamentary system. That is desirable, and I believe that it will come. I ask my hon. Friend not to close the Government's mind to the matter, and to tell us that he recognises the force of the arguments that have been heard, which was recognised by the former Foreign Secretary. We must keep the debate firmly open. If it is not opened by the Government, it will be kept open by Members of Parliament.

5.15 pm

Nigel Griffiths: I should like to respond to a number of the points that have been raised. First, I shall deal with the issue of mercenaries. Seeking to control mercenaries would go significantly beyond the scope of the Bill, and it is not our intention to do so. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) has received a response on that matter today from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the lead Department on that issue, and I hope that that will be satisfactory.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) raised a number of points and I shall touch on the most germane of them. Cultural exports and strategic export controls come under the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939. As we are replacing that Act, the Bill has to replace its export control powers in full and needs to cover both those categories. We have decided, mainly for reasons of clarity, that the annual report on cultural exports should be separate from the annual report on strategic export controls.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) made a powerful speech from the heart, which I commend to hon. Members. Those hon. Members who have not dealt with arms control issues as Ministers—those who have can only ever be a small minority—do not realise the soul-searching and scrutiny that Ministers and civil servants put into the work. That includes those who are making assessments of diverted end use, inquiring into previous use, and going into the real detail of the licences. It is a difficult job, often done under great pressure at all stages.

I am fortunate never to have found myself having time constraints; I have always been able to give due and detailed consideration to the licences. I know, however, that I come in at the end of a long process during which the licences have been scrutinised by colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. In defence of other Ministers before me, I do not believe that all Ministers took the view of our late colleague Alan Clark. Many Ministers from both parties have taken this issue very seriously.

This gets to the heart of the reasons that the new clauses have been tabled. I have thought seriously about the new clauses, but I urge hon. Members to reject them. We are wrestling with the emotive issue of sending arms to countries that have been the subject of controversy, but which are not the subject of United Nations or European Union embargoes. In some cases, of course, the UK imposes its own embargoes, so we do not rule that out. As hon. Members have hinted, however, this can leave the market open for others with less scrupulous controls than ours to move into it. Those people would also not have a report such as this annual report, which has been commended in Europe as almost a showcase report on how to list the strategic controls and the licences granted. There are important issues here, and they impinge on some of the individual cases that have been raised. I know that my colleagues are aware of that, and I do not want to comment on them further.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), the distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, raised more doubts than I had had about the two regimes that had been commended to me, Sweden and America. I will not add to his comments on Sweden, but in America applications are notified only after a contract has been signed. Here, we advise exporters before they sign a contract as to the likelihood of their getting a licence. That is a useful addition.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, in America only major contracts are covered. Using a telling phrase, he said that it was the small, nasty contracts that could be swept under the table. Certainly, small—possibly not nasty—contracts may require even more scrutiny. They may require disproportionate—but that should not be taken literally!—scrutiny and other work on the part of those responsible for vetting licences.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I gently remind the Minister that he must face the Chair?

Nigel Griffiths: I humbly apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

One of the complexities that caused us to reject the recommendation of the Quadripartite Committee is the fact that we would have to decide what threshold would catch the small, nasty contracts that my hon. Friend said the Americans did not catch. I have served on one of the most senior Select Committees, and I have seen the Clerk scrambling around to secure a quorum for a meeting to quiz top civil servants and others on billion-pound budgets. I fear that some £10,000 contracts that might be seen as controversial could go to what could be seen as a hotspot.

Mr. Battle: I tend to want a world in which we would emulate those who formed Arsenal football club in 1886. They worked at the Woolwich arsenal. Each of them put in 6d to back the football club; their works factory has now shut down. I feel that if people did other things rather than making arms it would make for a better world.

I also think that those in East Timor, for instance, might say, "As we form a new country and a new Government, we need the means to defend ourselves against a possible future engagement with Indonesia."

I think that the problem here relates to the word "prior". I do not think that the real issue relates to Ministers going through red boxes late at night; I think that it arises at the other end of the process. The pressure is coming from the arms companies. I want them to think twice. I want them to think seriously about the whole process, and not put in speculative bids as they often do. Prior scrutiny would push the process a further stage back, and people would know where they were. I think that that could be done, and would send a very healthy signal through the system.

Nigel Griffiths: I am sure that the industry will note my hon. Friend's comments. I certainly have.

Mr. O'Neill: I have listened to my hon. Friend with great interest, but he was not specific on one point. What would he expect to be the volume of work required? We have been given estimates of 40 to 50 cases, up to a maximum of about 100. Not all those cases would necessarily be referred at the Minister's discretion. Given the timing of such matters, it would probably be possible to arrange several meetings each year of a group that would examine them. I do not think that the volume would be as great as the Minister suggests, but I may have got it wrong. Perhaps the Minister could be a little more specific, as it seems that Government thinking has changed.

Nigel Griffiths: I have no more up-to-date information than my hon. Friend.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) asked about legal difficulties in the revoking of licences. There are no such difficulties where circumstances have changed significantly since the issuing of a licence. The difficulties

[Nigel Griffiths]

would arise if a country's circumstances had changed, or new and relevant information was available to the Government.

Let me return to a point I made earlier. The annual report sets out the reasons for refusals and the statistics. The hon. Member for Twickenham raised that matter, too. On page 15, the report makes clear the cases where revocation took place, so it is clearly set out.

I believe that the proposals that we have put before the House are the practical ones, and I urge the House not to press the other new clauses to a vote.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 1

EXPORT CONTROLS

Amendment made: No. 1, in page 1, line 9, at end insert—

'( ) The power to impose export controls is subject to section (*General restriction on purposes of control orders*).'.—*[Nigel Griffiths.]*

Clause 2

TRANSFER CONTROLS

Amendment made: No. 2, in page 2, line 21, at end insert—

'( ) The power to impose transfer controls is subject to section (*General restriction on purposes of control orders*).'.—*[Nigel Griffiths.]*

Clause 3

PURPOSES OF ORDERS UNDER SECTION 1(1) OR 2(1)

Amendment made: No. 3, in page 2, line 35, leave out Clause 3.—*[Nigel Griffiths.]*

Clause 4

CONTROLS ON PROVISION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OVERSEAS

Amendments made: No. 4, in page 3, line 35, leave out from "of" to end of line 40 and insert—

'technical assistance controls in relation to technical assistance of any description.

(2) For this purpose—

"technical assistance controls", in relation to any technical assistance, means the prohibition or regulation of participation in the provision outside the United Kingdom of that technical assistance; and

"technical assistance" means services which are provided or used, or which are capable of being used, in connection with the development, production or use of any goods or technology.

(2A) Technical assistance may be described in the order wholly or partly by reference to the uses to which it (or the goods or technology in question) may be put.

(2B) The power to impose technical assistance controls—

(a) shall only be exercised for the purpose of imposing controls corresponding to or connected with—

(i) any export controls or transfer controls imposed under section 1 or 2; or

(ii) any controls imposed by a directly applicable Community provision on the exportation of goods or the transfer of technology; and

(b) is subject to section (*General restriction on purposes of control orders*).'.

No. 5, in page 4, line 3, leave out from "of" to end of line 4 and insert "technical assistance".—*[Nigel Griffiths.]*

Clause 5

CONTROLS ON TRADE IN CONTROLLED GOODS

Amendments made: No. 6, in page 4, line 10, leave out "controlled".

No. 7, in page 4, line 12, leave out "controlled".

No. 8, in page 4, line 17, at end insert—

'( ) Goods may be described in the order wholly or partly by reference to the uses to which the goods, or any information recorded on or derived from them, may be put.

( ) The power to impose trade controls—

(a) shall only be exercised for the purpose of imposing controls corresponding to or connected with—

(i) any export controls or transfer controls imposed under section 1 or 2; or

(ii) any controls imposed by a directly applicable Community provision on the exportation of goods or the transfer of technology; and

(b) is subject to section (*General restriction on purposes of control orders*).'.—*[Nigel Griffiths.]*

Clause 7

GUIDANCE

Mr. Key: I beg to move amendment No. 28, in page 5, line 27, after "function;", insert—

'(bb) the time necessary to process applications;'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 35, in page 5, line 33, leave out subsections (3) and (4) and insert—

'(3) Any published guidance relating to export licensing, which is capable of applying in relation to the exercise of functions under an order under section 1 or 2, shall be treated as guidance under this section.

(4) The consolidated criteria relating to export licensing decisions announced to Parliament by the Secretary of State on 26th October 2000 shall be included in the guidance referred to in subsection (3).

(5) Changes to any guidance issued under subsection (4) shall not take effect until laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(6) Changes to any guidance issued under subsections (1) or (2), or under subsection (3) which does not contain any guidance made by virtue of subsection (4), shall be laid before Parliament and published within 40 days.'.

Mr. Key: Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have companies great and small in their constituencies that produce goods for export, and some of them require export licences. Many hon. Members present today can tell their own tales of letters to Ministers, telephone calls, parliamentary questions and debates concerning delay in granting export licences to companies.

We have heard some passion about the great companies in this country that do so much to create wealth, which is therefore taxed, from which we all benefit. We have heard

a lot of good sense. We have heard one or two over-the-top comments about the merchants of death—over the top in my view, anyhow. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman who made that comment finds out how many people in his constituency who vote for him are involved in defence industries. Nevertheless, one of the perennial problems—the Minister and two former Ministers present have commented on it at some length—is the care that is taken in assessing the value and disbenefits of any export licence application.

The officials who carry out the scrutiny before the decisions go to Ministers have themselves found that their departments have been understaffed and that extra burdens have been put on them. Under this Government, a new department was set up in the Foreign Office to secure a particular Foreign Office input to the ethical dimension. I am not arguing about that, but whatever mechanism Government create to handle the issue, it should be efficient and not unnecessarily disadvantage British industry where it is pursuing lawful objectives in the interests of this country and of their employees, our constituents.

As long ago as 10 May 2001, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) asked the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

"what the (a) average and (b) maximum length of time taken to process export licences was in 2000."—[*Official Report*, 10 May 2001; Vol. 368, c. 305W.]

The answer came back that in 2000 the mean length of time was 26.5 working days, the mode was 15 working days and the median was 17 working days. A lot of other statistics were given, but the basic message was, "Too long."

My amendment is concerned with the fact that the Government have failed to introduce time limits in granting licences in this Bill, which provided a very good opportunity to do so. That is essential to help competition. It would mean that manufacturers could guarantee a time scale for the production and delivery of goods. The 20-day average causes anxiety to businesses, great and small. We heard some interesting ideas from the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) about the equivalent of an outline planning permission being put in by some large companies to try it on with an export licence. That is not the norm; it is the exception.

5.30 pm

Many of the difficulties have arisen with small and medium-sized enterprises and, sometimes, very small family-based engineering companies in our constituencies. For example, I learned recently of a small family-run civil engineering company near Manchester. It specialises in high-quality, low-volume production of orders made to high specifications. Some of its orders are involved in defence. For example, it makes parts of a periscope for tanks as well as all sorts of bits and pieces, such as fins, for aircraft and, on occasion, missiles.

Anyone who knows anything about the engineering industry knows that, although there are the big boys, most of the work takes place in small firms in our constituencies that might employ only a dozen or so highly skilled engineers. They are the hardest hit by delays in export licensing.

That particular company in the north-west was approached to make a piece of equipment. It quoted, got the order and immediately put in a licence application. It went ahead, produced the goods and finished production on time but could not release them and so lost the order. It had done the work, but because three Departments could not process the application in time, it lost the order and was not paid.

On 9 July this year, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) asked a question of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. He congratulated her on her appointment and asked what she would do about the issue of the 20 working days. In a straightforward answer she said:

"Like him, I am worried about the delays and our failure to meet the target for dealing with all the applications on time. However, I am sure that he acknowledges that some of the applications raise complex and difficult issues on which a careful judgment must be made."—[*Official Report*, 9 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 543-44.]

We all understand that; it is inevitable. However, many issues are not complex. For example, a company in my constituency has made marine flares for the best part of half a century. It had a repeat order from Turkey—a member of NATO. It lost the order. It did not get the export licence in time because someone had decided that they suddenly did not want Turkey to receive flares any more. It was not even a new order. That is another frustrating example. There are many more, but I will not bore the House.

It is important to flag up this problem and for the Opposition to try to be constructive. Let us put target times in the Bill to encourage industry and give Ministers and officials an extra incentive. It is not that Ministers are being idle, not doing their boxes or failing to do their duty. I know what it is like; I have been there too. The boxes pile up and woe betide anyone who does not get them back. I admire enormously colleagues who tell their private secretaries that they are not taking boxes home. There are some who do that, but I never managed it. At 7.15 every Saturday morning the boxes arrived, never fewer than three, often as many as five, and that was the weekend gone. We know the feeling. It is not that Ministers or officials are failing to do their jobs properly but the system needs more discipline if we are not to disadvantage British companies. The purpose of the amendment is to introduce such discipline.

The Secretary of State said that she would do everything possible to speed up decision making, but that the Government would not risk making wrong decisions. I agree that they should not risk that. I shall table a written question in a few minutes asking what initiatives the Export Control Organisation is taking to reduce the processing time of licence applications because that touches on the livelihoods of some 400,000 people in this country. If the Government's objectives for the success of British industry are to be realised, export licensing must be an important part of that process. That is why I encourage the Government, through amendment No. 28, to consider inserting a specific sub-paragraph on the time necessary to process applications.

Dr. Cable: I should like to say a few words on amendment No. 35, which is on a theme rather different from that of amendment No. 28. It tries to bring together the two streams of argument current throughout this afternoon's debate. One is that there should be a new way of tackling the issue of appropriate parliamentary scrutiny. Opposition Members accept that the Government's business must be done and that small procedural questions

[Dr. Cable]

must be dealt with speedily. That is why in many cases the lowest level of parliamentary scrutiny is appropriate. However, in other cases, stricter parliamentary scrutiny is required.

That leads me to the second theme: sustainable development. A successor Minister might wish to change the export criteria, and that should be taken seriously and subject to proper scrutiny. Now that the Minister has had an hour or so to cool down, he might accept that his part in that debate was not his finest hour in Parliament. Perhaps he will respond, therefore, to our helpful suggestion in the amendment that he tackle the problem, which is recognised on both sides of the House, in a different way. We suggest that a distinction should be drawn between narrow procedural problems, which are properly dealt with by the most limited form of parliamentary scrutiny, and changes to the consolidated criteria, which are very important and require proper parliamentary oversight.

I remind the Minister of his comments in the earlier debate on sustainable development that might make him think again about facilitating a separate bite of the cherry and providing a different way of safeguarding parliamentary scrutiny. He said that sustainable development was not the only exception to the consolidated criteria that he had not included in the schedule. I endeavoured to intervene to tell him—he was not willing to accept the point—that when he first introduced the Bill, he explained that the concept of diversion had not been included because it was a totally different idea. In fact, that was not a good reason for excluding sustainable development, which is conceptually very similar to issues such as internal repression. When he reflects on that, he will realise that his arguments were weak.

A difficulty was also made of the fact that there are different ways of interpreting sustainable development. I have since in the past hour had an opportunity to check the way in which different Departments deal with the matter. One Department has several definitions, all of which are consistent and relate to the Brundtland criteria. I mention those points because, when the Government reflect on the day's work, I think that they will realise that they did not handle the matter well. There are other ways of safeguarding the criteria from future changes by any Minister who might wish, perhaps capriciously, to ignore the will of Parliament. By splitting the guidance criteria into two, we have suggested a neat legislative way of doing so.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak briefly on an issue that has been of some concern to me in the past in two capacities, one more recent than the other. In the 1980s, I had the privilege of being a special adviser at the DTI. I formed a deep admiration for the work of its officials, but felt that they were generally more concerned with policy than its implementation. Inventing a new policy is a wonderful thing, requiring a great deal of intellectual exercise and agility. Going through the rather dreary process of making sure it works in practice is slightly less appealing.

When it came to export licensing, there was perhaps a tendency to relegate the importance of that part of the Department's work. What my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) had to say was very important, as it reminds officials that it is as important to deliver a policy speedily as it is to invent a marvellous policy. I commend what he said and hope that the Government will reflect that it would do no harm to accept this important amendment.

More recently, I had experience of this problem as a constituency Member. It was a particularly strange occurrence. A company in my constituency that had been actively encouraged by the DTI to export to Pakistan—and had received great assistance from the export promotion wing of the Department, for which it was grateful—then found that the export of the piece of machinery concerned was frustrated by the export licensing regulations. The machinery was impounded at the dock and it took weeks and weeks for the Department to make a decision on the granting of the licence.

We had a bizarre situation, in which the company had been encouraged to export a product by one part of the Department but the export of that piece of kit was frustrated by another part of the Department. Eventually, the Department decided that it should not be exported at all, so all the work of the export promotion part of the DTI was entirely wasted. Now, the same company is being encouraged by the Department to export the same kit to China. Will it get an export licence in reasonable time for the export of that piece of kit? It is odd to see a Government who boast of joined-up government not being able to join up the work of one Department of State.

It would be a generous and wise act to accept the amendment to ensure that there was some pressure on the export licensing function of the Department to act speedily in the interests of British business.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I rise to support my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and amendment No. 28, which would make a vital contribution not only to the efficient working of the system, but to reassuring companies up and down the country. Many of these companies are small. They are not necessarily located in the major centres of defence manufacturing, but in constituencies across the country. Their concerns ought to be taken into account.

I cannot see the harm in adding to the Bill this modest amendment. It is not specific in terms of the number of days within which the Department should make a decision, but it puts in the Bill the need to provide a timetable as guidance to officials. That would provide industry with a degree of certainty. Despite being, generally speaking, favourably disposed towards the Bill, industry sees an element of uncertainty in it. Industry does not like uncertainty; it likes to be certain about the conditions that apply to its operations.

The amendment would send out to industry a strong signal that the Government understand their concern that they must expeditiously handle applications for defence export licences. It is in the Government's own interests to accede to my hon. Friend's suggestion. It would be beneficial to them not only in their relations with industry but from a macro-economic point of view because, as the Minister—and I believe the House—knows, I believe strongly in defence exports. They are vital to the success of Britain's aerospace and defence manufacturing industry, which employs 350,000 people, and absolutely essential to ensure economies of scale in our

manufacturing for our own forces. Therefore, anything that we do to enhance those exports, within a system of licensing, must be good news for Great Britain generally.

5.45 pm

Therefore it is important, at a macro-level, that we should be perfectly clear in our mind of the merits of including, on the face of the Bill, guidance to impose on the Government an obligation to specify conditions regarding the time scale for the granting of licences.

I shall not cite any specific instances, but I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) informed the House earlier in the year of a case in his constituency, and my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) and for Salisbury have told the House of cases in their constituencies. I am sure that the Minister knows that there are many other cases around the country. I hope that when he responds to the debate he will seize the opportunity to tell the House that he accepts the amendment—there is still an off-chance that he might, but I suspect not. I hope that, in the event that he does not do so, he will take the opportunity to tell the House, and through the House British industry, that the Government do understand that if the system of licensing is to work, they must ensure that departmental officials take seriously the need to handle these export licence applications expeditiously, because if they do not, they will lose British business its export markets.

Finally, I shall refer to some comments by the Defence Manufacturers Association which, as the Minister knows, represents the smaller businesses in the defence manufacturing field. In a submission at the time of Second Reading, it said:

"A delicate balance must be achieved between the introduction of controls which are so vague as to be ineffective and easily circumvented by unscrupulous proliferators, and controls which are so stringent as to strangle UK Industry and make exporting by responsible firms almost impossible. Already we are aware of a number of companies who feel that the situation on export controls in the UK is so unhelpful and obstructive that they are either getting out of the business altogether or talking of doing so."

I hope that the Minister will be able to say that the message from Her Majesty's Government tonight is, "We recognise that in the past there have been delays. You can take it from us that we will give this undertaking to the House, and to industries across the country: we will ensure that these applications are handled expeditiously, and that when a company says that if it does not get a decision within the next 48 hours it will lose the order, Ministers will ensure that action is taken to ensure that that company does not lose the order."

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): I also represent a constituency where thousands of workers work in the defence industry, and I also am keen to see that many of the brilliant aircraft that are produced in and around my constituency are exported to many other countries. Is the hon. Gentleman assuming that if a time limit—a deadline—is set for the Department to determine a licensing application, the outcome will be more likely to be positive than negative? It would appear to me that some civil servants—and Ministers—may err on the side of caution when an attempt is made to accelerate the decision-making process. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that rigour may be more important than speed?

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, which enabled me to adjust my dress to be appropriately attired for the Chamber.

Mr. Luff: For the record, I assure the House that the article of dress to which my hon. Friend referred is the poppy in his lapel.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. My poppy fell off earlier when I was visiting the field of remembrance.

Mr. Key: I always carry a spare.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend would make a marvellous Minister for defence procurement, as he always carries a spare. I shall convey that message to those involved in exercise Saif Sareea 2.

The hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) makes a valid point. I am not seeking to alter decisions, but I noted earlier that industry prefers certainty. The House has heard that export orders have been lost because of delays in Government decision making. Business wants decisions to be made quickly so that orders are not lost. It is no good for a Minister to come along 10 days after an order has been lost and say that an export licence has been approved. Indeed, companies could reap an advantage if they knew at the outset that they were not going to get export licences for particular contracts. They would not then waste their time trying to pursue a contract.

The amendment does not specify a time limit on the consideration of applications. The power would be permissive in that, if the amendment were accepted, the Bill would state that a Minister "may" issue guidance with regard to the time scale for applications. That is a modest and fair way to proceed.

Nigel Griffiths: Amendments Nos. 28 and 35 relate to the guidance to be published under clause 7, and I shall explain why neither is appropriate. First, however, it may be true that civil servants were undervalued when the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) was a special adviser at the Department, but I assure him that no one values civil servants more than I do.

Mr. Luff: There is no question—civil servants were not undervalued at that time. I hope that the Minister heard me praise their talents and abilities.

Nigel Griffiths: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has had a chance to put the record straight. I assure him, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and other hon. Members that there has been an improvement in the delivery of the service. More of the 20-working-day targets are being met now than in the recent past, and that shows that the Government take the issue seriously.

Amendment No. 28 would provide for the publication of guidance about the time necessary to process applications under clause 7. That publication would not be mandatory, so I am pleased to tell the House that it is

[Nigel Griffiths]

possible to publish such guidance under clause 7. The Government already publish targets for processing standard individual export licence applications.

The amendment, however, raises important issues to do with the time taken to process licence applications. The Government recognise the difficulty that any delay in processing an individual export licence application can cause the exporter concerned. We aim to ensure that the controls are applied efficiently and impose minimum burdens, but the objective of giving every applicant a decision as quickly as possible cannot outweigh the need to give every application careful assessment against the relevant criteria. That can take time, especially if the application is particularly complicated or if there are concerns about the destinations involved. In an uncertain world, the international status of a destination country can change overnight, and what was an acceptable export last time may thus cease to be acceptable.

The Government are working hard to reduce the time taken to assess export licence applications. We have set demanding targets for processing standard individual export licence applications. In most cases, it is necessary for such applications to be circulated to other Government Departments. Our aim is to provide a substantive response to 70 per cent. of applicants within 20 working days.

Those targets are set out in a service and performance code, which is published by the Department's export control organisation. Information on performance against those targets is already published in the Government's annual reports on strategic export controls.

Amendment No. 28 is not practical, and I assure the House that the Government are doing all that they can to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the licensing system.

Amendment No. 35 would do two things. Proposed new subsection (3) would provide that all guidance published relating to the exercise of licensing functions for export or transfer controls would constitute guidance under clause 7. Proposed new subsection (6) would require all such guidance to be laid before Parliament and published within 40 days. In effect, any guidance on export licensing would have to be laid before Parliament and published within 40 days. Under the Bill, the Secretary of State will be obliged to lay before Parliament guidance issued under clause 7.

Let me outline why we do not consider it sensible that all guidance, including practical guidance on procedure, should have to be laid before Parliament. The Export Control Organisation publishes on its website a range of guidance for exporters, which is updated constantly—if necessary, on a daily basis. To lay that material before Parliament every time it was updated or changed would unnecessarily overburden the procedures for laying documents before Parliament. That would be unnecessary, because that material is accessible to all Members and the public on the DTI's website or on request from the Export Control Organisation. Moreover, in the Government's view, it would be inappropriate.

We believe that clause 7 should be used to lay before Parliament key guidance documents—for example, where new international commitments have been entered into—and, of course, the consolidated criteria. Proposed new subsections (4) and (5) would require that changes could only be made to the consolidated criteria with Parliament's approval.

The House will not deny the Government credit for making public and transparent the criteria against which licence applications are assessed. We have gone further, pressing the EU to adopt a similar code of conduct for arms exports to ensure that common standards apply across the EU. No one is in any doubt about the importance that we attach to the existence of the consolidated criteria and the EU code, and the Bill will, for the first time, make reference to the criteria in legislation. The consolidated criteria are based predominantly on that code of conduct.

It is quite proper to obtain parliamentary approval for new legislation, but this matter does not require new legislation to be made. If changes to the criteria were made, the Government would, of course, announce them. Parliament or parliamentary Committees could consider any change in the usual way, but it would not be appropriate for such changes to be subject to formal parliamentary scrutiny of the kind that applies to new legislation. In view of the explanations that I have given, I invite the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to the Minister for that explanation. I believe that the message has been taken, and it will be transmitted around Whitehall, no doubt. In good faith, therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 8

Annual Reports

Nigel Griffiths: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 5, leave out lines 43 to 45 and insert—

'(1) The Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament in respect of each year—

(a) a report on the operation during the year of any order under section 1 so far as relating to the export of objects of cultural interest; and

(b) a report on other matters relating to the operation of this Act (and any order made under it) during the year.

(2) A report required by subsection (1) shall be laid as soon as practicable after the end of the year to which it relates.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 29, in page 5, line 45, at end insert—

'( ) Such reports shall list the other member countries of the European Union and shall show in respect of each such member country any information known to the Secretary of State regarding the granting of a licence within that country in respect of an essentially identical transaction refused or regulated within the United Kingdom.'.

Government amendments Nos. 11 and 27.

Nigel Griffiths: I shall explain why Government amendments Nos. 9, 11 and 27 are necessary. I shall also explain why amendment No. 29 should not be pressed to a Division.

Under Government amendments Nos. 9, 11 and 27, we simply seek to ensure that the current practice of publishing separate annual reports on cultural and strategic export controls can continue after the Bill comes into force—an issue to which I referred earlier. At present, the DTI, Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office produce the annual report on strategic export controls. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport produces a separate report on exports of objects of cultural interest.

Given that the audiences for those two reports are likely to be different, it makes sense to publish them separately. Separate publication also ensures that the cost to members of the public of obtaining the information in which they are interested will be kept to a minimum; and we ensure that the annual report on strategic exports is available free from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website.

Under amendment No. 29, an obligation would be imposed on the Secretary of State to publish information on decisions by other EU member states to grant licences for essentially identical transactions refused or regulated by the United Kingdom in the Government's annual reports on strategic export controls. We make every effort, including through the exchange of information on licensing decisions, to promote a multilateral approach to export control. We promote harmonisation between our partners in the European Union and in the international non-proliferation regimes.

6 pm

Before any EU member states grants a licence that has been denied by another member state or states for an essentially identical transaction in the last three years, it is required first to consult any member state that issued the denial notification under the provisions of the EU code of conduct on arms exports. If, following the consultation, the member state nevertheless decides to grant a licence, it will notify the member state or states issuing the denial notification, giving detailed explanation of its reasoning.

The EU code stipulates that such exchanges between member states are to be treated as confidential and are not to be used for commercial advantage. The Government intend to observe that confidentiality in dealing with denial notifications and consultations to ensure that the code can continue to be the basis of free exchanges of information between member states. For that reason, the Government oppose the amendment.

The EU already publishes information on the number of licences issued, denial notifications, and bilateral and multilateral consultations initiated in the annual report on the EU code of conduct for arms exports. Thus information that can be put in the public domain is already put in the public domain at EU level.

At the same time, the Government continue to urge all member states to match the benchmarks for transparency in arms exports that we have already set out in our annual reports on strategic export controls. The decision to transfer or deny the transfer of any item is a matter of national discretion, and the Government recognise that there are differences between member states' policies towards certain countries, as reflected by the existence of national embargoes or other restrictions.

In view of the explanations that I have given, I invite Members to support amendments Nos. 9, 11 and 27. I ask those who tabled amendment No. 29 not to press it.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 9

INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: No. 10, in page 6, line 7, at end insert—

' "control order" means an order under section 1(1), 2(1), 4(1) or 5(1);'.

No. 11, in page 6, line 8, at end insert—

' "objects of cultural interest" includes objects of historical or scientific interest;'.

No. 12, in page 6, line 9, at end insert—

' "technical assistance" and "technical assistance controls" have the meanings given in section 4(2);'.

No. 13, in page 6, line 10, at end insert—

' "trade controls" has the meaning given in section 5(2);'.

No. 14, in page 6, line 16, leave out subsections (2) to (5).—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Clause 11

ORDERS

Amendments made: No. 15, in page 7, line 4, leave out—

'an order under section 1 or 2'

and insert "a control order".

No. 16, in page 7, line 5, leave out "3(2)" and insert—

'*(General restriction on purposes of control orders)* (2)'.

No. 17, in page 7, line 16, leave out "or 2" and insert "2, 4 or 5".

No. 18, in page 7, line 17, leave out "3(2)" and insert "

'*(General restriction on purposes of control orders)* (2)'.

No. 19, in page 7, line 18, leave out "4, 5 or".—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Schedule

PURPOSES FOR MAKING ORDERS UNDER SECTION 1(1) OR 2(1)

Amendments made: No. 20, in page 9, line 3, leave out paragraph 1.

No. 21, in page 9, line 5, leave out "An" and insert "A control".

No. 22, in page 9, line 7, leave out "An" and insert "A control".

No. 23, in page 9, leave out lines 13 to 26 and insert—

'4 An order may be made for the purpose of imposing export controls in relation to goods of any description if it appears to the Secretary of State when the order is made that there is a risk that exportation of such goods might have a relevant consequence.

4A An order may be made for the purpose of imposing transfer controls in relation to technology of any description if it appears to the Secretary of State when the order is made that there is a risk that transfer of such technology might have a relevant consequence.

4B An order may be made for the purpose of imposing technical assistance controls in relation to technical assistance of any description if it appears to the Secretary of State when the order is made that there is a risk that the provision outside the United Kingdom of such assistance might have a relevant consequence.

4C An order may be made for the purpose of imposing trade controls in relation to goods of any description if it appears to the Secretary of State when the order is made that there is a risk that carrying out the activities to be controlled in relation to such goods might have a relevant consequence.

4D(1) For the purposes of this Schedule a relevant consequence, in relation to any activity, is a consequence (direct or indirect) of a kind mentioned in the following Table.'.

No. 24, in page 10, line 2, leave out from beginning of line to "the" in line 3 and insert—

'The carrying out anywhere in the world of acts which facilitate'.

No. 25, in page 10, leave out lines 6 and 7 and insert—

'The carrying out anywhere in the world of (or of acts which facilitate)—'.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Amendment proposed: No. 39, in page 10, line 11, at end insert—

E An adverse effect on the sustainable development of the country to which the goods were exported, or the technology was transferred.'.—*[Dr. Cable.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 92, Noes 237.

Division No. 52] **[6.2 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Garnier, Edward
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Maclean, Rt Hon David
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Spring, Richard
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyrie, Andrew
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin

Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. John Heppell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 26, in page 10, line 13, leave out from beginning of line to "acts" in line 14 and insert—

'The carrying out anywhere in the world of (or of acts which facilitate)'.

No. 27, in page 10, line 23, leave out sub-paragraph (2).—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

6.17 pm

Nigel Griffiths: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank hon. Members for the important contributions they have made to this vital Bill, not only on Report but on Second Reading and in Committee. Those who have participated in the debates have provided thorough and useful scrutiny of the Bill's provisions—indeed, so useful has the scrutiny been that it has informed the amendments that have just been made.

The Bill is the result of years of intensive work. Current export control powers were introduced more than 60 years ago. I shall outline the main advances shortly. The Bill is the product of an open and consultative approach, which I have every intention of continuing. The events of 11 September mean that there is now an even greater need for new controls on arms to be passed by Parliament. While work continues on new emergency legislation in the wake of events in America, the Bill plays an important part in strengthening and modernising the powers available to us to control the arms trade.

Whatever the technical details, we should never lose sight of the bigger picture, especially the humanitarian objective. The Bill is about controls on lethal weapons. There is, regrettably, too much evidence of what such weapons can do, which is why we are working with like-minded nations to reinforce and extend international counter-proliferation efforts. The Bill will make a significant contribution to that work.

One of the most important improvements is that the Bill provides for proper parliamentary scrutiny of secondary legislation. As well as negative resolution procedures, the Bill provides for both draft and delayed affirmative resolution procedures. It is worth remembering that the Act it will replace makes no provision at all for parliamentary scrutiny.

As well as replacing existing powers to control exports, the Bill will modernise our controls and provide powers to control the electronic transfer of relevant technology. It is essential that the controls that apply to exports should apply also to technology that may be communicated by telephone, fax or e-mail. The House will welcome the new power to allow the Government to bring controls on military technology into line with those on dual-use technology.

An equal welcome has been given to the new power to control the provision of technical assistance overseas. We intend to use the power to implement the EU joint action, which relates to controls on technical assistance.

Yet another widely welcomed measure allows us to control trafficking and brokering in arms. For the first time, the UK Government will have a comprehensive power that will allow them to introduce controls on UK involvement in trade between overseas countries in goods that are subject to export controls.

These measures will allow us to prohibit UK involvement in the illicit supply of weapons to regions of conflict. We all have a vested interest in ensuring that UK arms manufacturers that are at pains to comply with our export controls regime are not undermined by unscrupulous foreign agents and foreign companies. That is why the Government will continue to press for action to be taken at an international level.

We shall continue to press for international embargoes to be imposed on countries and regions of conflict. That is the best way to stop the supply of arms to those regions. We have supported, and we shall continue to support, efforts within the EU to secure a political commitment from all member states to introduce controls on arms trafficking and brokering. I am advised that such a commitment is imminent.

[Nigel Griffiths]

The Bill will also ensure greater transparency in decision making by setting out in the schedule the purposes for which export controls may be imposed. It will therefore be clear to all concerned exactly what the statutory parameters for imposing controls are. The Bill also provides for the publication of guidance about licensing decisions, and requires such guidance to be taken into account in licensing decisions.

The major improvement in transparency is backed for the first time by a statutory requirement on Government to produce annual reports on strategic export controls, and a separate annual report on items of cultural interest. The NGO Saferworld has said of our annual reports on strategic export controls that they

"currently stand as the most transparent reports published by any European country, and offer a potential template for best practice throughout the EU."

The annual reports are instrumental in enabling the Government to be held to account for their decisions. It is right that future Governments will be required to continue to report to Parliament annually.

There is no question but that the Bill will transform the UK's export control regime. It provides a new framework that allows for the introduction of an effective and comprehensive new set of export controls. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.22 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): It has been a long haul to get where we are today. The Minister rightly paid tribute to the many Members who have contributed to the Bill's evolution, not least the members of the four Select Committees that came together to form the Quadripartite Committee.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page)—they have not contributed to our debates today—for the work that they did on the Bill before they were substituted at half time, as it were, by me and my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key).

The Bill has had the longest gestation period of almost any Bill in recent years. The Scott report, which gave rise to the Bill, was published in February 1996, five and a half years ago. The Conservative Government accepted the report's recommendations and immediately issued a consultation document. The Labour party's manifesto in 1997 gave a firm pledge to take action. That was followed by the publication of the White Paper in 1998. Yet after that the Government sat on their hands, so it has taken three years for the Bill finally to be introduced. That is all the more remarkable given the fulminations of the current Leader of the House back in 1996 at the time of the Scott report. Yet when he was in a position to influence the timing of legislation, he and the Government allowed the matter to drift disgracefully.

Even now, we are merely at the end of the beginning. There can be little doubt, especially after this afternoon's debate, that there is still a great deal more work to be done when the Bill is considered in another place. Nevertheless, I do not wish to be too churlish; I recognise that the Bill will bring transparency and openness, which were previously lacking, and I welcome that. It deals with difficult questions.

Although the control of the export of goods related to armaments is clearly important, it is not always easy. I shall provide a brief illustration. A few years ago, when I was working for the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, I accompanied her on a regional visit. We were returning to London from a Royal Air Force station, and had to wait for a short period while the plane was being prepared. The commanding officer of the station asked if we would be interested in seeing something, and took us to a disused hangar on the periphery of the base, where there were a large number of steel cylinders. They were in fact the Iraqi supergun but, even after I was told, that was not obvious. They may still be there for all I know.

Opposition Members welcome the Bill, but our welcome is qualified. As happens all too often, the Government have decided that most of the legislative detail will be left to secondary legislation, of which we have seen only draft orders at a late stage during discussion of the Bill. It will be difficult to judge the Bill's impact on British industry and commerce until we see those orders, which will be published after the Bill has become law. That is a bad principle for any Government to follow.

On Second Reading on 9 July, we made it clear that we believe that the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939 is inadequate, inappropriate and ripe for revision. However, what we have in its place is effectively no more than an enabling measure. Neither the Government nor British industry or its customers know precisely how the Bill will work. The Quadripartite Committee, which brought together the Defence Committee and the Select Committees on Foreign Affairs, on International Development and on Trade and Industry, recommended that the Government publish draft secondary legislation before Second Reading. In the event, the dummy orders, four of them stretching to nearly sixty pages, were first seen by members of the Standing Committee when they were published in October, halfway through their deliberations. That is a travesty of which the Government have every reason to be ashamed.

At the heart of the Bill lies the schedule which, for the first time, sets out in statute the purposes for which the Government can impose export controls. That brings welcome additional transparency, but the Bill also allows the Government to change the schedule simply by order without the need for further primary legislation. What is more, the Government can override the provisions of the schedule and impose export controls outside those provisions, again simply by means of secondary legislation. That was rightly criticised by the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee of the other place.

In their consultation document on the Bill, the Government used weasel words:

"The negative procedure would provide Parliament with the opportunity to debate and vote on secondary legislation where appropriate".

For those unfamiliar with the workings of this place, that may well sound a sensible compromise. But as anyone who works here knows, it is not the reality of the situation. Parliament does not decide whether to debate a negative resolution: the Government do. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells said on Second Reading,

"If the Government do not want a debate, there will not be one."—[*Official Report*, 9 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 552.]

We have rightly spent time this afternoon seeking to persuade the Government to change their mind. Lord Scott made it plain in his evidence to the Quadripartite Committee that he would prefer the affirmative resolution procedure to be used. The negative resolution procedure is not necessarily restricted to technical and uncontroversial orders, as the Government have tried to claim. Some of the orders that have already been laid before Parliament raise issues deserving examination. Yet at every turn, the Government have sought to resist the greater involvement of Parliament in a way that those concerned with improving the accountability of Ministers and the scrutiny of Government decisions will find difficult to understand.

When the dummy orders finally arrived on the desks of the members of the Standing Committee and were taken off the internet by British industry, the Government tried to justify their methods in the accompanying notes published at the time. The Government claimed that the export control provisions of the dummy orders represented a consolidation and a rationalisation of controls that were already in force; that the operation and enforcement of certain controls on the electronic transfer of dual-use technology were already contained in statutory instruments; that the dummy order includes provisions on the purpose for which information held by the Secretary of State may be disclosed; and that the new legislation simply codified existing practice.

The dummy orders increased the maximum penalty from seven years to 10 years, both under our national legislation and for offences under directly applicable European Community legislation. These are not matters of technicality. They raise hugely significant issues, yet the House is expected to believe that they will be dealt with adequately by statutory instruments and a short debate Upstairs.

One of the other main issues that has occupied our attention this afternoon has been the strange omission from the Bill of any reference to sustainable development. As has already been pointed out, in the consultation paper on the draft legislation, which was published in March this year, the schedule to the draft Bill contained in the table a section headed "Sustainable Development", which made it clear that the Government intended to take into consideration in granting licences a serious adverse effect on the economy of any country, or the potential for sustainable economic development in a country.

In the first paragraph of her speech on Second Reading, the Secretary of State said:

"We shall not ignore our international responsibilities: to reduce poverty, promote sustainable development and reduce conflict.

That is what the Export Control Bill is about."—[*Official Report*, 9 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 542.]

Yet that is precisely what the Bill is not about, as the references in the draft Bill were subsequently removed. That absence from the Bill has caused concern to a number of NGOs and to a large number of hon. Members in all parts of the House, as has been evident this afternoon.

Nigel Griffiths: Can the hon. Gentleman confirm whether the arms manufacturers asked for such a provision to be put in the Bill?

Mr. Whittingdale: I do not believe that the arms manufacturers have made such a request, but it is the House, rather than the arms manufacturers, that wishes to determine the contents of the Bill. There are serious concerns that need to be addressed.

The Minister has claimed throughout our proceedings this afternoon that sustainable development is a criterion by which export licences can be judged, as set out in the EU code of conduct. He argued that it is therefore unnecessary to specify sustainable development as a criterion in the schedule to the Bill. However, he has plainly failed to explain why, if it is possible to use the criterion contained in the EU code of conduct, it cannot also be contained in the schedule. His explanations on that point have been profoundly unconvincing. For that reason, we supported amendment No. 39.

The Bill will have a considerable impact on a key sector of British industry. Not only is the United Kingdom's the fourth largest economy in the world, but we remain a major international manufacturing and trading nation, and our defence manufacturing industry is second only to that of the United States of America. It employs some 350,000 people and there can hardly be a single hon. Member whose constituency does not contain some defence-related businesses.

In my constituency, that is certainly the case. We have the BAE Systems research centre at Great Baddow, and just eight weeks ago I was the guest of Alenia Marconi at the Defence Systems and Equipment International, or DSEi, exhibition at the Excel centre in Docklands. The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) mentioned that exhibition and raised some questions about the people who had been invited to attend it. However, the exhibition was a fantastic showcase of British defence manufacturers and left one in no doubt about their importance to the economy.

These are difficult times for all involved in business, and manufacturing in particular. The manufacturing sector has been in recession since the beginning of the year and the latest figures show another significant drop in output. It is therefore essential that the Government should not add to the burden of regulation and bureaucracy any more than is necessary. The Government do not have a very good record on that, and defence firms are right to worry that the Bill might make it harder still for them to compete.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury rightly pressed the Government with his amendment to include in the Bill a requirement that licence applications be determined within a specific period. I regret that the Government were not persuaded by his argument, although I draw some comfort from the assurances that the Minister gave. There is still concern that the Bill may make it even harder for Department of Trade and Industry officials to determine applications within a reasonable time, and that that might add a further impediment to the competitiveness of defence manufacturers.

The Government's task has been to strike a delicate balance between the need to exert proper control over the export of goods and related technology and the need not to inhibit legitimate trade unnecessarily by imposing unrealistic or burdensome regulation. How successful they have been in that task will be very difficult to tell until we have seen the detail of the secondary legislation. We shall, however, support the Bill on Third Reading, while continuing to raise these issues. I suspect that they will be

[Mr. Whittingdale]

the feature of debate in another place and perhaps here, too, when the secondary legislation comes back before the House.

6.36 pm

Mr. O'Neill: I listened with ever-increasing incredulity to the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). When he was carrying the bags of the then Prime Minister, I remember trying to elicit information from the then Conservative Government about issues such as Iraqi guns, and getting either a wall of silence or a cackle of deceit. We got no information; we had virtually no means of getting to the bottom of those matters.

I have been mildly critical of the Bill today. There have been pieces of legislation from which one derives particular satisfaction, and the legislation on the national minimum wage is an example. I take pride in this Bill because I realise that much of the campaigning and arguing that we did in the late 1980s and early 1990s is now bearing fruit; indeed, it has borne fruit.

There are some grounds for complaint about the tardiness with which the Bill was produced. Nevertheless, reports have been produced and improved on year on year, largely as a consequence of the Quadripartite Committee's criticisms. The reports started out with an unacceptable degree of opacity in their writing and presentation, and it was thanks to the Clerk of the Committee and some of its members—Ted Rowlands, its then Chairman, in particular—that the publications were put into an intelligible form. The importance of doing that was that the argument can no longer be levelled against us that we should not restrict trade in armaments because if we do not carry on that trade, someone else will because there is no leverage in the international arena. We now have that leverage.

I am always reluctant to place any Government on the high moral ground, but we now have a position from which to argue internationally in favour of a better control regime for armaments. That means that we can give the lie to the argument, hinted at by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford, that we are somehow going to disadvantage our armaments industry. Armaments industries always complain, and they always will.

We now have a means whereby we can show a proper way of dealing with the arms business, which I believe is a legitimate part of economic activity. It reduces the cost base and the unit cost of our own equipment and is an important employer and trainer of labour. I know from my experience in the east of Scotland that the armaments industry was the engine that drove what became known as silicon glen and the high-tech civilian industries.

I welcome the Bill and I hope that it may be tweaked a bit in the Lords. Every Opposition complain about negative resolutions. I spent years labouring in the Augean stables of the Standing Committees, looking for references to negative procedures so that we could have a debate on them. That kept the Committees going. Sometimes that took us half the night—but my point is that, by and large, the Bill marks a major step forward in our handling of the armaments industry. It can be held up as an example to the rest of the world. It is not often that we can do that in Britain, and for that reason alone—apart from all the other desirable elements—I wish the Bill well elsewhere. I hope that eventually we shall secure a degree of prior scrutiny, but at this stage I am happy for the best not to be the enemy of the good.

6.40 pm

Dr. Tonge: I well remember, as a very new Member, sitting in the Locarno rooms in the Foreign Office and listening to that speech about foreign policy with an ethical dimension. I do not think there was a dry eye in the house that morning: it was tremendously moving and very exciting to feel that we were part of a new Government with a new slant—a new ethical dimension.

We waited excitedly for tangible proof of the new direction that we had taken. We waited, and we waited. In my office, we waited particularly for a Bill to follow up the Scott report—a Bill on arms control. We waited four years. When the draft Bill was published, a cheer went up from the young people who worked in the office, and from me. We were delighted; it was extremely welcome. The hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) is right. This Bill is welcome, and in many ways it is a very good Bill. We will, of course, support it.

In these closing stages, we should pay tribute to a couple of bodies. I am thinking of non-governmental organisations such as the UK Working Group on Arms, and Saferworld, which have done a tremendous job in supporting and briefing Members. Some of the issues have been very difficult, and I think that their good work should be recorded publicly. I also pay tribute to the Quadripartite Committee, which has been brilliant, and to its Chairman. I was sad to be a member of it for such a short time; its work and its report have been exemplary. I do not understand why the Government cannot accept the concept of prior scrutiny. A Committee like the Quadripartite Committee would be entirely responsible, and would surely respect the needs of the arms industry. It would weigh up those needs, and balance them against all the other needs that it had to consider.

I am still concerned about brokering. I am still not convinced that the Bill would prevent a man with a mobile telephone from selling arms wherever he wanted to. We have been given all sorts of assurances, but I hope the matter will be considered again in the other place. My main concern, however, still relates to the cumulative effect of arms exports on developing countries. Linked with that, of course, is our favourite topic this week, sustainable development. We have heard well-argued speeches on the subject today and yesterday, when we debated the International Development Bill. I feel that the Minister's responses today have been pathetic—he seems constantly to fall back on the European code of conduct, which he apparently considers to be legally binding. We all know that it is not.

Let me read the Minister a short extract from the report of the Committee stage. It is very short; do not despair. I said:

"The Minister must realise that much argument resulted when the Government gave permission for the repair of guns for Morocco, which borders Western Sahara."

Members may remember the incident. I continued:

"That contravened clause 8 of the European code of conduct, and nothing happened as a consequence. The provision is not legally binding."

In replying, the Minister said:

"Criterion 8 derives from the EU code of conduct on arms exports, and we are firmly committed to it. Hon. Members want to prevent a future Government from withdrawing from consideration of sustainable development as part of the export licensing process. They are ignoring the fact that we signed up to the EU code of conduct. We shall not withdraw from it, and a future Government will have to be bound by clause 8".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 17 July 2001; c. 47-48.]

That is all very fine, but a couple of months before the code of conduct had already been broken and nothing happened, so it is not very reassuring constantly to fall back on that code.

Sadly, although it is welcome, it is a curate's egg of a Bill. I hope that it will be further improved in the other place.

6.45 pm

Roger Casale: I wish to make three brief points. At the end of our proceedings on the Bill, first, let us not lose sight of where the Bill came from. I certainly remember that afternoon in February 1996, before I was a Member of this place, when the Scott report was published and layer after layer of deceit was peeled away to reveal a rot at the core of our Government, which was the old decrepit system of arms control. All of us have a duty to restore public confidence in the transparency of our political system and in the Government's capacity to exercise a rational, fair and effective policy on the control of arms. I believe that the Bill goes a long way towards that end.

Secondly, the Bill is long overdue. The previous such Bill was passed before the second world war in 1939. Times have changed since then, but let us remember that times have also changed since 11 September. We started to consider the Bill before the events of that day. I hope that the Minister and the Government will recognise that times change, the world becomes a more dangerous place and we need all the time to keep arms control measures and legislation under review and up to date.

Thirdly, I welcome the spirit of many of the responses during the debate. Clearly, there is much work still to be done on parliamentary scrutiny, on end-use monitoring and in particular on ensuring that sustainable development is, if not in the Bill, very much part of the spirit of the legislation as it operates in practice.

It is a landmark Bill and it rightly has all-party support. Although we understand and support the Government's desire to ensure that the Bill works in practice, much work can still be done when we review the Bill's operation in the light of experience to keep the ideas and aspirations that lie behind it alive in the years to come.

6.48 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth: It looks as though it falls to me to be the tail-end Charlie in the debate on this important Bill. I entirely support the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), who made a number of extremely important points about detailed aspects of the Bill. We shall follow with great care how the Government implement the Bill, if it manages to secure safe passage through the other place.

However, I think that it is wrong to pretend to the British public that there has not been a system of arms export control in place over the past 60 years—there has. It may not have been perfect, but Governments of all complexions have tried to operate an ethical foreign policy in respect of arms exports. It would be invidious to suggest that any previous Government had been cavalier in the way in which they allowed British arms equipment to be exported to other countries.

Despite my repeated requests for evidence from Ministers of where there had been any lack of integrity on the part of British defence exporters, virtually no evidence whatever was forthcoming, apart from the mention of Sandline. Certainly, none of our major companies in the UK, which employ so many of our constituents, has ever been cited by any hon. Member—any Back Bencher or Minister—as having shown any lack of integrity in the way in which it promoted its business overseas. Those who are engaged in these activities are generally people of integrity and the last thing that they would want to see is British equipment falling into the hands of those who might use it against our own armed forces.

The Bill generally commands support. We have had a system of export control, but it has been deemed inadequate. That is why we had the Scott inquiry, which made a number of recommendations that the Bill is seeking to implement.

BAE Systems has its headquarters in my constituency. It said:

"The new Bill will render the UK's export control regime more efficient and more effective whilst at the same time meeting the ethical objectives set out in the preamble to the Bill. However, it is also our hope that the Bill will not have the effect of adversely affecting either the competitiveness of UK companies or their ability to collaborate effectively with EU and/or US partners."

It also believes that it should not be put at a disadvantage as against its competitors in the United States or the EU. It is a common view among Conservative Members that the Government must implement this legislation carefully to ensure that it is not our companies in our constituencies that are put at an unfair disadvantage.

On a point of principle, I believe that the supply of defence equipment to our friends and allies enhances Britain's interests and influence overseas. It helps to reinforce stability in potentially turbulent regions of the world. It reduces the unit cost of supplying British equipment to Her Majesty's forces and is an honourable thing to do.

The Government have frequently committed British troops to action and we stand poised now. Who knows the extent to which British troops will be called upon to act in defence of our interests and in the wider interests of freedom around the world in the coming weeks. Defence exports help to ensure that they can afford to go into battle with the best of British equipment, not with equipment that we have had to buy from overseas because we have reduced our domestic capacity to produce it. The Government must strive to operate this law without emasculating a vital component of British manufacturing industry. I hope that they will interpret the law in that way.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Kidderminster Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

6.53 pm

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to raise the matter of the drastic downgrading of Kidderminster general hospital, which as most people know is the main reason why I am here. I am especially grateful that, at this time of international crisis, we can still consider important local issues. If we were deflected from that, terrorism would have won a battle.

On 12 September I was lucky enough to visit a local primary school. The joy, optimism and hope on the faces of the children restored to me a real feeling that the world was still a good place in which to live and that life had to go on. After introducing me, the head teacher asked a five-year-old what my job was. The five-year-old said, "He helps the Prime Minister." In fact, that statement has hidden depth. As an Independent, I have the huge privilege of being able to support the Prime Minister if he is right and being equally able, without the Whips leaning on me, to oppose him if he is wrong. It is a unique position.

I am now daring to say that Ministers were wrong in their decision about the reconfiguration of acute hospitals in Worcestershire. My job is to prove that to the House and to show that Ministers have based their decision on inaccurate and incorrect information. When I left the school, the small primary children sang a jazzy little number about David and Goliath. They did not realise how exactly apt that was.

The decision was to remove all acute in-patient beds and the accident and emergency department from an acute general hospital to a new hospital 18 miles away. Let us remember that there are nearly 100,000 people within four to five miles of the original site. They are now 18 miles away from the new site, and a further 25,000 people can be up to 35 miles from the new hospital. The acute general hospital had received a charter mark, most of its buildings are only six to 23 years old and, in the words of a distressed local lady, it is woven into the fabric of Kidderminster life—since, in fact, the 1820s.

How was the decision reached? I make no apology for referring to that because it allows me to alert other people facing threatened downgrading to the unscrupulous methods that managers may use to obtain their ends, and to why public consultation is in such disrepute. Divide and rule is one of the techniques; some are given enough to be kept quiet. That was shown by the responses to the consultation process. Of the 122 responses from official bodies, 50—nearly half—came from the 20 per cent. of the county's population living in the north-west part. Of those 50, 49 were rigidly against the plan.

The local medical committee, which represents all general practitioners in the county, rejected the proposals and found no evidence that they would provide a better, safer service. Another interesting response came from the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith). She was reported by the Worcestershire health authority as saying that she supported the proposal for a new hospital in Worcester, but not one which would centralise basic services away from local people. That is just what the plan did for my constituents, but not for hers.

Consultation has also been brought into such disrepute by the use of option appraisals. If hon. Members find them mentioned in hospital service reviews, they should beware. They are merely a method of wrapping up pseudo-statistics which are produced to confuse. In the Worcestershire case, the option appraisal was purely and simply a vote by the majority in the south and east of the county against the minority in the north and west.

What were the reasons for the decision? In these days of open government, we were staggered to find that communications between the NHS executive in the west midlands—now the west midlands regional office—and the Department of Health are entirely secret. Nobody can get at them. The reasons quoted are that the hospital would be unviable because of royal college guidelines for consultant specialisation and junior doctor training. That was absolute rubbish because the same guidelines were interpreted differently in many parts of the country.

Having forced through an unpopular decision, how does one realise it despite opposition? One allays the opposition—first, with spin.

"A comprehensive hospital will remain, dealing with the majority of both elective and emergency services."

Those were the words of the health authority, but one could not go there with appendicitis, a heart attack or pneumonia.

"85 per cent. of patients will still be treated"—

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Fitzpatrick.]*

Dr. Taylor: The health authority continued:

"85 per cent. of patients will still be treated there."

Of course they will; that number is made up of the day cases, out-patients and investigations that one finds at any hospital.

If one puts the kiss of death on an acute general hospital, staff will leave. Most believed that there was no alternative. The next step is to denigrate one's opponents. Most of us were called medical dinosaurs, a few were called militant activists and I was called King Canute. Thus, it happened that consultants had to agree. The downgrading, or virtual closure, was engineered by loss of staff, which meant the hospital was unsafe, and happened on 18 September 2000.

Where do we go from here? The unfairness is obvious. Hexham, Kendal, Bishop Auckland, Banbury and Neath—to name but a few—are smaller concentrations of population, with similar or fewer journeys, which have retained far more than we have.

Looking to the future, there is an admission that bed numbers were wrong. Also, there was an admission that elective in-patient surgery has to return to Kidderminster. We are looking forward to the time when primary care trusts will take control, because we can talk to our trust.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is concern that the primary care groups will not be in a position to form the primary care trusts in our region in time for the 1 April deadline? Does he agree that we need to seek guidance from the Minister tonight on whether there might be some sort of delay?

Dr. Taylor: There is real concern among primary care groups who are not yet primary care trusts that they will

not be ready. When that is coupled with the drastic reorganisation that produces strategic health authorities, we have a double reason for being worried about the future. I am pleased that we are working with the primary care trusts because these are people that we can talk to.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): On behalf of other Members of Parliament from the region, may I say that we all agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments and that we are looking forward to the Minister's response to his legitimate concerns?

Dr. Taylor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her support and for that of hon. Friends who cannot be here tonight.

We are delighted with the changes that are occurring at the top of the Worcestershire acute hospitals NHS trust. With the appropriate replacements, I and the primary care trust may start to have meaningful dialogue, which has been impossible to date.

I am delighted that the Royal College of Physicians and the Nuffield trust are looking at models that will provide emergency services at local hospitals. That is crucial for us in our battle to regain emergency services for Wyre Forest and south Shropshire. It is crucial to hospitals such as Crawley, Canterbury, Haslar, Penzance and, possibly, Pontefract, where emergency services may be threatened by larger neighbours. It is crucial to restore fairness and equality in the provision of emergency services across the country.

In this way, there may never again need to be such an unnecessary revolution as that which put me here. Purely selfishly, I am extremely grateful to be here, as this is the most superb job. I promote it as the best way for a retired doctor to enhance his pension, and I must say that I am enjoying what I do.

I do not believe that there is any other concentration of population of nearly 100,000 people that does not have an accident and emergency department within 18 miles. Despite frequent assertions by the health authority and others, the changes are not in the best interests of patients; that is the opinion of most local doctors, whose opposition was removed when they were led to believe that the changes were the only possibility for the future of hospital services in the county. It is not true that the Royal College of Surgeons, as has been said, was about to withdraw junior hospital doctor training recognition before the review.

I, and the 28,000 people who put me in this place, request the Minister to allow fairness and equality to return to local emergency hospital services throughout the country, by supporting the studies by the Royal College of Physicians and others to find workable models for emergency care in local hospitals.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): My hon. Friend knows that I disagree with him about the future chairmanship of the acute hospitals trust, and I am concerned that the point that he has made about bed numbers and the need for an improved A and E service at Kidderminster may be underplayed by any future chairman. Does he share my concern that the chairman who takes over from Mr. Harold Musgrove should not be a Government placeman who does the Government's bidding but one who argues robustly for the interests of Worcestershire, as I believe that Mr. Musgrove is now doing?

Dr. Taylor: I am delighted with my hon. Friend's intervention because, although we disagree about that particular personality, we are both determined that the person who succeeds him will be someone who welds together the hospital services of the whole county into one system, which really works. He must be someone with the management skills of King Solomon, if King Solomon had them, because it will be a tremendous job to weld together consultants who work differently, with three very separate communities. It is so important that we get the right person, whom we—the GPs, the hospital consultants, all MPs—can really talk to.

Mr. Luff: And who will argue with the Government.

Dr. Taylor: I am very grateful.

In my view, the Government are very good at ideas, initiatives and words. I want to quote to the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), whom I am delighted to see in the Chamber, some of her own words, which are absolutely crucial to the future of the national health service. In the letter that was circulated with the consultation document on involving patients and the public in health care, she wrote:

"The culture within the NHS needs to change, so that the views of patients and citizens are not only valued, but listened to and acted upon as well."

Those are excellent words and excellent aims. Can the Government deliver?

Mr. Luff: As the extra time is available, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it in order to take two minutes of the House's time?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. As this has become a debate of 37 minutes maximum, it is possible for other hon. Members to take part, but I hope that they will have regard to the fact that the originator of the motion deserves a full ministerial answer.

7.8 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I shall speak for no more than two minutes.

I was very interested to hear the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor), and I agreed with almost everything in it. However, I believe that he did not sufficiently emphasise one issue—the contribution that Kidderminster general hospital can make to increasing total bed numbers in the county. That is no criticism of what he said; it is just an observation.

There is now a consensus in the county that bed numbers are far too low. The Government's own figures show that, and privately health managers believe that the Government figures underestimate how low they are. I am one of those who actually took an optimistic view of bed numbers, and in a sense I am making a confession that I believe that I got that judgment wrong.

I hope that, in her remarks, the Minister will specifically consider how Kidderminster general hospital can contribute to increasing total bed numbers in the

[Mr. Peter Luff]

county, and—if it is not taking the debate too wide—will consider guarantees about bed numbers at the new Worcestershire royal hospital, which, working with Kidderminster, should address what could otherwise be an exceptionally serious problem. I hope that the Minister will respond on the bed numbers issue in Worcestershire as a whole and Kidderminster's contribution to solving that problem.

7.10 pm

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Before the Minister responds, I remind her that a rather cynical promise was made in the general election campaign that a review would be held of the situation with regard to Kidderminster hospital. I hope that she will say more about that review, and that she will take account of the consensus that has emerged with regard to bed numbers, which even includes the outgoing chairman of the NHS trust hospital. The House, and people in the Strangers Gallery, would be thrilled to hear more good news from the Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should explain that there is no such thing as a Strangers Gallery, and that there is just the Chamber.

7.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I am delighted to be able to bring what I hope will be good news to the House, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) on securing this debate on Kidderminster hospital. I am fully aware of local concerns about the current and future level of services provided by the hospital. The very presence of the hon. Gentleman in the House is evidence of how key those issues are to the local community.

I am also delighted that the education service in Wyre Forest is working so well that primary school children think that the job of all Members of Parliament is to help the Prime Minister. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will be delighted at that news.

I do not want to go back over old ground, and the hon. Member for Wyre Forest has set out the way in which decisions about Kidderminster were reached. However, the proposals in the "Investing in Excellence" strategy document were aimed at ensuring that we improved the quality of health services for patients across the whole of Worcestershire.

The consultation process carried out in 1998 uncovered a huge strength of feeling among people in the Kidderminster area, with many voicing their concerns about the possible closure of Kidderminster hospital. I emphasise that it was never the case that that hospital should close. There has been much confusion about that.

As the hon. Member for Wyre Forest knows, the Government have stated our commitment to modernisation and to driving forward reform and improvement. I do not intend to dwell on what has happened in the past, and I think that the hon. Gentleman has been generous enough in meetings with other Ministers to say that he too wants to look to the future and to try and secure the best services for his constituents.

In May of this year, as the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) mentioned, at the request of the then hon. Member for Wyre Forest, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that, on re-election, the Government would establish an independent clinical review of future elective services at Kidderminster hospital. On 26 June, the Government confirmed that the review would be undertaken by Professor Ara Darzi, professor of surgery at St Mary's hospital in London. The review was also to take place in the context of the new opportunities for planned increases in elective surgery arising from implementation of the Government's NHS plan.

Professor Darzi got to work extremely quickly and submitted his report on 31 July. As the hon. Member for Wyre Forest is aware, the Minister of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), and Professor Darzi visited Kidderminster hospital on 27 September to announce that the Secretary of State had accepted the review's recommendations in full.

The review recommended that the new £13 million diagnostic and treatment centre at Kidderminster hospital should be expanded to include up to 20 more beds. It also recommended that the range of surgery provided at Kidderminster should be increased, thus reducing waiting times and increasing access for local people, and that Kidderminster should have three operating theatres rather than two, so that more operations could be carried out.

The review also recommended that better links between Kidderminster and other local hospitals should be established, especially in connection with transport for relatives. It also recommended the development of telemedicine links for the doctors involved.

As I said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has accepted all the recommendations in full. Their implementation will enable Kidderminster hospital to carry out a wider variety of common operations, including tonsillectomies, prostate operations, hysterectomies and gall bladder operations. It will also be able to carry out more orthopaedic operations, and more procedures—including procedures for children—in connection with eye, ear, nose and throat surgery.

Dr. Richard Taylor: I want to emphasise the urgency of those changes. Forgive the clinical detail, but some of my constituents with prostate problems have to get up 15 times at night and cannot go to work because they are so desperate, and they require simple prostate operations as soon as possible. I fear that that will not be possible for many months because the trust wants to make major structural changes. It must be made possible, and the facilities already exist. In my constituency, the men of my age—luckily, I am not quite troubled in that way yet—must be able to get their prostates seen to within the next very few months, please.

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. Not just for people in Kidderminster, but for people throughout the country, trying to reduce waiting times is clearly a key priority for us, so that they are seen as soon as possible.

Mr. Luff: Will the Minister confirm that the new surgical facilities that she mentions at Kidderminster are

intended to serve not just Wyre Forest, but the whole county? Will she take on board the fact that none of the county's other MPs has been informed of the outcome of the report to which she has alluded? We have relied on press reports. Will she encourage her colleagues in the Department of Health and, indeed, in the health authority to make greater efforts to explain that those new facilities will serve the whole county? It is very important to ensure that that is understood.

Ms Blears: Yes, the new facilities will serve the whole county, but they are primarily directed in the first instance at serving local people, because they are the people who will have access to them. As the services develop, they will improve for the whole county. I certainly will undertake to try to ensure that the information is made available to as many people as possible. After all, this is extremely good news, and it is certainly in everyone's interest that that information is broadly available.

Matthew Green: The Minister keeps referring to the county of Worcestershire. Is she aware that about 15,000 people in my constituency used Kidderminster hospital? That number is now declining because they have to travel further afield. She talks about the services being available for Worcestershire, but will she also include the many residents in the South Shropshire and Bridgnorth districts?

Ms Blears: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman's constituents have used the facilities at Kidderminster for a long time, and the intention is to provide facilities for as many people, who want to use them, as we can in the area. As the facilities develop and begin to come on stream, local people will be the first priority and then those across the county. Under the new organisation of the health service, it will be a matter for primary care trusts to commission appropriate services for their populations, but clearly they will want to consider the range of facilities available, irrespective of county and administrative boundaries.

We must consider where it is appropriate for patients to go and where it is best for them to get their local services, so I do not view administrative boundaries as an artificial cut-off. The patient flows and clinical networks are important, and putting the power with the primary care trust will enable local communities to commission appropriate services for local people, which will be a significant improvement.

More beds and operating theatres will be provided at Kidderminster, and a wider range of surgical procedures will be available. That is extremely good news for local people. I am also pleased to inform the hon. Member for Wyre Forest that, as part of national commitments to reduce maximum waiting times for operations to six months by 2004, 6,000 more operations will be carried out in Worcestershire. Thanks to Professor Darzi's recommendations, it is envisaged that Kidderminster hospital will carry out about 2,500 of those extra operations. That should result in more local people being treated more quickly and more conveniently at Kidderminster.

The hon. Gentleman will also appreciate, given his background, that local clinicians and health care managers need to ensure that the Kidderminster diagnostic treatment centre is well planned, successfully introduced and provides high-quality services. Of course, we are anxious to avoid any delay in implementing Professor Darzi's recommendations, but the Health Act 1999 places a statutory duty of quality on the health service. We must ensure that we put in place arrangements to monitor the standards of the services provided.

As hon. Members have noted, the local primary care trusts will play a pivotal role in leading the development to ensure that the all health organisations in the area take part in developing the service and that they have a commitment to supporting it in the future. It will therefore be necessary to develop protocols for referrals, training and new ways in which new clinical services are to be introduced.

The local health community anticipates that the trust will be in a position to implement many of the report's recommendations before the planned opening of the diagnostic and treatment centre. We intend to get on with that as quickly as we possibly can. At the same time, we shall maintain the high-quality standards that local people are entitled to expect.

Miss Kirkbride: That news will be extremely welcome to my constituents. I enter a caveat, however. Is the Minister aware that the accident and emergency department that was at Kidderminster is now a minor injuries unit and that accident and emergency services are now provided at the Alexandra hospital and the Worcester hospital? Clearly, if in-patient surgery for people having fairly serious operations takes place at Kidderminster hospital, the present arrangements for accident and emergency will have to be beefed up so that more than the current service for minor injuries is provided.

Ms Blears: I commend the hon. Lady's ingenuity in raising the issue of accident and emergency services. I shall come to that shortly. However, I assure her that issues of clinical safety and those relating to high-quality services will be paramount. Therefore, the developments will take place in the context of the whole service. They will not take place piecemeal without any recognition of the knock-on effects that they may have. I am not convinced that that means there will be a full-scale accident and emergency centre at Kidderminster, but I will come to that point shortly.

In February this year, the Secretary of State announced that 26 new diagnostic and treatment centres will be opened to try to increase the number of routine scheduled operations that can be carried out. By separating them from emergency work and by protecting both streams of work, we can have a real impact on waiting times.

The new centre at Kidderminster will allow for virtually all the non-emergency, hospital-based health care to be provided for the Wyre Forest population locally. It will also attract those patients from elsewhere in the country—and, no doubt, from Shropshire—who wish to take advantage of the state-of-art facilities proposed.

It is important to stress again that Kidderminster hospital is not closing. In addition to day-case provision and a comprehensive range of out-patient services, Kidderminster hospital currently provides a purpose-built chemotherapy suite that supports cancer services, paediatric day assessment and home-based support, a midwifery-led unit, a minor injuries unit and a specialised medical rehabilitation ward providing services for patients recovering from medical conditions such as a stroke,

[Ms Blears]

together with a range of back-up diagnostic facilities. It is important to reassure local people that it will be a centre of excellent health care for themselves and their families.

Approval has already been given for the development of a new satellite renal dialysis unit to be housed in the Kidderminster diagnostic treatment centre. The centre will also have up to 20 short-stay surgical beds in single rooms with en-suite facilities.

Worcestershire health authority gave a commitment to keep all services running at Kidderminster hospital during the building of the diagnostic and treatment centre. The hon. Member for Wyre Forest will appreciate therefore that the decanting of services needs to be planned with extreme care to ensure that it proceeds as smoothly as possible.

The immediate development of short-stay in-patient facilities would almost certainly result in other services being moved around the site. That might make it difficult to keep all the existing services operating, so we need to make sure that the plans go forward in balance and that we recognise the effects on each of the constituent parts of the service. That requires extremely careful planning.

It is planned to open short-stay surgical beds on a Monday- to-Friday basis for patients with an average length stay of between 24 to 48 hours once suitably qualified staff have been recruited. That is an immediate step that can be taken as soon as staff are in place, and it will ensure that an overnight facility is provided. Additional operating lists have been identified that could take place in Kidderminster to increase the range of services available and these should be in place within the next three to six months. They will come on stream very quickly.

The full business case for the new centre is due to be completed by the end of this month. The current plan is for construction on the refurbishment of some buildings on the Kidderminster hospital site to commence in June or July 2002 with a view to full opening in the autumn of 2003. On completion, all Professor Darzi's recommendations will be implemented in full.

As for accident and emergency services, the decision to remove blue light services from Kidderminster was a clinical one, based on real concerns about maintaining high standards of clinical safety where three accident and emergency departments were fairly closely situated. Our overriding duty has to be to put the safety of patients first. I am not aware that any compelling evidence has been produced to convince the health community or Ministers that it would be both safe and viable to provide blue light emergency care from Kidderminster.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) mentioned the minor injuries unit, which is one of the most successful of its type. It has an overall throughput of 20,000 patients and is seeing 75 per cent. of the number of people who used to go to accident and emergency. It is a major part of the service and functioning extremely well. It has well developed protocols with the ambulance trust. The extra investment of £1.3 million has enabled the trust to provide additional crews with high-dependency facilities and additional front-line paramedics to support the ambulance service, which is also functioning extremely well, to ensure that patients are taken to the right place immediately. From April next year the constituents of the hon. Member for Wyre Forest will benefit from access to the new £87 million hospital in Worcester which will combine state of the art accident and emergency facilities with appropriate clinical expertise.

Dr. Richard Taylor: Emergency and accident facilities are the crucial issue. We cannot understand why small hospitals such as Hexham and Kendal have retained blue light services. I commend to the Minister the work of the Royal College of Physicians and Andy Black of Durrow Management. They have produced models in which some emergencies are still dealt with in local hospitals. We believe that a model could be designed for the whole country, based on the Andy Black model and on what is happening at, for example, Hexham, Kendal and Bishop Auckland. That would defuse the terrible anxiety about the loss of emergency services. We do not know—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must leave the Minister time to complete her remarks. I remind him that interventions are distinct from speeches.

Ms Blears: I am aware of the work to establish other models for accident and emergency care, and am greatly interested in the outcome of that. It is important not to close our minds to a range of ways in which services can be provided. The work is relevant across the country and, in particular, in rural areas that sometimes do not have access to the types of centres that are available in urban ones. Everyone should have the right to receive the best possible services in the most appropriate clinical setting. Local health authorities are working together with primary care trusts and everyone in the local community to achieve that.

The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) expressed concern about the appointment of the chair of the trust. I can reassure him that appointments are completely in the hands of the independent NHS Appointments Commission. The process will proceed. There is no question of chairs and other trust members being placemen of the Government or anyone else. I am sure that an excellent appointment will be made and he or she will take forward the health service in that community.

The proposals by Worcestershire health authority will ensure that local people are able to receive appropriate care in their local communities. Change is always difficult in the NHS. There are different and conflicting pressures from, for example, the royal colleges on training accreditation and from local people. The difficulty is to ensure that we balance and reconcile those different interests and that we do it with an eye always to high-quality services for local people. I meant what I said in the discussion document: we need to put patients and citizens at the heart of our national health service and ensure that their views are expressed, listened to and acted on. That is in the best interests of all our communities and, indeed, of our health service. If we go forward in partnership, we can avoid conflict and come to a resolution—

The motion having been made at Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 9 November 2001

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Drugs Strategy

[Relevant documents: The Second Special Report from the Home Affairs Committee, Session 2000–2001, on Drugs and the Law: Government Response to the Police Foundation's Independent Inquiry into the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, HC 226.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

9.33 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): The House knows that the Home Secretary has called for an adult debate on drugs and recently announced in evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs his intention to ask the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs to review the arguments for reclassifying cannabis from B to C under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. This is a timely moment for Parliament to have a direct opportunity to participate in that debate, and to listen to the views expressed on the issue and the wider subject of drugs policy.

Drugs misuse poses serious problems for society. It causes misery for the users and their families and can destroy communities. It stops many young people reaching their full potential in life and fuels much of our crime. It is estimated that up to half of all property crime is committed by users of heroin and cocaine. The cost to the criminal justice system is estimated to be about £1.2 billion a year. There are the costs, too, of related ill health, absenteeism and social problems, to say nothing of the cost to individuals, the wasted lives and the lost opportunities.

The causes of drugs misuse are complex and deeply rooted and there is no simple solution. Our strategy therefore recognises the need for action on a wide front. Experience in other countries supports that. National drug policies and strategies have developed according to local needs and priorities, but in general the trend is to a balanced approach, in which supply, demand and harm reduction strategies are all important components. The differences between countries are not as great as is sometimes suggested. For example, much is made of the strong harm reduction orientation of Dutch policies, but the Dutch have not legalised the use of any controlled drug. Like us, they prioritise their enforcement effort against the drugs that cause the greatest harm.

Our strategy has four main aims: first, to help young people resist drugs misuse so that they can achieve their full potential; secondly, to protect our communities from drug-related antisocial and criminal behaviour; thirdly, to provide treatment services to help people with their drugs problems; and, finally, to attempt to disrupt the supply of drugs.

We recognise the scale of the problem we face in tackling drugs misuse. We also know that there are no quick and easy answers. That is why our strategy is supported by major long-term investment that is focused on proactive measures to tackle drugs misuse directly. The main aim of the strategy is to stop people taking drugs in the first place. However, there will always be some people who continue to take drugs even if they are aware of the dangers. We therefore have a duty to ensure that they have as much information and help as possible to reduce the risks that come with that behaviour, such as providing information on and services for needle exchanges and making people aware of the dangers of injecting and using shared needles.

Much good work has been done at national, regional and local levels. We are reaching out to young people in a variety of ways. Some 93 per cent. of secondary schools and 75 per cent. of primary schools now have a drugs education policy in place, compared with 86 per cent. and 61 per cent. respectively in 1997. The positive futures initiative set up in March 2000 aims to divert vulnerable young people away from drugs and crime through involvement in sport. So far, 24 projects have been set up. The initial results are encouraging, showing reductions in criminal activity and truancy and improved community awareness.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Can my hon. Friend give an example of an anti-drugs education scheme on either legal or illegal drugs in any country in any century which reduced drugs use?

Mr. Ainsworth: It is difficult to single out an issue, but I have little doubt that unless we manage to get an effective message through to young people, drugs use will increase. A large part of our motivation is to improve the message and our ability to get it across, which is one reason why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary decided to reclassify cannabis.

The Connexions initiative, which was set up in March 2000, provides a service to all young people aged 13 to 19 to help them to achieve in education and to make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. All drug action team areas are developing young people's substance misuse plans based on central guidance to ensure that all young people requiring drugs services receive them.

We are clear about the need to warn young people that all drugs, including cannabis, are dangerous, but that class A drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, are the most harmful. Experience shows that preaching to young people does not work. The message must be credible and informative if they are going to listen. A communications campaign will be launched in December to spell out the risks and dangers of taking drugs. It will highlight the national drugs helpline, which provides young people, their parents and carers with access to straightforward, clear and credible information. The campaign will also support existing work being done to help young people tackle problems of drug misuse.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Minister rightly points out that all drugs are dangerous, particularly if

[Michael Fabricant]

taken to excess. That might include cannabis, too. However, does the hon. Gentleman believe that the message to young people that cannabis taken in excess might be dangerous would be more credible if it were conjoined with the message that taking alcohol and tobacco—they are also drugs—is equally, if not more, dangerous when they are taken in excess?

Mr. Ainsworth: I have little doubt that the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We need to get the message through to young people that taking any of those substances in excess is dangerous. It will put them at risk in the short term, because of the intoxication that results from taking cannabis or alcohol. It can also seriously damage their health over the longer term. Nothing that the hon. Gentleman says is outwith Government policy or, indeed, previous Government policy in that regard.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): My hon. Friend's response to the intelligent question asked by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) was acceptable. Alcohol is probably the single most dangerous drug for young people. However, although my hon. Friend is trying to spell out the Government's strategy for certain types of drugs, is not the fact that an alcohol strategy is not in place and will not be for some time a major failing in marrying together the attack on all drugs?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend is right. We need a strategy for alcohol and we are working with the Department of Health to produce one. We hope to go to consultation on such a strategy in the spring of next year. We need it to underpin and provide focus to our work in explaining the dangers of alcohol.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Will my hon. Friend comment on my belief and that of many others that the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse should take all substance abuse, including alcohol and tobacco abuse, under its control? Is it not time that we brought everything together?

Mr. Ainsworth: We now at least have the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse. I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that it represents a potential major step forward. We are looking to it to increase the amount of expertise that we have on the issue of drugs. Many people who work in this sector have also advised us that, if we try to deal with drugs in isolation from alcohol, the potential for failure will be greater. Such issues need to be debated, and my hon. Friend has considerable expertise in the subject.

Research shows that for every £1 spent on treatment, £3 is saved in criminal justice expenditure as a result of reduced drugs use leading to reductions in crime. The challenge of breaking the link between drugs and crime is to identify drug users earlier in their drug-using career and to get them effective and appropriate help.

We have good evidence now that treatment can work and is cost effective in achieving a reduction in drugs use and related offending. It can also improve the health of drug users. We have developed a number of interventions in the criminal justice system to maximise engagement with drug misusing offenders. Our most recent intervention is the new drug testing powers introduced by the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. That allows for the drug testing of persons aged 18 and over for specified class A drugs, such as heroin and crack cocaine, when they are charged with trigger offences such as property crime, robbery or class A drugs offences. It also provides for the probation supervision of offenders under drugs abstinence orders. The new powers are being piloted in three sites—Nottingham, Staffordshire and Hackney—until March 2003.

The annual increase of 8 per cent. in the number of people attending treatment services is encouraging. We established the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse in April this year to expand drug treatment services and to ensure the delivery of high-quality services across the country. At the point of arrest, arrest referral schemes seek to reduce drugs-related crime by encouraging problem users who are arrested to take up appropriate treatment. The schemes now cover 86 per cent. of all police custody suites across England and Wales.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): In the light of what the Minister has said about the piloting of drugs treatment and testing orders, will he at least be prepared to consider the views of the many commentators who, since the Home Secretary's sudden announcement to the Home Affairs Committee about the reclassification of cannabis, have suggested that it would be much wiser for reclassification to wait until the results of the pilots and of the policing changes in Brixton in south London have been assessed?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am a little confused by the hon. Gentleman. The three pilots are concerned with two class A drugs—cocaine and heroin—where there is a proven link between the use of those drugs and acquisitive crime. I am not certain how that connects with a decision to ask the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs—ACMD—to advise on the reclassification of cannabis. I accept that that decision has a far closer correlation with the trial on policing that is taking place in Brixton, but that is due to conclude at the end of the year. A full evaluation will be available in February. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary did not announce to the Home Affairs Committee the reclassification of cannabis; he announced that he would ask ACMD to consider its reclassification. All that, and the debate that we are holding, are going forward in tandem. There will not be a definitive decision on the reclassification of cannabis—if that happens—before Easter next year.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The House welcomes this debate, because it is sensible to hold it while the Home Affairs Committee is carrying out its work.

I do not want to press the Minister to move other than gradually, but are the Government prepared to recognise that policy to date has been a total failure? We have had some of the harshest policies for drugs misuse in Europe, but drugs use has increased more and is at a higher level than almost anywhere else in Europe. Although it is true to say that no other countries have legalised drugs, they are increasingly decriminalising them. If we spend far more on prevention than we do on the criminal regime

and do far more to help addicts than to punish them, we might have a far more comprehensive approach than the Home Secretary's rather limited response so far.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am not prepared to accept that. The hon. Gentleman has given us a caricature of the Government's policy. There is a lot of good work, and the targets in the drugs strategy debate have enabled people to focus on the need to work together to achieve their aims. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that there will be dramatic changes in a relatively short time or that there is a magic bullet to solve the problem, he is deluding himself, but I do not believe that he does think that. There is, potentially, a need to refine and re-balance the policy, but to say that our whole policy is oriented towards criminal justice and crime prevention, and does not focus on health, harm reduction and education, is to give the House a caricature of it.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I am very interested in what the Minister is saying. Does he accept that the evidence from the pilot schemes that he mentioned and the experience of organisations such as Transform seems to show that we should focus more on what drives people into addiction, and less on mere prohibition? To achieve harm reduction, would we not be best advised to find out what it is in people that causes them to become addicts in the first place?

Mr. Ainsworth: The two are not mutually exclusive. There is no need to legalise or decriminalise to try to focus on education and harm reduction. If we are having an adult debate, instead of evangelising or propagandising for a particular point of view, we should note that most countries are moving towards a balanced approach. That includes countries that have been severe in their drugs policies and focused on law and order, as well as those who are regularly held up as being soft on drugs. They are drifting towards a more central position, in which they are taking every kind of action to solve the problem. That is true in Holland, as it is in this country.

Dr. Iddon: May I respond to my hon. Friend's point about the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs? Page vi of the Government's response to the Runciman report notes:

"ACMD recommended, as the Police Foundation notes in support of their own recommendation, that cannabis should be transferred from Class B to Class C."

I find it astonishing, therefore, that the Home Office needs to refer the matter back to the ACMD, which has made the same recommendation as Runciman.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend ought not to find that astonishing. Some people would be upset if they thought that the Home Secretary had effectively bounced people into that decision by simply announcing that he was reclassifying cannabis, full stop. He announced to the Home Affairs Committee that he was going to ask the ACMD to consider reclassification. Yes, he did so in the expectation that the council would agree, but it is right that such important decisions are not made on the spur of the moment—everybody must have the opportunity to have their say.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): The Government deserve a great deal of praise for taking a brave step forward in their drugs policy. However, hon. Members have been asking the Minister to acknowledge that, on an evidence base—and new Labour, at its best, is evidence-based—the policies carried out to date are not working. The Home Secretary has acknowledged that, and we are moving towards policies that might work a bit better, as they do in almost every other country in which they have been tried.

Mr. Ainsworth: If we are to say that our policies are not working, we must measure them against policies that would work much better. I think that my hon. Friend veers in the direction of legalisation. I do not know how far he goes in that direction, but if he catches the Speaker's eye, we will hear his views in detail. The Home Secretary has called for a debate, and if my hon. Friend believes that legalisation will lead to lower levels of drugs use in this country, he should use the opportunity of this debate to spell out the logic behind that view.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): The Minister said that, when addressing the Home Affairs Committee, the Home Secretary did not say that he was seeking to recategorise cannabis. However, according to all the evidence and the commentary, including the Minister's comments in this debate, that is the expected policy. What is the Government's policy today? Is it to change the category of cannabis or not?

Mr. Ainsworth: As I have said clearly, and as the Home Secretary said, the policy is to ask the ACMD to consider the reclassification of cannabis from B to C. There should not be any confusion about that. I understand that the media are a difficult animal, and that messages get twisted, but everyone in the House ought to know exactly what the Home Secretary said.

Michael Fabricant: Can the Minister envisage a situation in which cannabis is not reclassified, and remains in class B?

Mr. Ainsworth: There is a theoretical possibility that the council's advice will be that we should not reclassify cannabis. However, given the statements that have been made and the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) about the council's recommendation, I doubt very much that it will give that advice.

Mr. Hawkins: What a shambles.

Mr. Ainsworth: If the Home Secretary had simply said, "That's it; I have decided to reclassify cannabis," the hon. Gentleman would have been the first to complain. However, my right hon. Friend asked the ACMD to look at the matter and it will make a decision after that consideration, to which Opposition Members, along with everybody else, are entitled to contribute.

All prisons in England and Wales now provide counselling, assessment, referral, advice and through-care services, which create a care plan to meet the needs of the great majority of prisoners during their time in prison. More than 37,000 assessments were undertaken in 2000–01. Detoxification programmes are available in all

[Mr. Ainsworth]

local and remand prisons in England and Wales, and more than 32,000 prisoners entered detox in 2000–01. There has been a significant fall, from 24.4 per cent. in 1996–97 to 12.4 per cent. in 2000–01, in the number of positive drug tests in prisons under mandatory drugs-testing procedures.

Drugs misuse is a threat not only to individuals but to whole communities, because of the antisocial behaviour, crime and fear of crime that it can generate. We are therefore concerned not only to educate and treat individuals, but to empower and strengthen local communities in their efforts to tackle those problems. Our efforts are aimed particularly at those communities where deprivation is most acute and drugs use most firmly entrenched. In tackling drugs misuse in those areas, we seek to integrate action into neighbourhood renewal programmes.

The creation of the drugs prevention advisory service means that local drug action teams, who are at the forefront of local action to reduce drugs problems, can now access a range of expert services developed and provided in response to their specific needs. Through the confiscated assets fund we are supporting a number of projects aimed at providing a bridge between the end of treatment and access to the labour market.

In the March Budget we also provided additional financial support for the Employment Service, to enable it to identify and help claimants with a drugs problem, and to help ex-users to re-enter the labour market once they have successfully completed a course of treatment. I should also highlight an innovative prison-led project that will pilot five post-release hostels for short-term prisoners with a history of drug-driven offending. The hostels will provide intensive support through the crucial period of the first few months after release.

Action to disrupt the supply of illegal drugs remains a high priority. The Proceeds of Crime Bill will enable us to seize more cash from the criminals, threatening directly the profits that motivate the trade. We are bringing together law enforcement and other agencies in a concerted attack on the drugs trade, and we have put in place a comprehensive joint agency strategy to tackle heroin and cocaine supply from the source in countries abroad to the United Kingdom's streets.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My hon. Friend is being extremely generous in giving way. On the confiscation of drugs profits, can he tell us how much money has been confiscated? In particular, what proportion of the total profit does that amount represent? Given that the trade in this country is estimated to be worth more than £6 billion, how much of a dent are the Government making in those profits?

Mr. Ainsworth: I cannot give my hon. Friend the figure now, but I can tell him—and I acknowledge this—that it is a very small proportion. That is why we have introduced the Proceeds of Crime Bill. The existing law is disjointed. There is an obligation to prove the origin of the funds—irrespective of whether it is drugs money or the result of other crime—even though that presents a problem to the law enforcement agencies in terms of seizing the proceeds of crime. Confiscation orders can be applied by the courts, but they are not often enforced, so only a small percentage of the confiscation orders that are agreed actually lead to confiscation. All that provides the justification for the Proceeds of Crime Bill, which will be debated shortly in Committee. That Bill is intended to make that process more effective.

Lembit Öpik: On the issue raised by the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), what evidence do the Government have to show that confiscation and the prosecution of drugs suppliers have made any difference to the amount of drugs use in this country?

Mr. Ainsworth: As the law to date has been so relatively ineffective, I doubt whether it has made much difference at all, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman would agree that logic points to the need for the Proceeds of Crime Bill—to which the Liberal Democrats gave a reasonable response on Second Reading—and to the principle that attacking the profits made by the organisations that supply our communities with such substances can be a very big tool, which has been massively underused historically in this country.

We are seizing increasing amounts of class A drugs, including multi-tonne seizures of cocaine upstream. Police forces in the west midlands are piloting a project from which we will be able to develop a model for tackling the supply of drugs between the ports and the local communities. The project is funded with money confiscated from drugs traffickers.

We continue to play a leading role in the international campaign to combat the world trade in illegal drugs. We are concentrating on heroin and cocaine as the drugs that cause the greatest harm. During the year 1999–2000, we contributed some £8.5 million to overseas anti-drugs assistance.

As a major contributor to the United Nations international drugs control programme, we support alternative development projects such as those in Colombia. We are working closely with our European partners to drive forward an EU drugs strategy, and we continue to assist EU applicant countries on drugs issues.

Right hon. and hon. Members will know that Afghanistan is by far the largest single supplier of heroin. It produced 70 per cent. of the world's opium in 2000, and 90 per cent. of heroin in the United Kingdom originates there. Although it is true that the cultivation of the opium poppy all but ceased last year in Taliban-controlled areas, levels of trafficking remained high throughout that period and significant stockpiles exist. In the light of the current military situation in Afghanistan, we are keeping a close watch on changing circumstances and the possible effect on supplies of heroin to the United Kingdom. Although some people seem to think that the Taliban's decision to discontinue cultivation was due to some high motivation, there is absolutely no evidence that the amount of drugs leaving the country tailed off during the period when cultivation stopped. That may have been an exercise in getting rid of an over-extensive stockpile.

Paul Flynn: It would be only fair to say that our brothers-in-arms in the Northern Alliance have trebled their poppy and heroin production. Is it not nonsense to believe that if one country's crop of drugs is destroyed,

the gap will not be filled by another's? At the moment, Burma, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan are doing so. If we have a war on drugs, we are in danger of turning central Asia into a vast new Colombia, where warring armies will fight each other in drugs wars. That is what we did in south America, and we are now likely to do the same with a vast area of central Asia.

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not know to what degree I differ from my hon. Friend. I had rather hoped that he would use the opportunity of his intervention to withdraw the allegations that he has made in two letters that he has sent to me since we discussed this issue last time in the House.

Paul Flynn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a moment.

I do not think that what is happening in Afghanistan is the result of the heroin supply trade, but there is no doubt about the misery on our streets currently and for a considerable time. Yes, the Northern Alliance have produced opiates, but since the Taliban have been in control, they have been the major contributor to heroin supply on our streets.

Paul Flynn: The very minor dispute that I have had with the Minister, which I regard as a closed issue, was covered in the letter that I sent to him two days ago. He will note that *Hansard* editors have agreed to alter the record of what the Minister said in a debate because the *Hansard* record was different from what he said. My argument was that the words that he actually used happened to be untrue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. It would be helpful to the House if this debate could be confined to the broad issues, rather than entering into areas to which all hon. Members are not privy.

Hon. Members: Tell us more.

Mr. Ainsworth: If my hon. Friend wants to bandy allegations around, he is free to do so. My boredom threshold has been reached on the matter, so I do not intend to take it any further.

Good progress has been made on programmes and short-term targets that underpin the four strategy aims, but we recognise that there is much more to do. As I have said today, all controlled drugs, including cannabis, are dangerous, and it is essential that we warn young people of those dangers in a commonsense and credible way. We need to focus more effectively on hard drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, which cause the most harm, and on getting people into treatment. That is why the Government are currently reviewing progress against the drugs strategy targets to ensure that we still have the right balance and focus.

Against that background and the very clear difference between cannabis and class A drugs, the Home Secretary has decided to consult the advisory council about reclassifying cannabis. The council has been has been asked to provide advice within three months, and the Home Secretary intends to take a decision next spring. Some of the coverage of my right hon. Friend's announcement has been quite wrong and confusing—it does not equate to decriminalisation or legalisation. Cannabis, as a class C drug, will remain controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and using it will still be a criminal offence. However, if reclassification is warranted by an honest scientific assessment of the relative harms, it would enhance the credibility of our drugs laws as a whole, and it would help us to deliver our message on drugs to young people and better to align public policy and criminal justice practice.

Tackling drugs misuse is not something that the Government can do alone. We need to engage with communities and individuals across the country. I know that many hon. Members are actively involved in our own communities in tackling drugs misuse, and I welcome the opportunity to hear their views first hand.

10.10 am

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): On a subject as serious as this, it is perhaps incumbent on those who wish to address the House to say whether their professional expertise has involved any contact with the scourge of drugs. During the late 1970s and more or less the whole of the 1980s, I had the opportunity to practise as a barrister in the west midlands, an area with high drugs use, especially in the inner cities. In that time I prosecuted and defended in a great many drugs cases.

The drugs problem has got still worse in our inner cities during my years in the House, and for pretty well the whole of my adult life, and certainly all of my professional career, both as a practising barrister and as a Member of this House, I have regarded drugs as the most serious scourge of our society.

When we consider the possible changes that the Home Secretary is now considering, we must look carefully at the unanswered questions. One of those, which none of the media commentators has focused on, is the fact that the simple reclassification of cannabis would not merely completely alter the sentences of, and the police response to, those found in possession of it; it would have a much more significant effect on the sentencing powers of the courts over those who supply it.

Although the Minister talked in general terms about the need to control supply, he did not advert to the other point at all. The practical effect of the reclassification of cannabis would be as follows. At present, with the current classification, if someone is convicted of the offence of supplying cannabis, the maximum sentence open to the courts is 14 years' imprisonment. There is usually a reduction in the sentence to take account of a guilty plea, but large-scale supplying of cannabis regularly attracts sentences of long years of imprisonment. It is fairly commonplace for large-scale suppliers who are caught and convicted to be sentenced to eight, nine or 10 years.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: I will give way to one of the two most ardent legalisers on the Labour Benches, but only when I have finished my point.

The practical effect of a reclassification would be to reduce the maximum sentence dramatically. It is most likely that, in return for a guilty plea, even the largest-scale

[Mr. Hawkins]

suppliers of cannabis would face sentences of only two years' imprisonment, of which they might serve one year or even less.

That would be a huge change. I do not think that there is much difference of view between the parties about the serious evil of those who supply drugs, especially to young people—although we will hear in a moment whether the hon. Gentleman disagrees. If the result of the change is that many of the large-scale suppliers will serve only about a year in custody, there are serious questions to be answered about whether the Home Secretary's proposed changes will lead to a massive increase in the number of young people subjected to the dangers of cannabis, which everybody accepts can be a gateway to the use of harder drugs.

Paul Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Jones *rose—*

Mr. Hawkins: Before I give way to the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), I ask him to say whether he can claim that there is a single user of class A hard drugs who did not start with cannabis.

Mr. Jones: I do not know whether I should thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me, but may I correct one thing that he said? There are more than two ardent legalisers on the Government Benches, and a damn sight more than two on the Opposition Benches behind him.

The hon. Gentleman speaks about the evil of people selling cannabis, but while he was prosecuting them, did it ever cross his mind that there was an enormous hypocrisy in the law that categorised those people as deserving 14 years in jail, while someone who sold tobacco, which kills huge numbers of people, got, if he was successful, a peerage or a Queen's award for industry?

Mr. Hawkins: I know one thing about the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends on the rearmost of the Government Benches—who are sitting so far from the Minister as is possible within the confines of the Chamber that it is clear that they wish to detach themselves from Government policy—and that is that the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for legalising drugs is matched only by his hatred and contempt for anyone who runs a successful business. I do not accept for one moment his totally fallacious assertions.

Mr. Jones *rose—*

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman and I will never agree on these matters, and he knows that. It would be pointless for him to seek to persuade me.

Paul Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central) *rose—*

Mr. Hawkins: I give way to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd).

Mr. Lloyd: There is an important point here about the role of the criminal justice system and the length of sentences. My experience, as a constituency MP and in life in general, is that the use of cannabis has grown astonishingly during the past 30 years. At what point has the criminal justice system had a real impact on the supply chain?

Mr. Hawkins: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis; one of the reasons why I was happy to give way to him is that I know that he thinks quite deeply about these issues. I take the view that whenever a large-scale supplier of drugs is imprisoned, it takes him off the streets for a long time. I know that those in favour of legalisation will say that someone else will fill the vacuum. That may well be so—

Mr. Jones: It is so.

Mr. Hawkins: Even if it is, if one takes the view that the purpose of the criminal law is to try to catch and punish those who are guilty of serious wrongdoing, serious criminal penalties must be available for those who participate in what most Members, and certainly the vast majority of the public, regard as an evil trade.

Paul Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Hawkins: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He and I have debated these issues many times. I know his views. I know that he will never persuade me, and I am aware, from the many times that we have debated the matter, that I shall not persuade him.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow) *rose—*

Lembit Öpik *rose—*

Mr. Hawkins: I shall give way a little later, but I have already given way a couple of times, and now I want to make some progress.

The view from the Opposition Benches—certainly from the Opposition Front Bench—is that the Home Secretary has to justify, with evidence, the major changes that he wishes to introduce.

In parenthesis I should say that the Opposition are highly suspicious about the timing of the Home Secretary's announcement, and the reasons that underlay that timing. As the Minister will know, the Home Secretary's recent appearance before the Select Committee on Home Affairs took place only one day after a Home Office Question Time at which the Minister himself had given an answer completely inconsistent with what the Home Secretary said the following day to the Select Committee. It was apparent to all of us that the Minister knew absolutely nothing about the Home Secretary's planned announcement.

I do not criticise the Minister for that, because I do not think that the Home Secretary had any intention of bringing forward his announcement to the Select Committee until the Government spin machine realised that on that day the big running story was the appalling e-mail in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions—the Jo Moore scandal. That was what the Government spin machine wanted to bury, so the Prime Minister's chief press adviser cast around for an announcement that could suddenly be

brought forward that would wipe the Jo Moore story from the media for the rest of the day, and erase it from the front pages the following day. The answer was to ask the Home Secretary to make a startling, half-cocked announcement to a Select Committee that had only just begun an inquiry. That is what the Opposition think lay behind the timing of the Home Secretary's announcement.

The announcement was bizarre because most Secretaries of State appearing before a Select Committee that is carrying out an inquiry would have the courtesy to tell the Committee that the Government would wait until the Committee had finished its inquiry, that they would consider the report and recommendations, and that only then would they decide whether to change policy.

Dr. Iddon: Those of us who are pro-legalisation of cannabis were utterly dismayed because the Home Secretary's announcement and all other announcements made that day were wholly overshadowed by a much more important announcement, of decommissioning in Ireland.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Double-banking.

Mr. Hawkins: As my hon. Friend says, that was probably simple double-banking of other stories by the Prime Minister's spin machine. I read the newspapers the following day and listened to the broadcast media for a great part of that day. Only two stories ran: one, as the hon. Member for Bolton, South–East (Dr. Iddon) says, was decommissioning; the other—which took up almost as much space in many newspapers, and more space in some of the tabloids, was the Home Secretary's sudden, half-cocked, rushed announcement. The hon. Gentleman knows the reasons perfectly well, because he has seen the Prime Minister's spin machine in operation—I seem to recall that he has complained about the misuse of that spin machine in other debates.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: If one believes what the hon. Gentleman is saying, it is possible to accept that the decommissioning of arms was also invented in Downing street. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary wanted to let the Select Committee know what he was minded to do at the outset of its inquiry, so that it was not halfway through that inquiry when the announcement was made. That was his motive in telling the Committee when he did. It had absolutely nothing to do with the cloud-cuckoo nonsense that the hon. Gentleman is coming out with.

Mr. Hawkins *rose—*

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hawkins: I think that I should respond to the Minister's intervention before I give way to my right hon. Friend. The Minister's interesting explanation of events that did not conform with the usual process whereby Secretaries of State wait for Select Committee reports before responding to them does not answer the point I made earlier. It was apparent not only to me but to the whole House that the Minister's response to a question only the previous day was entirely inconsistent with the Home Secretary's announcement.

Mr. Lilley: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Home Secretary could and should have informed the House rather than a Select Committee, either the day before at Home Office questions, or afterwards by means of a statement, and so allowed the whole House to participate and cross-question him? I say with all respect to the Minister that it is the Home Secretary who we would like to hold to account, and we should have been given the opportunity to do so. That would also have allowed the Select Committee to cross-question the right hon. Gentleman in great detail the next day.

Mr. Hawkins: My right hon. Friend, who has given long and distinguished service as a Secretary of State, is absolutely right. That reinforces our belief that the previous day the Home Secretary had had no intention of saying what he subsequently said, and that he was influenced by the Government's spin machine, which was concerned about getting rid of the Jo Moore story from the media and the airwaves.

Simon Hughes: I agree with the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) about the process, but I do not accuse the Government of having the motives that he ascribes to them. May I ask the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) two direct questions about Conservative party policy? First, do the Conservatives believe that any drugs should be reclassified as recommended by Runciman—yes or no—and if the answer is yes, which ones? Secondly, do they believe that it should be criminal to possess cannabis for one's own use? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Hawkins: As the Minister says from a sedentary position, we are keeping those matters under review. However, it is for the Government to answer the question that we, the official Opposition, put to them: will the Home Secretary's proposed changes result in fewer young people becoming victims of drugs? That is the question that we are posing today. We, the Opposition, are putting the Government under pressure to answer that question and to justify their answer by evidence. In an intervention that made Opposition Members smile, the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central said that "new Labour, at its best, is evidence-based." I doubt that new Labour has a best in the hon. Gentleman's terms, but any sensible Government should ensure that any step that they take is evidence-based.

One of the Opposition's concerns is that the Government do not appear to have taken into account much of the evidence that they have collected of the influence of drugs on road accidents. I hope that those who participate in the debate will consider the fact that all the evidence that I have obtained from the Library, which has been drawn from studies carried out all around the world, shows that all sorts of drugs, both soft drugs such as cannabis and harder drugs, are having a serious and increasing effect on the number of road accident fatalities.

Before the Government reach a final decision on reclassification—the Minister might be rowing back a bit from what the Home Secretary told the Home Affairs Committee—I hope that as well as considering the implications for sentencing for supplying class B and class C drugs, the Government will seriously examine the worldwide evidence of the increasing number of serious injuries and fatalities caused in road accidents which

[Mr. Hawkins]

coroners' investigations and police investigations later reveal were caused, or seriously contributed to, by one or both drivers driving under the influence of drugs.

Lembit Öpik: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Hawkins: I have given way to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) once and I shall not do so again, because he will make his own speech in a little while. No doubt, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) will simply repeat the questions asked by his hon. Friend, so I will not give way to him either.

The Government have to answer some serious questions. The Opposition will continue to level the charge that Government are not thinking these matters through. They have not addressed the serious concerns that I have raised today. We hope that the Government will stick to the sensible comment that the Minister made at the outset of the debate, that all drugs are dangerous and that all drugs should remain illegal. The Government will have our support only if and when they demonstrate that they have thought through the issues properly and sensibly. We do not think that they are doing so now.

10.29 am

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I am astonished by the lack of policy detail in the speech of the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). Drugs strategy is an serious issue, and it is important that people articulate their opinions and views in debate. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reflect on that, because we need to have the education debate for which the Home Secretary has called. Although my views differ from those of the Government in some respects, there is no doubt in my mind that we must start a more efficient debate—one that examines the practical aspects of drugs use and abuse.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the use of drugs makes other activities dangerous. Given the nature of the debate on classified drugs, it is sometimes difficult to debate the issue rationally. I have an anecdote that the hon. Gentleman might find unpalatable. Some years ago, I spoke to a senior police officer about the rave scene. Interestingly, he said that the crashing of cars following raves, many of which were stolen, was not a major issue. His view—I do not know whether it can be substantiated—was that ecstasy was not linked to the rise in dangerous car use. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman is right when he says that we must have regard to the wider consequences of drugs use.

Neither the Minister nor the hon. Gentleman referred to one of the consequences of the black market in drugs—gangsterism. Killings in my constituency and nearby areas are, sadly, a common phenomenon. It is a long time since I have been able to say to people with shock that there has been another death in my constituency, or in Manchester as a whole. Last week, a 36-year-old man was killed. Nobody knows exactly why the killing took place, but the strong suspicion is that it was linked with the drugs trade. Successive Governments have failed to deal with the linkage and have taken a one-dimensional view of the drugs trade.

There is a strong argument that we should try to break the link between the supply of different types of drugs. If we are to have an intelligent debate about drugs, we must consider the dangers of all drugs and accept that the use of all substances in that context is potentially dangerous. We must disaggregate different types of substances, as their impacts are different. If we view legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco as being all right, and all illegal drugs as being bad, we make a profound mistake about the damage that drugs do to society.

Our drugs laws have criminalised a huge section of society. Some of the most ruthless criminal gangs in Manchester and in other major cities are way beyond being driven by the motor of drugs activity. The use of firearms in Manchester, for example, is a direct result of our failure to get to grips at an earlier stage with the way in which drugs are sold. These issues must be taken seriously. One of the problems that I confront in my constituency is the view that anyone who is the victim of such violence is expendable. I have attended too many funerals where mothers have cried about their sons dying, even if those sons were sometimes involved in activities of which I and others would not approve.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is raising some interesting points about gangsterism and drugs. Has he considered the prohibition of alcohol in the United States in the 1930s and the growth in gangsterism? Would he care to draw an analogy between gangsterism in the US and the scene that he is describing?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. The history of the United States teaches us that prohibition was ended too late easily to dismantle the criminal problems that had grown from it. Even if we were to alter our controlled drugs policy overnight, criminality and organised crime would still exist in my constituency and in others. As I have said, it goes beyond the drugs trade.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Let me take up the interesting point made by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant). Is my hon. Friend aware that during the period of prohibition in the United States the murder rate doubled? Immediately after prohibition ended, it went down to its previous level. He might want to consider the effect of the prohibition of drugs in Manchester and in other major cities.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is right. When I came to Parliament 18 or 19 years ago, deaths of the sort that I have described were fairly unusual. Unfortunately, some types of extremely violent crime are now tolerated. I blame our drugs policy for the growth of such crime. I wish that we could return to a less violent society, but alas we shall not easily be able to do so. If the motor for drug-related killing were to disappear, it would have an impact on deaths in Manchester and more widely, if nothing else.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that many of the paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland have been directly funded from the proceeds of illegal drugs? That has persisted because the industry is primarily demand led, not supply led.

Mr. Lloyd: I agree. The hon. Gentleman's last comment was the most important. What he says about the paramilitaries applies not only to Northern Ireland but to

the rest of the world—for example, Colombia, where the astonishing civil war has displaced 1 million people from their homes. The number of people dying is, by any standards, outrageous. Almost all the violence stems from the demand for cocaine in western Europe and, more importantly, in the United States. Yes, there is such a link.

A central point about drugs policy, which is often overlooked, is that it is convenient to dismiss those who are involved with drugs on the basis that they are on the fringe of society and do not matter. As we invest in attitudes that lead to a tolerance of the most violent types of crime, the issue spreads beyond drugs to wider aspects of society. We must regard drugs as a motor for violent crime and consider how to break the link. The Minister has not dealt with that this morning. I hope that he will reflect on the issue.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: My hon. Friend makes a serious point. He appears to suggest that the legalisation of certain drugs would do away with the present levels of crime. It is true that certain levels of crime—often serious crime—are associated with the supply of drugs, but a high level of crime is associated with the behaviour of people under the influence of drugs. If we move towards a policy that increases the use of drugs, such crime could well increase.

Mr. Lloyd: I do not follow my hon. Friend's logic. When we talk about drugs users, we are talking not about cannabis, which is probably still the most widely sold illegal drug, but about heroin, cocaine and crack. My hon. Friend referred to cannabis being behind 50 per cent. of the economic crime that is driven by drugs. That figure might be on the low side; it might be as high as two thirds. The pattern probably varies from place to place.

My constituents live in a relatively high crime area of a relatively high crime city. They know that when their homes are broken into, when their cars are broken into and when they are mugged on the street, half the time or more that is the result of drugs use. The Minister suggests that such crime might increase if we were to change policy on drugs, but I do not agree.

I do not advocate the decriminalisation of heroin or crack. Crack is a phenomenally difficult drug, even in treatment terms. There are no easy substitutes for it, as there are for heroin. Heroin is still the biggest motor for such crime, so we should allow regular users to obtain heroin or heroin substitutes—sometimes the most efficient method is to prescribe heroin itself—in a way that takes the dealer out of the equation. In that way, we would begin to remove the economic motor, cutting out the mugging, housebreaking and car theft.

My constituents are not as conservative as society generally is thought to be. They have begun to realise that, even though they may have nothing to do with drugs directly, they have a strong vested interest, as victims of the drugs trade, in a review of policy. We need a lot more radicalism in our approach.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath may get very animated about cannabis, but it is a long time since I have thought that it was even worth discussing seriously. I welcome the Home Secretary's moves, but they do not go far enough. Cannabis is not an issue. There is a generation in this country that looks askance at our laws on cannabis and considers them irrelevant. They are not only outdated but honoured totally in the breach.

Mr. Hawkins: I understand that the hon. Gentleman is considering the issues seriously. How does he respond to the Government's drugs tsar, who said:

"The pro-legalisers who have said that cannabis isn't a gateway drug will have to look at this hard and long. I can say now cannabis is a gateway drug. I have not found any evidence anywhere that cannabis is not harmful, is not carcinogenic, or that its usage will not lead to harder drugs"?

The hon. Gentleman supports a Government who gave Mr. Hellawell his drugs tsar powers. Why does he think him so wrong?

Mr. Lloyd: I have enormous respect for Keith Hellawell. I know him reasonably well and have listened to him on many occasions. He says many intelligent things, but no individual is the sole expert on these matters—there are many different views. The argument that cannabis has dangerous physical properties must be taken seriously, but a highly emotive campaign saying that it is somehow on a par with drugs such as heroin and crack is simply misguided, because for the overwhelming majority of people under, say, 45—

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Fifty.

Mr. Lloyd: Well, I am 51, so I tower loftily above the age division—or perhaps I am a child before my time.

Young people do not regard cannabis as being even remotely on a par with heroin and crack. The more the gateway argument is pursued, the more damage we create in the minds of young people, because instead of having an intelligent debate about the properties of drugs and their potential dangers we suggest that there is a common thrill from all illegal drugs, which is nonsense.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): As the youngest Member in the Chamber today, let me point out that it is when young people go to get cannabis that they are forced into contact with the peddlers of hard drugs. That is a fact. Does he understand that?

Mr. Lloyd: Is my hon. Friend asking me? Yes, I understand it.

Let us talk honestly about dealer mechanisms. Dealers themselves are not all of a kind. There is a world of difference between the Mediterranean "beyachted", ultra-rich centre of the whole operation and some kid on a street corner selling a bit of cannabis to some friends. I do not want to sound like the dealer's friend. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), those of us who advocate decriminalisation are probably the dealers' bigger enemies. Those who want to maintain the status quo are keeping the dealers in business, to be brutally honest.

Drugs are not all the same, and if we maintain that they are, we send out a confused message. The notion that alcohol is less dangerous than cannabis is bizarre. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath invited me to consider the dangers of cannabis as a gateway drug, but the biggest gateway drug is alcohol, which is amazingly easy to obtain. It is illegal to sell it to people under 18, but that law is often breached, too.

[Mr. Lloyd]

The use of multiple drugs exposes young people to dangers that range from teenage pregnancy all the way to death by overdose. We need to disaggregate the debate and educate young people in a way that fits in with their own experience. As long as we continue to say that drugs are undifferentiated, other than illegal ones being bad and legal ones okay, young people will treat our message with contempt, because their experience tells them that the world is not like that.

The Minister talked about dealing openly and intelligently with young people. We know that 1 million ecstasy tablets are taken every weekend. Some of them are cut with substances that are effectively poisons. It would make more sense to get round the problem by allowing the ecstasy to be tested against a proper pharmacological standard and prevent harm from being done not by ecstasy per se but by the things that it is cut with. That is practical, but very controversial.

It would also make more sense to recognise that some heroin users do not present for treatment on the basis that they want to give up immediately. It may make sense to prescribe heroin for the user who would otherwise get it on the street. If we reorder people's lives during a period of crisis, we do a lot to remove both the criminality and the social disruption. We need to consider radical ways in which treatment can be given. It is not all that long since there was moral outrage at the idea of needle exchange, but we went beyond that, because it worked. We have to get past the moral outrage and do what works.

Treatment is still alarmingly patchy in this country and it is still massively underfunded. Some estimates say that we should spend twice as much on it. I urge the Minister to tell his Government colleagues that unless we tackle the role of treatment we will fail in our duty to tackle drug-induced crime and to allow many of our citizens to lead decent, productive lives.

We need the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse to develop a national strategy, delivering treatment where it is needed. I know, for example, that it is very hard for people to get into a detoxification unit in the north-west. Very few people can get into detox units, which gives rise to a serious problem. Heroin addicts have told me that they reach a point in their own use when they want to get out. They want to get into a detoxification unit there and then, but often are told to come back in three or six months, which means that we have invested in a further three or six months of crime, social havoc and disruption. We must deal not only with the patchiness of treatment, but with the lack of resourcing for the key points in the treatment system that will allow us to move people out of drugs use and into a more productive way of life.

Finally, there have been successful experiments in the role of proper rehabilitation—re-education and getting former drugs users into productive activity and work. We need the equivalent of a new deal for drugs users. Conservative Members may not like the term, and it is a controversial idea. Why should that despised minority demand resources at the expense of the rest? The pragmatic response is that is it in the interests of us all to make sure that that despised minority is brought back to a lifestyle that allows them to live in harmony with the rest of society. It would save all of us much heartache and a great deal of crime, and in the end we would be a more decent society.

10.51 am

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), with whom I largely agree. He put the case carefully but persuasively. Like me, the hon. Gentleman represents an inner-city seat where the community is plagued by the drugs menace, and where the hardest and most serious implications of that are the number of people who deal in serious drugs for profit and produce a huge amount of crime and social disruption as a consequence. We share that analysis, and I am grateful that there seems to be increasing agreement about what is going on out there in the real world, on which we can base our policy reactions in Parliament.

On the Liberal Democrat Benches, as the Minister knows, we welcomed the Home Secretary's referral of the cannabis classification issue to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. That was long overdue, but it was none the less welcome in the early days of a new Home Secretary. We believe that that announcement and its logical implication, which is the reclassification of cannabis, is only the start of the reform that is urgently needed. It must not be the end. There is a case for much wider reform as a matter of great urgency. Now that the Government are willing to have the debate that the new Home Secretary called for, I hope that they will listen to the voices and, on the basis of the evidence, move on quickly.

The United Kingdom is increasingly out of step with many neighbouring countries in drugs policy. Much of the world and much respected opinion here at home has moved on in recent years in terms of thinking through responses, but we are only just beginning to have the open and honest debate for which many people have been calling for several years.

As I commented to the Minister, we continue to have one of the most punitive regimes for drugs use in the world, and certainly in Europe, yet our drugs problems continue to get worse, not better, and the law clearly is not working.

We could spend some time sharing facts and experiences, so I shall simply summarise the current British position from material provided by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, which has a clear continent-wide view. Its most recent report states that the UK has one of the highest levels of drugs use and misuse in Europe. More than half of our 16-year-olds have already tried an illegal drug. The annual number of convictions for cannabis use has gone up from 15,000 in 1980 to 78,000 just before 2000. Between a third and a quarter of people aged between 16 and 29 have used cannabis in the past month.

More worrying than the cannabis issue—which is why I agree with the hon. Member for Manchester, Central—is the finding that the number of hard drugs addicts has gone from about 1,000 in the UK 30 years ago to more than 200,000 today. The number of deaths attributed to heroin or morphine use in England and Wales has risen by more than 100 per cent. in four years—a terrifying edge to the drugs problem. The average age of heroin users is going down, whereas in many other countries it is going up. The greatest increase in hard drugs use is among the under-21s. If that is not a statement of the need for radical action, I do not know what is.

I reiterate the figure in the recent Library note, which is generally agreed: the drugs market in this country is estimated to be worth £6 billion. Before the drugs tsar was first appointed—when he was still chief constable of West Yorkshire in the mid-1990s—he said:

"The current policies are not working. We seize more drugs, we arrest more people, but when you look at the availability of drugs, the use of drugs, the crime committed because of and through people who use drugs, the violence associated with drugs, it's on the increase. It can't be working."

That has not changed over the past seven years. That is why we need a much more radical response.

I commend to colleagues in all parts of the House—the more people we can carry with us, the better—the work of Drugscope, which is regarded as the most impartial collector and disseminator of information. The organisation happens to be based in my constituency, and is a well known, well established and well respected charity. I hope that hon. Members will contact Drugscope for advice or to check facts and figures.

If we are to be honest and open, we need to look at the difficult questions that politicians have shied away from. We may have to make some hard and controversial choices, but that does not mean that they are the wrong choices. The House must be brave enough to say that, and increasing numbers of voices are doing so.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, who is laying out the evidence on which we should make our decisions. Further evidence comes from the MORI poll commissioned by the *News of the World* a couple of weeks ago, which showed that 65 per cent. of the population supported the legalisation of cannabis. As regards the House making brave decisions, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the House has been cowardly, and that it is the public outside who are changing the opinions of the House, rather than the other way round?

Simon Hughes: I agree. Public opinion is clearly ahead of Parliament on the cannabis issue, and the credibility of politics is losing out because we are less and less in tune. The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) pointed out that she was the youngest Member of the House. One of the problems is that we are not a balanced Parliament in terms of age. We do not have lots of young people helping in the formal process of policy making. It is therefore even more important that we listen to what they say.

One of the reasons why young people do not vote is that they increasingly think, that we do not understand at all what goes on in their lives. We can change the form of voting and enable people to vote by post or by telephone, but if they do not hear a debate that reflects the reality of a Friday night or a Saturday night on the Old Kent road or in the middle of Manchester, we are not likely to win their respect, their confidence or their participation in the democratic process.

I agree that we must take account of the opinion poll evidence on the cannabis issue, which is clear. There is much other creditable recent evidence, including the two important reports of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and of Psychiatrists, and the Police Foundation inquiry, now a year and a half old, chaired by Dame Ruth Runciman. A report was published this week by the former chief constable of Gwent, which makes it clear that someone who was a senior police officer believes that the way in which we deal with heroin use has been entirely unhelpful, and that we need to give people legal access to a place where they can go openly and have heroin prescribed, to get them away from the sordid backstreet operation through which that drug has been obtained in the past.

I make a further potentially controversial point, which does not assume a particular opinion on the issue. Parliament came to a view 30 years ago that we had to legalise abortion, not because everyone thought that that was morally right, but because unless we did so, we were perpetuating the sequence through the generations and condemning women who did not want to go through with the birth to being at the hands of the racketeers, the exploiters and those who were not validated as professionally competent.

There is a parallel with drugs. As the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow said, we condemn many young people to going to traffickers, dealers, exploiters and pedlars who are not interested in their future. They want only money and reward for their activities, although the result, one, two or three years later, may be pain, suffering and death for those young people. I hope that we establish a policy in this Parliament that breaks the link between the young person who experiments with drugs simply because young people experiment and those who make money, irrespective of young people's interests.

Lembit Öpik: Does my hon. Friend agree that the issue is not whether cannabis is a gateway drug but whether prohibiting it leads individuals to be exposed to alternative gateways and to people who can introduce them to other drugs?

Simon Hughes: My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow made that point clearly. I do not accept the gateway view. To reinforce the point, the person who provides cannabis often wants the purchaser to buy something else at greater cost. People thus become reliant on those who are literally pushers—they push others into buying drugs that make them return because they are addictive. Pushers create a dependency market for which they have guaranteed customers who have less and less money and thus go thieving, burgling and nicking. Serious crime follows: blackmail, intimidation, harassment and the gun crime that has already been mentioned.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): If cannabis is removed from the market, does not the hon. Gentleman worry that more dangerous drugs will be pushed more vigorously?

Simon Hughes: No. The Runciman report clearly states that all drugs are not the same, and we must educate people to understand the difference. Just as the consequences of drinking low-alcohol lager and high-alcohol spirits are different for most people, there is a difference between using cannabis and heroin, and between taking one or two ecstasy tablets and regularly using crack cocaine. I do not accept that using one makes people likely to progress to the other when they can be educated to understand the difference. Education is vital.

A classification system is a good idea. Cannabis has some harmful consequences, but it is not especially harmful. Ecstasy is more harmful. It is a relatively new

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drug, and we do not know all its implications. However, taking ecstasy leads to a handful of deaths a year, whereas smoking causes 120,000 deaths a year and alcohol-related diseases account for 30,000 deaths a year. We must give people the facts and counter the prejudice. We must also ensure that we have a system that keeps people up to date.

We must establish an authoritative body that works in the open to keep up to date with events. Since 1994, my party has called for such a body. We originally proposed a royal commission, but that is a one-off exercise. We subsequently argued for a standing commission. I hold to the view that we need an authoritative, independent body that can say, "These drugs are available. Ecstasy has just arrived; these are the implications, this is our advice." It should be able to take evidence and give advice. With great respect to Keith Hellawell, whom I do not know well, someone who is under the Government's umbrella and is perceived as a Government person will not have such authority. That is the weakness of such a job.

I accept the policy aims that the Minister outlined. We must help young people to resist drugs misuse and protect our communities from drug-related antisocial and criminal behaviour. We must enable those with drugs problems to overcome them and live healthy, crime-free lives. We must stifle the availability of illegal drugs on our streets.

I do not advocate taking drugs; most people are better off without drugs, and using natural, not artificial remedies. Changing the law does not mean advocating drugs use or making drugs more acceptable, beneficial or preferable.

We should divide society into three groups. We should treat recreational drug users as normal people who use such drugs in the same way as alcohol or tobacco, which are also used, for better or worse, as recreational drugs. We should treat addicts as victims because they need help. That is clear from talking to people who have been to prison for a drug-related crime and have benefited from a regime that has helped them to deal with their problem. The pushers, dealers, profiteers and traffickers are criminals. Like hon. Members from other parties, I hope that, at the end of the review, we will distinguish between those who should be regarded as criminal and those who should not. For example, the personal use of recreational drugs should not be criminal—it is different from dealing in serious drugs, an activity that should be criminal. We must categorise those activities differently.

The key recommendation of the Runciman report is that if differences exist in the amount of harm caused, it is important to educate people about that. There is evidence that cannabis is harmful, but less harmful than alcohol and tobacco. It is therefore not logical to treat the personal use of cannabis as a crime when we allow people to use tobacco and alcohol. Many people now say precisely that and act accordingly, and that brings the law into disrepute. Policies must be credible as well as intelligent.

The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow has already raised the next point, which I hope that the Government will tackle, and I have no reason to suppose that they will not. We are constrained by international legal obligations. I accept that international conventions require trafficking in narcotic drugs to be regarded as an offence. We cannot alter that unilaterally; we have to work within that parameter. However, the Portuguese have recently decriminalised possession of all drugs. It is therefore possible, even within the international parameters, to treat possession, the personal production of drugs such as cannabis, which can be grown, and social, non-commercial supply differently from commercial supply. The Portuguese have only recently made their decision, and we therefore do not know the result. However, I hope that we will consider policies that are intellectually and practically coherent.

We also cannot say that it is acceptable to use cannabis without an explanation of its source being equally acceptable. That is not sensible law. The weakness of the Government's policy is that they are prepared to change the status of cannabis to a class C drug, but people might be prosecuted for using it, depending on the day of the week, the location and the officer on duty. Someone may or may not be charged. We cannot have an arbitrary policy; there should be certainty and clarity.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: On the international convention, would the hon. Gentleman agree that a consensus is emerging across Europe and elsewhere—in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, for example—that the conventions should be altered? We drew them up in the 1920s, when we made a list of the drugs that were relatively unknown or not widely used in the west and said that they should be illegal, while those that were widely used should be legal. That was the rationale, and it is time to change it.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is a bit like the prompter at the side of the stage, but I had not forgotten my next lines. I was going on to say that, although we are constrained at the moment, there are good reasons why we should seek to move on. One is that Europe is moving on, and in the context of the European Union there is an opportunity to consider the evidence, to share the development of the policy and, in some cases, to move from criminalisation to decriminalisation.

An argument also exists for examining the conventions as a whole and considering whether they are still appropriate. I believe—as the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) clearly does—that conventions such as these should not stand for all time; they need to be revisited. It is now time for us to open the debate about whether, in this day and age, with 30 years' extra evidence available, it is appropriate to treat all drugs, from the most serious—the heroins of the world—to the least serious in terms of health effects, in the same way with regard to what countries are required to do.

Commentators regularly get these issues wrong. People must understand that there is a debate about what should be legal, and a second debate about what should be criminal. We must distinguish between the two, but both be on the agenda. It is nonsense to argue that—in the case of cannabis use, for example—we should replace one whole set of criminal sanctions with another whole set of what are administrative sanctions, so that people get a fine instead of other penalties. To replace one by the other would fundamentally change very little.

In relation to drugs such as heroin, I ask the Government seriously to consider the arguments put by Francis Wilkinson and others. Over the years, the Home Office has had pilot schemes at work to give people the opportunity to go to registered, recognised, publicly

available centres—at doctors' surgeries and elsewhere—to receive their supply of heroin, if they are addicted. That seems to be a far safer option.

We must adjust the balance of spend between the two thirds of the money that we spend trying to control the supply of drugs and the lesser amount that we spend trying to deal with people who have become caught up with drugs and become addicts. Any prison governor will tell us that they often have to discharge prisoners who have been inside for offences prompted by drugs without having been able to do anything to deal with their drugs problem. When those discharged prisoners get out, they will say that they have not got the support that they need to be able to return to the ordered lifestyle that they would like, away from the temptations and pressures of drugs.

I do not intend to get involved today in the debate about driving-related issues. Drug-related driving offences must be dealt with in the same way as alcohol-related driving offences. Many people who should not be, are on the roads causing danger and death to other people.

Tinkering with the law is not enough. We need a thorough review not only of classification but of the appropriateness of criminality in relation to various offences. We need to ensure that those who are doing the dealing and distributing are the criminals. We need to educate our young people, in particular, about the differences between different drugs. Above all, we need policies that will be hugely more effective in stopping people getting into regular drugs use in the first place, or, if they do, that will allow them to get out of that afterwards. We could do it, but it will require a bold Government over the next few years, and it will require other people and parties to be equally supportive.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If all hon. Members present are seeking to participate in this quite intense debate, brevity will be their friend.

11.14 am

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): First, I apologise for the fact that because of a constituency engagement, it will be impossible for me to be here for the wind-up speeches. As an old lag in these debates—I have taken part in every one since 1987—it is pleasant to feel less lonely than I have in some of the previous ones.

These matters are of great importance—they are literally matters of life and death. Because of decisions that we have not taken, and because of acts of omission in this Chamber, there have been at least 5,000 avoidable deaths in the past 10 years, and if we do not alter our policies there will be at least 10,000 in the next 10 years.

Ten years ago, I introduced the first Bill on medicinal use of cannabis. All that was required was a simple change in the law, so that cannabis could be treated in the same way as heroin and prescribed to people on a named-patient basis. Such a measure could have been passed by any Government with an ounce of understanding or compassion. There is no change: Ministers come and go; Governments come and go; and the same delusion goes on, and has done since 1971.

During the past 10 years, the House has imposed quite unnecessary additional anxiety on tens of thousands of people suffering from multiple sclerosis and who are in serious pain. Many of those people have taken cannabis while waiting for the knock on the door, because most of them were growing it themselves and knew that they were—according to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins)—"evil" people who could go to jail for 14 years for what they were doing. Since then, the public, the police, the courts and the juries have said that the laws that we have been supporting command no respect—that the law is an ass.

The control over the laws on cannabis has parted from this House, and it would now be impossible—especially after the announcement on the use of recreational cannabis—for any police force to arrest a seriously ill person for using cannabis medicinally. No jury in the land would convict; indeed, no jury has convicted for the past 18 months. We have allowed the law to pass into disrepute. We now know that the public and the police, who have been leading this move—police in Cleveland and Brixton, and the ex-chief constable of Gwent—are much more far-sighted than many of the politicians here, and particularly any Government. I am optimistic that, having taken this decision to go ahead and change the status of cannabis, we have reached a turning point. We have said that 30 years of prohibition have not worked, and that they have made the position far worse.

I serve as a rapporteur for the Council of Europe's Health Committee, for which I write reports about drugs. I want to reinforce what has been said there. I have examined the policies on drugs in the 43 Council of Europe countries, and carried out a precise analysis of the outcomes in the two most pragmatic countries—Switzerland and the Netherlands—and the two most strongly prohibitionist countries, which are Sweden and the United Kingdom. The picture is clear. Much has been said about the effects of legalisation or decriminalisation, as has happened in Holland. In spite of that, in every category—young, middle-aged and old—in Holland today, there is less use of drugs than there is here. We are by far the worst country in Europe. We have had 30 years of harsh prohibition, while Holland has had 20 years of intelligent decriminalisation.

The hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) asked about people going on to harder drugs. The success of the Dutch scheme lies in the fact that the two markets are separate. Young people can use drugs. They do not have to smoke them—they can take them in safer ways such as in food or drinks. They are not exposed to the pushing of hard drugs users. Another great success of the Dutch drugs policy is that the use of hard drugs has gone down every year for the past decade. Three quarters of the heroin addicts get their heroin in a clean supply from the medical profession and do not have to go on to the streets for it.

Prohibition in Britain is killing young people. The figures vary, but those that I have seen show that before 1971 there were fewer than 500 registered addicts. They were virtually all being maintained by the health service. Many of them, believe it or not, were veterans of the first world war. They had operations on the battlefield and became addicted to morphine. They were supplied with morphine by the health service for the length of their lives and many of them lived to be old contemptibles.

The case of Enid Bagnold is often cited as an example of the old British system. She was the greatly revered and respected author of "National Velvet", but throughout her adult life she injected herself with prodigious quantities

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of heroin, to which she had become addicted after a hip operation. She died, eventually, a peaceful, serene death at the age of 91.

Last year in this country, in just one incident, 59 young people were killed by prohibition. They were not killed by heroin, because they injected a far less powerful dose of heroin than the one that Enid Bagnold took under the old British system. They were killed because the heroin was contaminated. It was contaminated because the market that supplied it was an irresponsible criminal market and 59 lives were wiped out as a result.

As a constituency MP, I found it distressing when, a fortnight ago, a mother rang me up and said, "I don't know wether you will be shocked by what I say, but I am buying heroin for my son." Another mother said on the "PM" programme that to save her son's life, she told him to go out and commit a serious crime. Those are the actions not of evil people, as was suggested earlier, but of loving parents. They are actions that many of us, if we were in such a dreadful situation, might take ourselves.

In Britain in 2001, we have failed those young people who have the misfortune to be addicted to heroin. Like those who fall into alcoholism, their problems are caused by the way their brains work. Their brain chemistry gives them addictive brains. We know far more now about brain chemistry and we can say that addicts are not evil people. They could be our sons or grand-daughters. They are not wicked or evil people, but people who deserve to be treated as patients, not criminals. More than any other country in Europe, we treat addicts as criminals.

A report in the *Western Mail* yesterday about Peter Black, the Assembly Member with responsibility for these matters, mentioned an 18-month waiting list for treatment for heroin users. I did not know the wait could be so long, although I knew it could be six months. For those addicted to drugs, it is often a major life event—such as a bereavement, falling in love or relationship breakdown—that gives them an opportunity to get off drugs and break the daily routine of committing a crime to get the money for drugs, taking the drugs, sleeping it off and then going out the next day to begin again. They might get the money through prostitution, mugging or robbery, but the major event gives them the chance to break the cycle. To do so, they need treatment immediately, but they are almost always told to wait for six weeks, or six months, or even 18 months. We should hang our heads in shame that we have a smaller proportion of addicts getting treatment from the health service than any other country in Europe.

A new mythology is growing up about drugs-driving. It is a serious matter and none of us would suggest that anyone should drive under the influence of drugs. However, I have rarely heard such a vacuous speech from an Opposition Front Bencher as that from the hon. Member for Surrey Heath, who did not do me the courtesy of giving way. I had thought that his predecessor was as bad a Front-Bench spokesman on this subject as we could get, but the hon. Gentleman's speech was a disgrace.

I urge the hon. Gentleman to consider the conclusions reached by the Transport Research Laboratory on the effect of cannabis and other drugs on driving. Speed improves drivers' perceptions and reactions—it was used for training fighter pilots—but it is dangerous because it also increases their sensitivity to other distractions. It makes drivers worse. Alcohol convinces drivers that they are more skilled, but it impairs their reactions, and that leads to accidents. The effect of cannabis is to impair the reactions of drivers, but it convinces them that they are worse drivers so they drive more cautiously or not at all. That is the scientific evidence.

I do not want to continue the disagreement I had with my hon. Friend the Minister, but we need to consider the world situation. Prohibition started in the 1920s. Virtually every country has an Act prohibiting drugs dated 1921. Thankfully, we did not follow the fundamentalist philosophy that held sway in America and prohibit alcohol, but most countries prohibited drugs. In the 1960s, again under the influence of America, the United Nations spread the view that harsh penalties and imprisoning lots of people would reduce the use of illegal drugs. Very few countries still believe that. The best that we can achieve is harm reduction.

Before the debate, I read what has been said on the issue in the House over the years. We have heard a change of tone today, with a more pragmatic influence coming to bear on the policies, and that is welcome. However, I found a speech by David Mellor, the Minister responsible in 1989, in which he announced to the House:

> "We can take some comfort . . . from the fact that heroin has moved towards its peak".—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1989; Vol. 163, c. 593.]

It would be a salutary lesson for my hon. Friend the Minister to read the speeches made by his predecessors.

Our record on drugs prohibition disgraces us as politicians. The problem is not the drugs themselves but prohibition. The last two meetings of the Health Committee have been extraordinary. The Government—like the previous Conservative Government—maintained their view of the great dangers of heroin. However, the evidence was rewritten two days later and significant changes were made. The Government were asked to say why heroin was dangerous and they gave a long list of reasons. The worst aspect of heroin is that it is addictive. If it is prohibited, people have to break the law to get it—except the few, barely 300, people who get it from the health service. The list of problems which it was claimed make heroin a dangerous drug included aneurysms and abscesses, but they are all the effects of prohibition.

In Britain, the people who die from heroin use are those who take it in the back lanes, in foul conditions with dirty needles. Under the old British system of health service provision, death from heroin use was very rare. No country's approach is perfect, but other countries in Europe are adopting more pragmatic policies and we are now taking the first steps too. In Rotterdam in Holland, I visited a place called Paulus Kerche with a journalist and we saw people who had been registered as addicts for a long time getting clean heroin, of a known strength, and clean needles. There was a supervised shooting-up room, but the project also supplied lessons in IT, job interview techniques and CV writing. The community also produced its own newspaper. The addicts were not excluded or despised, or told that they were evil people. They were also given a chance to get off drugs.

We should emulate the practice in other countries. I wish my hon. Friend the Minister well in his task. In his post, he has the ability to institute great reforms that will save many lives and greatly reduce the levels of crime in the country.

11.30 am

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I, too, must apologise to the House, as I have constituency engagements that I must fulfil. Coincidentally, one is at a neighbourhood law centre, where the subject of drugs abuse is almost certain to come up. I shall also visit the local police station, where a similar matter is likely to be raised.

It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), who has long been known for his campaign on drugs. Although I do not intend to follow his path, as I am sure he will understand, I hope that one or two points of agreement will emerge from my brief comments, which are much more related to my constituency than to national policy.

However, I have one point to make on national policy. I should be grateful if the Minister would either put his answer on the record or write to me, as I shall not be present for the winding-up speeches. The debate about cannabis use focuses on the legal and criminal implications, and makes only passing reference to the health implications. The hon. Member for Newport, West referred to the good that cannabis can do for multiple sclerosis sufferers. I hear similar evidence from my friends in the health professions, but they also tell me that long-term cannabis use leads to chest and heart problems, cancer and mental health problems, which is much more worrying.

I seek an assurance that the full weight of medical views on the effect of long-term cannabis use on people's health will be taken seriously into account in any decision by the Home Office and the advisory council.

Michael Fabricant: Could I tempt my hon. Friend to agree with me that, if one or two doctors agree that cannabis should be prescribed for medicinal purposes—I repeat, for medicinal purposes—it should be prescribed now?

Mrs. Lait: I am not an expert, but I understand that a Government-sponsored research programme is finding out what the effects are. I am a great believer in not doing anything until we have discovered all the evidence, which is possibly why I have criticisms of the Home Secretary's statement to the Select Committee, which was perhaps taken the wrong way. He announced a change in drugs policy before all the evidence was properly examined. We must consider the evidence, and I hope that the full weight of the medical evidence on the effects of long-term cannabis use will be taken fully into account in any decision.

The charity ADAPT is based in Bromley. ADAPT is short for "addicts are people too", and it concentrates on long-term, high-dependency drugs users. The hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) and my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), who hope to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are well aware of that charity. The problem of longer-term, high-dependency users in the current regime instituted by the Home Office is that the treatment they require to stabilise themselves is not being provided.

High-dependency users—there are 45 in Bromley borough alone—have been attending the Laybourne clinic in the east end of London. The clinic has had great success in stabilising those people. As we all know, one problem for drug addicts is their disordered, chaotic lifestyle. As high-dependency users grow older, they recognise that, to bring some stability to their lives, they need to reconnect with their family and friends and with society in general. They need to be able to write the CVs that will get them the jobs that will bring them back to the mainstream. That requires them to keep their drugs use stable as well.

According to ADAPT, under current Home Office policy, those particular users are often told that they must not only reduce their intake by 70 per cent., but go from injecting to oral intake. That may seem simple to those of us who are not drug addicts, but it is an insuperable barrier for many users, and they go straight back to the disordered and chaotic lifestyle that they have been trying desperately to get out of. Since the Laybourne clinic has lost its inspiring light, Dr. Garfoot—the hon. Members I mentioned may expand on that case—four members of ADAPT have died in Bromley alone.

I want the Minister to give an assurance—I did not hear him do so in his introductory comments—that older, high-dependency, injecting users will also be taken into account in the treatment programmes that are being promoted. All the Minister's comments, with the best will in the world, focused on young people, but this group of older people needs to be treated differently.

On 21 August, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), wrote to me saying:

"Treatment is therefore provided on the basis of clinical need."

No one argues with that—it is all we are asking for—but the hon. Lady continued:

"Hence, treatment of adult drug misusers should not vary according to age per se."

Therefore, under current Home Office and Department of Health policy, age is not recognised, nor are the needs of longer-term drugs users. Unfortunately, many users who were being stabilised and who were coming back into the community as valuable members have to go back on the streets, and they add to the crime that we all deplore because they cannot get the treatment from the Home Office and Department of Health programmes that is necessary to keep them stable.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I shall consider the hon. Lady's comments, but that is not what I am told. I do not pretend that our treatment facilities are adequate, and we are trying to improve them. I am told that they are oriented towards opiate users, most of whom have used those drugs for a long time. We need to develop policies that will reach out to people from ethnic minorities and cocaine users. We have practically nothing in that area, as was exposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd). I am not certain that what the hon. Lady says is borne out by the facts, but I shall certainly consider the points she made.

Mrs. Lait: I am most grateful to the Minister for that reassurance. I was not for a moment suggesting that other groups should not have treatment available to them. All the evidence from ADAPT, of which I am a local patron, is that the treatment those people have been offered is being withdrawn. That is the crucial point.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend, who has made an

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excellent point. Is she aware that there were 270 patients in the Laybourne clinic a couple of months ago, and between them they had spent 600 years in jail, yet the clinic has a recidivism rate of just 7 per cent. compared with 50 per cent. for the Prison Service? Unfortunately, the clinic is threatened with closure.

Mrs. Lait: I was not aware of those figures, as I have concentrated on the people from Bromley who attended the clinic. However, I was aware of the recidivism figures, and I congratulate the clinic on its success. It is very sad that the General Medical Council struck off Dr. Garfoot.

The Under-Secretary said in her letter that she hoped the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse would soon be in a position to start issuing guidance on model treatment services. If the treatment services have been geared so much to long-term users as the Minister says—I do not doubt him; I am sure he has been advised correctly—why are those users finding that the services to which they were accustomed are being withdrawn? Furthermore, why do I find that four members of ADAPT who lived in Bromley are sadly no longer with us—the ostensible reason being that they took brown heroin as opposed to the heroin needed to stabilise them and allow them to remain in the community?

I hope that the Minister will comment, or write to me, on Government policy regarding the treatment of high-dependency, long-term injecting users.

11.41 am

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): This debate, which I welcome, is the first major drugs debate that we have had since 2 July 1999. Much has happened since then, and I think the mood of Parliament and, especially, the people has changed.

I congratulate Lady Runciman's committee and the Police Foundation. They have, in part, catalysed the change of direction. The Government, fortunately, have accepted 24 of the 81 recommendations, and 20 are still under consideration, including the one on cannabis reclassification. However, I want to move the debate on to new ground, beginning with the proposed legislation arising from the consultation document "New National Minimum Standards for Care Homes", published by the Department of Health last July, and the likely impact of the proposed new regulations on drug and alcohol treatment centres. Because of the summer recess, we have had little time to debate those proposals.

The background to today's debate is the dire shortage of treatment and rehabilitation beds in residential homes throughout the country. I welcome the establishment of the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse in April this year, and wish it well. I hope that it will have a major impact not only on the quantity but on the quality of treatment places available.

Single lockable bedrooms, preferably with en suite bathrooms but at the very least with adjacent bathrooms, are proposed as a minimum standard for care homes. Communal facilities for catering and other activities for clusters of between eight and no more than 16 bed spaces are also recommended. The report contains other recommendations, but I shall not dwell on them today.

The cost of treatment is already very high. If those minimum standards are accepted, many homes for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug and alcohol addicts will have to close, at a time of great need. The owners cannot afford the conversion costs, and would price themselves out of the market as a result of the much-increased unit costs arising from such a reduction in the number of bed spaces. It is estimated that 50 per cent. of existing bed spaces would be lost in the sector, and there would be little incentive for the provision of new ones. That is sheer madness at a time like this. Many treatment places are provided by charitable organisations, which already find it difficult to raise the necessary money.

The idea of locked rooms is also unacceptable. The vulnerable people involved might accidentally overdose, or attempt suicide under the pressure of treatment in the centres. Treatment can be very unpleasant, causing the withdrawal symptoms that we know about. Patients and their professional carers therefore prefer at least two people to be in each room, so that one can support the other through a difficult and emotional time. Indeed, sharing is seen as part of therapeutic treatment.

The recommendation for access to visitors to be available 24 hours a day is an open invitation to drug dealers to visit the premises. In any case, it is often better to isolate drug addicts from their peer groups and friends during the detoxification programme. Even close family members are best kept away in certain instances, because they too can exert emotional pressures.

When clients are consulted—we do not consult drug addicts often enough—they are most interested in access to treatment, the quality of staff, structured treatment programmes and well-linked service provision. They rarely mention the quality of accommodation, and the quality of accommodation in this sector is quite high anyway.

I recognise that minimum standards for other care homes will be welcomed, but I ask the Government to think again about the impact of the proposed regulations on drug and alcohol addiction and rehabilitation services. After all, the closure of homes in this sector would have a major impact on the Government's crime reduction strategy. Has my hon. Friend the Minister had any discussions with his colleagues in the Department of Health? If not, may I ask him to do so?

Surely, the minimum standards set out in the consultation document published in July are intended mainly to improve the quality of life for long-term residents in homes, for example the elderly. Are they really meant to affect homes in which people dwell for only a short period? Would it not be better to allow the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse to determine care standards for residential homes in this sector?

It strikes me that drug treatment in the past has consisted of methadone, methadone, methadone, and little else. Although methadone is useful as an opiate substitute, I have long argued that addicts should be given a choice of treatment. I am told that methadone is often harder to give up than heroin. For many years, I have advocated the use of other opiate substitutes such as buprenorphine and LAAM—laevo-alpha-acetylmethadol. Fortunately buprenorphine, the drug of choice in France and Australia and easier to give up than methadone, is now more readily

available on prescription in this country than it used to be. I have also advocated the availability of abstinence programmes such as the 12-step programmes, and the use of clinically pure heroin—or diamorphine, as the medics prefer to call it—for long-term addicts who have developed high tolerance levels to that addictive drug.

As has been said, the former chief constable for Gwent, Francis Wilkinson, published a paper only this week in which he suggested that we should try to secure clinical treatment with pure heroin for as many as possible of the estimated 300,000 heroin addicts in order, initially, to stabilise their lives before offering further treatment or even detoxification. That would constitute a return to the old British system that we left behind in 1971, under pressure from the Americans, when there were far fewer heroin addicts than there are today. In 1960, for example, there were only 685 registered heroin addicts in this country.

When he bravely announced the reclassification of cannabis, the Home Secretary gave notice that he would make an announcement in the spring about heroin prescribing. Let us hope that he sees a role for the registration and treatment of heroin addicts in the same way. That would constitute a huge harm-reduction programme, not to mention the serious impact that it would have on criminal behaviour. I estimate that up to 70 per cent. of crime in metropolitan areas is drug related.

As other Members have said, the current war on drugs is not working as a strategy. I am pleased that the Home Secretary is prepared to review it, and to think radically. None of us are soft on drugs, but some of us believe that the time has come—as in other European countries—to conduct some experiments in policy.

With regard to the amendment to section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, many of us who are interested in drug addition were concerned about the outcome of the so-called Winter Comfort case in which John Brock and Ruth Wyner were imprisoned for allowing drugs to be used on premises that they were running in Cambridge to help drug addicts. The verdict has had a ripple effect throughout organisations that have known drug addicts on their premises on a care basis, including housing authorities. Since then, section 8, which deals with drug-related incidents on premises, has been amended by a section in the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, although I understand that no guidance has been issued by the Home Office on that change. It would be helpful if the Minister were to update the House on that.

The Government say that the amendment of section 8 is unrelated to the conviction of the Cambridge two and that it was introduced to deal with crack houses, which are prevalent in London. There are several concerns about that amendment, but shortage of time allows me to refer to only a few of them briefly.

If, as in the case of several European countries, we eventually introduce supervised consumption of heroin for known addicts, which some hon. Members have called for today, the amendment could conflict with that policy. If possession of cannabis is to be a non-arrestable offence and the amendment to section 8 is implemented, ironically the owner of the premises on which people are in possession of cannabis could be arrested, but not the person in possession of the cannabis, which is silly.

The amendment to section 8 conflicts with the Government's policy of reducing drug-related deaths because drug users will be driven out of premises and forced into the open air to inject where they are known to be at greater risk. In addition, providers of supported housing are unlikely to provide such housing for vulnerable drug addicts under those circumstances.

My final point relates to something that the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) said. I was recently made aware of a number of doctors who have been subjected to disciplinary action in relation to their treatment of drug users. Those doctors fall into a group of people who believe that drug addicts are victims and need specially tailored treatment and counselling, rather than criminals who should be punished. They are something of a rare breed because the majority of general practitioners—94 per cent. in fact—are unwilling to treat drug users, which leaves the addicts with no alternative other than to continue to use street drugs. Indeed, budding doctors in our medical schools get little training in drug addiction.

I have been closely involved with the case of Dr. Adrian Garfoot, who has long been treating long-term drug addicts in London, many of whom were extremely chaotic and even dangerous when they approached him for help. He has treated such people for more than 24 years. In 1991 he opened the private Laybourne clinic, which has also been mentioned. His method of treatment involved prescribing pure substances such as injectable methadone at an adequate level so as to enable the user to move away from the street drugs that can have a detrimental effect on the user's life.

A new patient would be subjected to a series of tests to determine their individual tolerance level. The prescription would be dispensed on a weekly basis. Throughout the treatment, the drug users would become more stable because of the regular supply of the drugs that they desired. As the prescribed drugs were of a purer form, they were not subjected to the differences in quality of street drugs. As their treatment progressed, it was often possible to reduce the level of drug use. In addition, as the addicts were attending a clinic on a regular basis it was possible to assist with the treatment of drug-related illnesses, such as those caused by HIV and the hepatitis C virus, from which many addicts suffer without their knowledge.

Most of Dr. Garfoot's patients have been able to lead normal lives again following their stabilisation. Many have worked and many have rejoined their families. Without his or a similar doctor's help, a considerable number of them would be dead. I am not a great fan of private medicine, but the public sector seems unable to cope with those long-term patients. I never thought that I would live to see the day when I would be defending private medicine in the House, but since 1982 Dr. Garfoot's activities have been scrutinised by the Home Office drug unit, now known as the action against drugs unit, because he was found consistently to be prescribing high levels of drugs to his patients. For the majority of doctors, that would be seen as irresponsible prescribing, but it is important to remember that his patients were long-term and often chaotic addicts with a high tolerance threshold that required a high dose. Had he prescribed smaller doses, his patients would have gone out on to the streets to top up to get the same high.

Dr. Garfoot was eventually brought before a Home Office tribunal in 1992. The process from inception to a verdict took five years and the conclusion was reached that he should be cleared of wrongdoing. A verdict of abuse of process was recorded in 1997, the last time that

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

that Home Office procedure was used. Since then, such disciplinary investigations have fallen under the remit of the General Medical Council. I recently asked the Home Office in a written question why its procedures were no longer in use. Its response was:

"They are cumbersome, time consuming and inflexible."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 287W.]

However, the measures introduced by the GMC in the wake of the Harold Shipman case would be draconian by comparison if applied to doctors such as Dr. Garfoot. I understand the Government's concern when such doctors lose a patient or two because of an overdose—usually, incidentally, by topping up from suppliers outside the clinics—but that is not a reason to consider them in the same light as a Dr. Shipman. Far more of their patients die on the streets when they are not receiving any treatment.

Mr. Bellingham: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in the Garfoot case there was no evidence of any diversion of drugs from patients or of any harm that came to patients? The hon. Gentleman made a good point about GMC procedure. Is he also aware that under the old Misuse of Drugs Act tribunal procedure the punished doctor could go back to his mainstream GP practice? The new GMC procedures mean that he cannot do that and is, struck off for perhaps five years and loses his livelihood.

Dr. Iddon: I am aware of those issues.

The sweeping new measures that operate through the GMC's interim orders committee have allowed it immediately to suspend or put sanctions on a doctor who is suspected of misconduct. Dr. Garfoot was subjected to that procedure after it was discovered that he was prescribing high dose levels to his patients and was accused of irresponsible prescribing. The IOC ruling meant that he was forced to reduce the number of patients he was treating and could not accept new patients. In the aftermath of the decision, taken only a few weeks ago, two of the doctor's patients have died, and I heard today that it could be as many as four. Of the cases which I am aware, one died from an overdose after being forced back on to the streets, and another tragically committed suicide.

The GMC's case against Dr. Garfoot dates back to 1996. Since then, he has been subjected to two preliminary conduct committees, three interim order committees and one professional conduct committee. That is the harassment of a doctor who is trying to do good deeds in the community. In any case, such a legal process is incredibly costly; I believe that a similar case cost £500,000 to conduct. As the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) said, the procedures are not simple. The appeals process leads to the Privy Council, so the cost of an appeal must be prohibitive.

John Marks practised the old British system similar to the Garfoot treatment in Widnes. His practice was forced to close in 1995, and by 1997—just two years later—40 of his patients had died. That is an incredible indictment of our drug policies, and it also shows the level of dependence that the addicts have on such doctors.

I am aware that 15 doctors have now been subject to such procedures. And what happens when they are struck off? Some 200 to 300 addicts are precipitated on to the streets of our major towns and cities, and, as the House has heard, many of them die.

When John Marks practised in Widnes, the local crime rate went down by an astonishing 50 per cent. He was driven out because health authorities refused to fund him, and he had to go to New Zealand to practice the old British system.

Dr. Garfoot has helped 1,200 addicts, and I submit to my hon. Friend the Minister that many them would have died if Dr. Garfoot had not been allowed to treat them. Indeed, may I be so bold as to request my hon. Friend to seek a meeting with his counterpart in the Department of Health so that they can review the General Medical Council's procedures as they affect doctors who are willing and able to treat long-term drugs addicts who no other general practitioner and not even the health service are willing to take on board?

When the Home Office special tribunals were set up, James Callaghan, who was Home Secretary at the time, spoke of

"irresponsible, careless, or negligent prescribing or unduly liberal prescribing with bona fide intent, which may justify curtailing the doctor's authority in relation to controlled drugs in order to stop a supply for misuse, but not justify the drastic course of disqualifying him altogether".—[*Official Report*, 25 March 1970; Vol. 798, c. 145.]

I have been in contact with the GMC to express my concern about the way in which the interim order procedures are currently implemented and to ask it what alternative arrangements it is making for the 200 to 300 patients who have to resort to street drugs when doctors are struck off. I am sad to say that no arrangements are being made, so I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to examine that issue.

I have tried to show how Government policies across the different Departments of State can have an unexpected impact on the way in which we deal with drug addiction if those policies are not thought through carefully. I hope that my contribution has been constructive and that my hon. Friend will take account of my points.

12.2 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Garfoot case is, indeed, a scandal. I hope that the Minister will examine it in much more detail.

This has been a particularly informed debate. Although it is invidious to pick out individual contributions, those of the hon. Members for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) and for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) were especially valuable.

I am afraid that I have to leave the Chamber at about 12.30 pm, for which I apologise. I have a constituency engagement and there is a lack of trains to Lichfield. I hope that I will be in the Chamber to hear the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) but, if I am not, I promise him and the Minister that I will read their remarks in *Hansard*.

The Minister said that he welcomed an adult debate on the drugs issue. He was right to say that, and this has been an adult debate. Drugs are a dreadful scourge, and not just in Manchester, Central; they are a problem even in the leafy lanes of Lichfield. Market traders there have told me that syringes are often found first thing in the morning in the city square. The scourge faces us all nationally.

We are debating not whether drugs are a scourge, but how the problem can best be dealt with. It is revealing that when the hon. Member for Newport, West asked the

Minister which of the Government's strategies have worked, he was unable to answer. That is simply because there is evidence that prohibition in the broadest sense does not work.

I asked earlier whether an analogy could be drawn between prohibition in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s and the prohibition that exists now in the United Kingdom. I do not advocate that we lift the prohibition on all drugs because I do not believe that we know what the consequences would be. From now on, I shall address my comments solely to soft drugs, and cannabis in particular.

I reiterate my earlier point that all the evidence shows that prohibition in America in the 1920s and 1930s bred not only gangsterism but alcoholism. If one were to draw an analogy with the United Kingdom, one could strongly observe that, under prohibition, gangsterism in drug pushing has led to greater numbers of people taking drugs and becoming addicted. The Government and academic bodies need to consider that in far more detail.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one could extend the analogy and observe that, under prohibition, unregulated production meant that the alcohol itself caused death, as well as blindness? Are there not strong parallels between those circumstances and the present situation in Britain?

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. We have heard about the number of deaths caused by people taking impure ecstasy. I am not advocating the free availability of ecstasy, but clearly one could argue that if it were available under controlled conditions, at least deaths would not be caused by contaminated tablets.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Nobody would argue with the assertion that prohibition in America had dreadful consequences, but, in the interests of a serious debate, may I ask where the hon. Gentleman acquired the evidence that alcoholism increased during that period? Instances of liver cirrhosis fell considerably, and although the alcohol consumed was probably stronger than before because hard liquor was easier to smuggle, overall alcohol consumption fell too. I do not deny that prohibition caused massive problems, but from where did the hon. Gentleman get his evidence?

Michael Fabricant: From the United States Senate inquiry in 1941, and I refer the Minister to its report, which supports my argument. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman and I are arguing about the general principle of the issue, but there are important analogies to be drawn.

If we had known hundreds of years ago of the consequences of consuming alcohol and tobacco, might we not have made those substances illegal too, because it is becoming clear in this debate that they are also drugs? It was said earlier that cannabis can be a gateway to harder drugs. One could argue that the gateway exists because cannabis, like harder drugs, is illegal, and alcohol and tobacco are not necessarily gateways to harder drugs simply because one can acquire them legally and does not have to come into contact with pushers. The House and the Government must consider those arguments in detail.

The Minister rightly, said that the Home Secretary's announcement during evidence to the Home Affairs Committee did not constitute an official change of policy, although I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) that its timing was very suspect indeed.

The Minister was also honest, as is his wont, in answering my question. He said that he would perhaps be surprised if cannabis were not reclassified—I think that I summarise his words correctly. In the light of that perfectly legitimate answer, it is worth stating the present position on taking cannabis.

I shall quote a Drugscope briefing paper, which several hon. Members have been given. Interestingly, it states:

"Britain still has some of the toughest drug laws of any European country. Britain also has one of the biggest drug problems and the highest addiction rates."

Sadly, it states:

"Around half of young people (16-24) have tried illegal drugs, 29 per cent. in the last year. Over a third (34 per cent.) of all adults (16-59) have tried drugs, 11 per cent. in the past year."

The key point is:

"Cannabis is the most widely consumed drug in all age groups and 70-85 per cent. of offences against the Misuse of Drugs Act are cannabis related—mostly possession."

As we have heard, some constabularies have chosen to take a view about how they will handle people found in possession of small amounts of cannabis that is solely for their own use. That is an enlightened and important policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath, who speaks from the Front Bench, spoke about road accidents. I agree that it is wrong to drive a vehicle when under the influence of alcohol or any other drug, including cannabis. I hope that the Minister will say how the Home Office will assist police forces to detect those who drive under the influence of cannabis, just as they are equipped to detect those who drive under the influence alcohol. I strongly believe that there is no defence for driving under the influence of any drug, be it alcohol or cannabis.

I simply want to say in conclusion that I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) only on the medicinal prescription of cannabis and other drugs. I understand her argument that a review is being undertaken of whether drugs should be prescribed for specific purposes, but we should not hide behind that. Some health authorities hide behind the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. In south Staffordshire, anti-tumour necrosis factor drugs are not being prescribed to people with rheumatoid arthritis because it is argued that the issue is currently being investigated by NICE. That is an excuse: those drugs are not being prescribed because South Staffordshire health authority does not have the money to do so; other health authorities are prescribing them, even though NICE is reviewing their use.

Similarly, we should not use the review of whether doctors should be allowed to prescribe certain drugs for medicinal purposes as an excuse not to consider their use. Overwhelming evidence shows that those who suffer from multiple sclerosis and certain forms of cancer benefit medicinally from being prescribed those drugs. It is absolutely wrong that people who suffer from such diseases are threatened with criminal prosecution, as are their doctors for making the drugs available to them. I would be prepared to say that if we are to be cautious, perhaps two general practitioners should sign the prescription.

[Michael Fabricant]

I urge the Minister to ensure that, as quickly as possible, the law is changed, or guidance issued to police forces, so that if two doctors believe that any drug ought to be prescribed to alleviate suffering or to cure people of drug addiction, they are allowed to prescribe it now, without fear of prosecution. I do not believe that the House—or even the Home Office—knows better than medical practitioners.

12.15 pm

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Why is this debate so important? It is because, as we all know, drugs misuse ruins lives and fuels crime and anti social behaviour. In Tower Hamlets, where I live, everyone is affected by drugs, whether they have ever taken a drug in their lives or not.

The starting point is clear—how do we protect individuals and communities against drug abuse? We must take an evidence-based approach that prioritises harm reduction above everything else, and that means putting harm reduction above our human tendency to moralise and judge.

I want our drugs policy to target the drugs that harm us most and cause the greatest destruction in our communities. Which drugs harm us most? Every year in Britain, 10 people die from taking ecstasy and 2,100 from taking other illegal drugs; 30,000 die from alcohol use; and 120,000 die from smoking. No one in Britain has ever died from taking cannabis. It is instructive to consider the fact that although cigarettes kill the most people, they do not destroy our communities as some other drugs do. In my view, the drugs that do most to destroy our communities are heroin, crack cocaine and alcohol. Those are the drugs that we need to do most to deal with, using well thought out and well funded harm reduction strategies.

I was pleased to hear the Minister say that supply, demand and harm reduction strategies must be more balanced, and that that is what the Government are trying to do. He also said that we must get an effective message across to young people. Again, I am pleased that since 1999 the Government have increased the proportion of secondary schools with drug education programmes from 86 to 93 per cent. Sadly, however, we have to accept that the drugs policies of successive Governments have sabotaged the attempt to send an effective message to young people. Worse than that, they have criminalised many young people, 42 per cent. of whom have tried cannabis at some point.

I cannot help mentioning the glaring contradictions raised by the speech of the Conservative shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). Since entering the House, I have not heard such a weak speech from any Front-Bench spokesman. That genuinely saddens me, as on this subject we need strong and intelligent debate. The hon. Gentleman's speech showed a complete absence of intellectual rigour. He spoke with passion about cannabis suppliers getting up to 14 years in jail, but completely failed to answer the telling point that those who supply drugs that cause much greater harm, and kill far more people, often end up with a peerage instead of a jail term. Why is that? Mainly, it is because most members of the establishment choose to relax with a glass of wine or a cigarette. They do not, on the whole, roll themselves a joint. Their choice of recreational drug is considered acceptable, but the choice of millions of other people in Britain is criminalised.

The problem was well set out in an extremely thoughtful speech by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes). He points out that the problem is not recreational drugs use, whatever drug is used, whether it is alcohol, tobacco or even cocaine—although not crack cocaine. It is not recreational drugs use that is the problem; it is addiction.

Mr. Prisk: Despite not being a member of the establishment and therefore not knowing whether or not they gently roll a joint, or whatever the terminology is, may I ask whether the hon. Lady thinks we can ever strike a balance between what she defines as recreational drugs use and addiction? Where would she draw the line? Where does recreational drugs use end?

Ms King: It is not possible to draw a line in the sand. I consider that if I have had more than three glasses of wine, I have crossed the line and tipped from recreation into drunkenness. That is my view, but down in the Bars I regularly see many other Members of Parliament tanking up on pint after pint or bottle after bottle of alcohol. There will never be an obvious or simple answer to that question. The question to ask is, when does drug use start to ruin one's life? When do one's usual daily activities start to suffer? At what point does one become unable to carry out other functions?

I pay tribute to two organisations, Addaction and Transform, and to the authors of the Runciman and the Police Foundation reports. Everyone involved with them has argued for an evidence-based approach, so let us look at the evidence.

There is a strong relationship between hard-drugs use and crime. It is estimated that between 50 and 70 per cent. of street and house crime is drugs related. Nowhere is the effect more devastating than in an area such as Tower Hamlets; no one suffers more than low-income groups. A Home Office study revealed that 13 per cent. of criminals in custody were convicted of drugs offences—that is twice the proportion recorded 10 years ago. Of all those arrested, 65 per cent. tested positive for one or more drugs. It is estimated that goods to the value of £1.3 billion are stolen each year by people who use class A drugs.

Given those facts, it is easy to understand the temptation to try to deal with addiction from a criminal justice perspective, but I believe that sending people to prison is not always the best answer—although, obviously, it depends on what else they have done. Sending people to prison does nothing to rehabilitate them or to protect society. Of all male offenders aged between 17 and 21 who were discharged for original drugs offences, 49 per cent. were reconvicted. That is a stunning indictment of the system. The evidence shows that the system does not work. It is estimated that one in five inmates take drugs in prison. Mandatory drugs testing revealed that 18.3 per cent. of inmates use drugs inside prison, and many experts fear that in some prisons the proportion is nearer 60 per cent. The drugs treatment strategy in prisons has been reviewed as part of the Government's 10-year strategy and more money is being

directed to treatment in prisons, but I would be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister stated in his closing remarks, or in writing, what further measures the Government will take to improve treatment and rehabilitation in prisons.

I want the House to reflect on the situation in what has been described as the heroin capital of London. I and other residents of Tower Hamlets are greatly distressed that the borough in which we live and which has so many positive characteristics has acquired that terrible tag. The price of heroin in Tower Hamlets is the cheapest in London. There are kids in Tower Hamlets who can buy heroin for less than it costs them to buy chocolate. Drugs agencies in Tower Hamlets have seen a 50 per cent. increase in heroin abuse in two years. The greatest increase in that abuse has been within the Bengali community, where drug use has risen from about 10 per cent. of those coming in to 40 per cent. A further rise is expected.

Previously, hard drugs abuse was mainly confined to young white men. However, the situation is changing rapidly. Is our response changing rapidly to deal with that? More than 50 per cent. of the increase in heroin smoking among the under-20s can be attributed to the rise in the reported incidence of drugs use in the Bangladeshi and Asian community. There is speculation among service providers that that could be an underestimate of the true picture.

The influence of ethnicity on illicit drugs use is an under-researched topic. I ask the Minister to take that up when he replies. There is a degree to which ethnicity overlaps other social variables such as unemployment and deprivation. I understand why there is that correlation, but we must undertake further research. Black and minority ethnic drugs users are less likely to use drugs agencies. Their reasons include a lack of awareness about the agencies. They complain that there is little cultural sensitivity or understanding once they get to an agency. Another factor is the ethnicity of the drugs agency staff. In particular, there is a lack of provision for women who may have a drugs problem. The number of women in that position is set to increase.

The national context is one of increasing drugs use among black minority ethnic communities. That is not unexpected given the concentration of these communities in areas of high unemployment and deprivation, coupled with experience of both overt and covert racism. However, that is not the issue with which we wish to concern ourselves today. We want to think about how we can help such people break drugs addiction.

We should consider how other European countries are dealing with the problem of drugs abuse. It is obvious that we have much to learn. We have the highest level of drugs use and misuse and the largest prison population in Europe. In contrast to our policy, many other EU countries have effectively decriminalised the possession of all drugs to focus resources on treatment and the supply side. Logic dictates such an approach, and I support it.

The average age of heroin users in the Netherlands is 36, and rising. The average age in the UK is 26 and falling. The Dutch are widely and wrongly believed to have legalised cannabis. In fact, cannabis is illegal in Holland. The Dutch policy has, in effect, created a regulated market for the small-scale supply of cannabis to adults through coffee shops. The Dutch have a similar level of cannabis use to other countries but there is a lower prevalence of the use of cannabis than in the UK, especially among young people aged 16 to 19.

The Dutch have a stable population of problem drugs users with a rising average age. A high proportion of those users are in touch with treatment agencies. The ratio of drugs-related deaths to other deaths is the lowest in Europe. I want our ratio of such deaths to become lower.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): We can all trade figures on drug use in the Netherlands. Is the hon. Lady aware that there was a 50 per cent. increase in heroin addiction in the Netherlands between 1988 and 1997 and that the level of cocaine use by Dutch people aged between 14 and 16 is the highest in Europe? The evidence that she is presenting about the benefits of Dutch policy seems to be in doubt.

Ms King: I see the former Cabinet member, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), shaking his head and suggesting that the hon. Gentleman's figures are wrong. I cannot respond to them here and now, but let me repeat that the proportion of people suffering drugs-related deaths is lower in Holland than here. That is something we should want to replicate.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Does my hon. Friend at least accept that the argument is more complex than is sometimes acknowledged? For instance, someone said earlier that we and the Swedes had the most restrictive, law and order oriented policies in Europe, and cited that as the reason for our high levels of drugs use, but Sweden has lower levels than Holland.

Ms King: Of course, I take my hon. Friend the Minister at his word, and I would want to consider that evidence. The whole point is that we need an evidence-based approach, and we have not had that up to now.

We can draw important lessons from how other European Union countries have dealt with the problem. There is benefit to be had from treating demand problems as primarily health problems and minimising the social exclusion of young people through drugs offending. It would also be beneficial to separate the market for cannabis from that for heroin. If those members of the establishment about whom we were talking earlier—Members of Parliament must accept that they are in the establishment—had to go to a heroin dealer to get their glass of port, they would be extremely distressed.

Finally, I want to consider the issues of addiction and treatment. In Britain, on average, drugs use commences at the age of 15. It becomes a problem at 17, but help is not sought until 22. It is in that window between 17 and 22 that the drug users lifestyles deteriorate and problems become monumental, putting the users and others at risk. They may enter a life of crime to feed their addiction or compromise their health by using non-safe injecting practices, resulting in hepatitis C or HIV infection. Their behaviour will have led to a loss of stability, of family and friends, and the natural maturation processes are slowed. Many put themselves outside the normal routes to progress through stability in family life and through education and work.

The Government have invested substantially in treatment services and believe that treatment works, but will they consider changing the proportion of spending on

[Ms King]

treatment and on prevention? Unfortunately, the money spent on prevention, sending messages to young people like me throughout the 1980s on campaigns such as "Just say no"—I do not know whether it was Nancy Reagan who put us off—was simply wasted. It did not work. The Government still spend a lot of money trying to get the message across, but young people simply reject it. They do not believe the message, because their personal experience shows them that part of it is flawed. Cannabis is not good for you, but they cannot accept that it is worse than cigarettes or alcohol, so they throw the baby out with the bathwater.

My plea is that we tackle drug abuse from a health rather than a criminal justice angle. In so doing, I believe that we will reduce crime and restore some integrity and security to the communities that need it most.

12.34 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) and I largely agree with what she said so lucidly. I shall endeavour to be brief, as I know that other hon. Members who have taken a consistent interest in the subject for longer, perhaps, than I have, wish to speak.

I was reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) that I raised the issue of alcohol prohibition in my maiden speech, when I quoted the shortest-ever maiden speech to the House, which was given during the 1920s, when prohibition was in force in the United States. It was made by a Labour Member representing a coal-mining constituency, who was incensed by Lady Astor banging on from the Conservative Benches about the need to ban the demon drink and outlaw the sale of alcohol. Eventually, as I said in my maiden speech, he could stand it no more, so he leapt to his feet, caught the Speaker's eye, and in six brief words gave his maiden and only speech:

"No bloody beer, no bloody coal."—[*Official Report*, 24 November 1983; Vol. 49, c. 498.]

Then he sat down again. I cannot promise to be that succinct, but I shall try to be brief.

One thing I learned when I was in the financial markets that is true also in the political world is that when something is inevitable, it happens sooner than one expects. In July, I published a pamphlet that began with the words:

"The decriminalisation of cannabis is inevitable".

I should not have been surprised that the Government made a move in that direction rather more speedily than most people thought likely and than I expected. I give due credit to the Home Secretary for that move and for having the courage to eat not only some of his own words, but a large meal of the Prime Minister's words in making that U-turn. It is welcome as far as it goes, but I shall explain why it does not go far enough.

First, however, I shall explain how I became convinced that reform of the cannabis laws was both inevitable and desirable and, discuss the extent to which the change announced by the Home Secretary will end the damage done by attempts to prohibit the sale and use of cannabis.

The subject is characterised by a threefold confusion, between the immoral and the illegal, use and abuse, and soft and hard drugs. On use, I should say that I have never used cannabis and have no desire to do so. As far as I know, I am the only Member of either party who has been a Front Bencher who has emphatically and convincingly denied ever using cannabis. That is probably why I have a clear enough head to realise that the attempt to prohibit it is inevitably doomed to failure.

On a more serious note, with reference to morality and legality, as a Christian, I have a profound moral objection to drug abuse, by which I mean abuse of anything, be it alcohol or cannabis, to the extent to which it deprives one of one's self-control and undermines one's conscience, thereby leading one to other acts that may be damaging to one's neighbour or ultimately to oneself and society as a whole.

There are many things, however, that are immoral but not illegal and which it would be foolish to make illegal. Adultery is immoral, but none of us would seriously suggest that the state make it illegal. If we were more willing to teach and do what the Minister said we should not do—preach what is right and wrong and what is moral and immoral—we would need less recourse to the law and have a freer and more responsible society.

Before I thought through all those arguments, I used to rehearse fairly mechanically, as one does, the line to take and the arguments for the status quo in constituency meetings with young people and their parents and grandparents. I hope that I am so sufficiently convincing and experienced an apologist that I convinced some that the status quo was sustainable, but each time I became less and less convinced. The arguments seemed to crumble in my hands when I was faced with the evidence.

The two main arguments that have been used to sustain the policy of prohibition are that cannabis is damaging to one's health and that it is a gateway drug. I read a great deal of medical research on the health issue. Instead of relying on my assessment, I quoted *The Lancet* review of the evidence in my pamphlet, which is available from the Social Market Foundation at £5 or from my website free of charge. *The Lancet* published the evidence in 1998 and concluded:

"On the medical evidence available, moderate indulgence in cannabis has little ill effect on health, and decisions to ban or to legalise cannabis should therefore be based on other considerations."

I have argued that in public, and the comeback was similar to Hegel's response when his disciples pointed out that his theories were refuted by the facts. He replied, "So much the worse for the facts."

There has been a tendency to dismiss the evidence. People say, "That's just *The Lancet*; I found an article in an obscure journal that says there is such and such a health risk." I prefer to rely on a review of all the evidence, published in a respected, peer-reviewed journal, rather than picking a study by a lay person who has not subjected it to peer review. Almost all the comprehensive reviews of the evidence, not only that by *The Lancet*, show that the health risks of moderate use are not great.

I do not want simply to win the argument. In the past two or three months, I have tried to single out the most difficult arguments to tackle, and I shall speak about the two strongest counter-arguments. The first concerns schizophrenia. There is evidence that cannabis can precipitate psychotic episodes in those who are liable to

schizophrenia, but it is disputed and not strong. It is based on the medical records of Swedish army conscripts, and half those heavy cannabis users who were subsequently diagnosed schizophrenic had taken amphetamines, which are known to precipitate the condition.

Schizophrenia affects only slightly more than 1 per cent. of the population and appears to be genetically preconditioned. Those who rely on the evidence I described effectively acknowledge that the health risks for 98 per cent. of the population are those that *The Lancet* found. However, there is a risk to the 1 or 2 per cent. who are liable to schizophrenia. Cannabis use will not cause the condition, but it may induce it earlier.

We must acknowledge that hundreds of mentally ill people die every year from paracetamol and aspirin overdoses. Nobody gives that as a reason for outlawing their sale. I cannot help believing that people seize on the schizophrenia argument to try to outlaw cannabis for the other 98 per cent. of the population. We should make people more aware of the health risks for schizophrenics; legalisation will make that possible.

The other strong health argument involves cancer. As the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) pointed out, no one has died from a cannabis overdose, but if people smoked as much cannabis as ordinary cigarettes, they would probably be more likely to contract cancer than regular tobacco smokers. However, almost no one smokes cannabis as heavily as heavy smokers smoke tobacco, so the argument is somewhat artificial. We must acknowledge that the health risks exist and we should try to ensure that people know about them. That will be possible only if we move to a system more liberal than the current one or that proposed by the Government.

The other key argument is that of the gateway—taking cannabis leads to using hard drugs. There is clearly no chemical predisposition caused by taking cannabis that leads people to take hard drugs. That is essentially the post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy that, because people do one thing first and another later, the first caused the second. It is like saying that most people who ride motor cycles previously rode bicycles, but that if bicycles did not exist, they would never have got on a motor cycle or that we could stop people moving on to motor cycling by banning bicycles.

The underlying gateway argument is that cannabis leads to hard drugs and that we therefore need to prohibit cannabis, but that is the reverse of the truth. Making the supply and possession of cannabis a criminal offence drives people through the gates of the law into the illegal world in which they must acquire their supplies from people who may also push heroin, cocaine and other hard drugs.

The simple fact is that, so long as the possession and sale of cannabis remain criminal offences, that reverse gateway effect will apply. Legislation is the only way to overcome it, which is why I propose that we should empower the magistrates in each area to license one or more outlets to sell cannabis in small quantities for retail use to those over 18 from premises which would carry no alcohol, which would lose their licence if there were the slightest reasonable suspicion that they handled any hard or illegal drugs and which would be bound to carry a health warning on what they sold and in their premises.

Unless or until we do that, we shall not break the link between the supply of cannabis and the supply of hard drugs. That has been the great success in the Netherlands and one hears a great deal of information about it. Indeed, people frequently tell me what I must have seen when I went over to Amsterdam with the BBC, but they are wrong. I saw some fairly disgusting sights in the red-light quarter connected to the sale of women's bodies and the abuse of women through prostitution; I saw rather less that had to do with drugs.

Dr. Iddon: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is a close link between prostitution and drugs in that many women have to exploit their bodies to pay for their drugs?

Mr. Lilley: That is true, if the drugs are illegal. So far as I know, it is not a correlated factor in the Amsterdam red-light quarter. The two happen to be adjacent because of the layout and policing of the area, just as lots of rather sordid things go on in Soho, and it seems to be traditional that they are linked in that area. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point.

The great success in Holland has been to break the link between the supply of cannabis and that of hard drugs. I visited the police, the drug rehabilitation clinics and the Salvation Army hostel for derelict users of hard drugs, and everyone agreed that going back, criminalising cannabis and restoring the link between the two supply routes would be a terrible loss to Dutch society. It should be emphatically put on record that no one wanted a return to that. In Holland, the age of heroin addicts and those addicted to other hard drugs is increasing, because they constitute a declining pool that receives relatively few new recruits from young cannabis users, who do not come into contact with the suppliers of hard drugs.

The greatest good that could be done by liberalisation is breaking the link between the supply of hard and soft drugs. Sadly, the reclassification proposed by the Home Secretary will not achieve that. It will, however, achieve one and a half of the four benefits that could be obtained by moving to legalisation. The authorities will be allowed to focus on tackling hard drugs instead of wasting so much effort on cannabis. Hard drugs are the real issue; they can enslave through addiction, drive people to crime and kill.

In this country, 80 per cent. of drug use is cannabis use. Most of the £1 billion to £2 billion spent on the attempt to prohibit drug use goes on trying to prohibit cannabis use. Two thirds of drugs arrests are cannabis related and three quarters of drugs seizures, by weight, are of cannabis. The change that the Home Secretary proposes will stop the cannabis tail wagging the hard drugs dog. It will allow us to focus on tackling hard drugs, not only by reinforcing the prohibition effort, but by allowing more creative effort to be put into policy formation and the health of users.

The change will half help in restoring respect for the law. Currently, the law is unenforceable, because it is indefensible. As a result, millions of otherwise law-abiding citizens break the law from time to time and use cannabis. Some 10 million people in this country claim to have done so, with 4 million doing so in the past year and probably 1 million in the past month. Some 100,000 people a year are arrested as a result.

All that increases the contempt for the law felt especially by young people, who see the differentjal treatment of cannabis, alcohol and nicotine as essentially

[Mr. Lilley]

hypocritical and demeaning. That effect would be diminished by the changes, although the Home Secretary will not alter the fact that the sale and use of cannabis will still be a crime. Those will not be arrestable offences, and that fact was spun to the media to suggest the end of any contact between cannabis users and the police, but they will remain prosecutable offences, although the police will have to prosecute by summons instead of by arresting people on the spot.

The change will mean that the police will have the option to enforce the law, but, in practice, they will not do so. They will no longer have to indulge in 300,000 stop-and-search operations on the street every year as they do at present. Those cause great friction between the police and some ethnic minority communities, which assume that they are being singled out. Only 12 per cent. of those 300,000 stop-and-search operations find evidence of drugs on the people concerned.

We will be left with an improved, but still odd, position, in which the police may arrest people, but will probably just issue a warning that falls short of a criminal caution. If someone is arrested a second time, they will be warned that, if they do it again, they will be warned again. That will still undermine the respect that young people feel for the law.

Pete Wishart: Is it not important to retain some societal disapproval of the use of soft drugs and cannabis?

Mr. Lilley: Society can disapprove of things without making them against the law. Most of us disapprove of adultery, but we do not try to make it against the law. We must end the belief that there is an identity between morality and legality. Only in totalitarian societies is the state seen as the author of the moral law. In free societies, the moral law springs from within our conscience and our religion, not from the state.

The change will improve the situation, but the law will remain in a contemptible state. That will undermine respect for it among the law-abiding, who will ask why we have such laws on the statute book if they are not enforced in practice.

The change will not achieve the other major gain that would stem from legalisation: it will not prevent the enriching and enlarging of the criminal underworld. We have made an important area of economic activity illegal, so the fruits of that activity are enhanced and the profitability increased, and all goes to the criminal underworld. As the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) pointed out, that also increases violence and lawlessness among those dealing in cannabis.

New studies show that much of the rise in violence that tends to occur when a substance is prohibited—for example, alcohol in the US in the 1920s and 1930s and cannabis in this country—is down to the fact that the people involved in the trade can no longer resolve disputes by resorting to the law, so they resort to the gun and to force. A legalised system would undermine that and siphon off a great source of wealth for the underworld. I hope that, instead of being attracted to such wealth-creating activities, many such people would join the free and legitimate economy, get proper jobs and become integrated in normal life.

Ms Oona King: The right hon. Gentleman refers to the increase in violence and the criminal underworld. In the light of events of 11 September, does he agree that removing the supply side from those groups would undermine their ability to fund terrorist activities, which depends to a large extent on drug supply remaining illegal?

Mr. Lilley: That is a powerful point, although I have focused my attention on cannabis, not hard drugs. There is a distinction between the two, and it would be a much bigger step to legalise hard drugs. We should take the first step and legalise cannabis, but that would not have any impact on the Afghan situation.

Prohibiting the sale of cannabis has an effect on criminality. The counter argument that is always put is that if we stop people selling cannabis they will push hard drugs even harder, but the contention that criminal gangs do not push the high-margin, addictive substances as hard as they can and are distracted into selling cannabis instead is ludicrous. If it were true, we should prohibit the sale of ice cream so they would all be diverted into that activity, but no one proposes it, because it is nonsensical. Those gangs push hard drugs as hard as they can.

The fifth and final benefit to be gained from legalisation brings me back to where I began: it would leave people greater freedom for personal responsibility in these matters. I believe that the state should intervene only when an activity does clear social damage, when there is widespread support for trying to prevent that activity by law and when the law can achieve some practical purpose. None of those three is true in the case of cannabis.

In general, the more responsibility over their lives we give to people, the more responsibly they will behave—not all of them, but more of them. The more we nanny people and treat them like children, the more infantile will be their behaviour.

Mr. Bellingham: Like the Labour party.

Mr. Lilley: That is an important point, but not one I wanted to make at this juncture.

We should err on the side of liberalisation unless there are strong arguments to the contrary. The change proposed by the Home Secretary is welcome, but it is a first chapter, not the end of the story. The right hon. Gentleman will have to move further in due course, and I hope that he will be encouraged to do so by the general tone of this debate.

12.58 pm

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I am pleased to take part in the debate. I have learned an awful lot from the contributions of all hon. Members who have spoken. The House is better able to take the drug strategy forward as a result of this proper debate.

I never believed for one moment that a 10-year plan had to be set in stone and never reconsidered or altered. The welcome decision to examine the issues around cannabis is very important. Arguments have been advanced by many organisations that work with people

with drug dependency problems, such as Drugscope. They greatly assist the all-party drug group, which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South–East (Dr. Iddon), and I am one of the deputy chairs. For a long time those organisations have been calling for a reclassification. They welcome the debate, and I hope that we come to the right conclusion, as I am sure we will.

My interest in drug addiction came from a purely personal interest in the people whom I looked after in my ward when I was a night duty nurse. I was able to spend a long time with people suffering from medical difficulties related to their drug addiction. Profound things have been said by Members about the personal problems of such people, and the humane response that they need from us. That is important, and should be kept at the heart of the debate.

We must never vilify people who run into difficulties with drug addiction. Sadly, too many of us in the House of Commons alone are addicted, I suspect—although we do not know for certain—to drugs, not just prescribed drugs, or to alcohol. It is therefore right for us to give careful consideration to those who have encountered huge drug problems.

In the short time available to me—I know that others are keen to speak; I also know that many of us would like to ramble around the whole issue of drugs strategy—I want to concentrate on my particular interest, which relates to those needing treatment for their drug addiction. Many of us welcome the changes that have taken place. Enormous stability has been brought into the whole issue, and has affected all those involved in helping people with drug addiction. There has been a huge sea change in our approach as professionals, volunteers and politicians to those in our communities. The drug action teams have been instrumental in no small part, sharing good practice, and ensuring that the programmes in our communities are properly validated and are giving the very best service to those who need it.

Let me put a serious point to the Minister. I am involved with several groups, and am keen to support our drug action team in West Sussex—which, incidentally, has achieved beacon status, and works closely with voluntary groups in and around Sussex. What constantly sends us mad is the continual drive to attract money into the service. Programmes may be good and well validated, and I entirely agree that we must be careful to ensure that the work in our communities is valid and having a reasonable effect. We do not expect everyone to be able to come off hard drugs just like that; it is a long process for many people, who may falter and fall several times before managing to remain clean. We cannot expect instant success from such programmes. The need to scrabble around for money and bid for it, however, is a distraction, taking the minds of those involved off the valuable work that they are doing.

I am involved in, and am honorary president of, a group in Brighton called the Oasis project. It is a particularly good project, working entirely for women. Health societies pay for women who have been through the criminal justice system to attend the project. The benefits are enormous: the project prevents women from having to undergo custodial sentences, and allows them to keep their children with them. The children can go to a lovely crèche where they are properly looked after, while their mothers enter a programme that challenges them enormously but also gives them complementary therapies. They are given help and support through information technology and all the other things we have heard about this morning, which are important in allowing people to get back on to their feet and reject drug use. We could debate the legality and illegality of drugs for as long as possible, and this morning's debate has been superb.

When I talked to those people who were addicted to drugs—their lives were chaotic and they had lost their families—it was obvious that they did not want to be taking them. Irrespective of whether their drug use was supported by the NHS or they had to commit crimes to get the money that they needed to feed their addiction, they would rather not be on them. That is very different from how they felt when they started to use drugs. We cannot get away from the fact that the initial experience is good. I am told that the first hit is amazing. How do politicians counter that?

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): We all recognise the experience that the hon. Lady describes. I represent one of the few inner-city constituencies held by the Conservatives and I assure you that the concerns of drug-related agencies have been brought to my attention. Does not that undermine what the Government are trying to do elsewhere? The Proceeds of Crime Bill and the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 are geared towards supply. Much of what you say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must use the correct parliamentary language. He must not use the word "you." I think that he has finished his intervention.

Laura Moffatt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comment. I suspect that he will realise that I believe that spending on treatment and care for addicts should be increased. I make no secret of that. However, enforcement is important. The drug strategy can be used as a basis, but it should evolve. I hope that the Bill to which he referred will help.

We must ensure that there is stability for those who can be treated in the community. Residential detoxification is important, but people have to return to their communities and the people around whom the drug culture developed. It is important that they are supported. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on supported tenancies. Sussex Oakleaf housing association has a supported tenancy scheme to keep ex-drug users in their own homes. It is crucial to ensure that the bills are paid and they do not go back to chaotic drug use. It is difficult to say that that is necessarily part of a drug strategy, but we should think of the strategy in the context of the wider community.

Other issues also need our attention. My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) rightly pointed out what a load of old duffers we are for the most part. Perhaps we do not understand that our well meaning messages are badly received by young people. Will the Minister consider greater use of youth forums to take part in partnership discussions with the Home Office on issues such as the messages that we send to young people on drug education? My main concern is to keep young people safe from drug use. The debate on legality and illegality is important, but safety is crucial. Will the Minister consider using young people to help the Home Office, through its agencies, to get the right message to them to stop drug use starting? We have a chance of doing that if we get the emphasis right.

1.9 pm

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): This has been a fine and informative debate. It is useful that we have used the Runciman report as a reference, but I am surprised that it has not received the commendation that it deserves. It is a fine document that suggests several realistic ways forward.

There is no doubt that drugs are one of the most contentious and eagerly debated issues in society. If the public are asked to name the issues that most concern them, drugs invariably and inevitably come in the top five in any list. However, the debate on drugs is one of the least defined and least informed, and that is surprising because drugs as we understand them in their contemporary sense have been with us for four or five decades. As a society, we are experienced in dealing with drugs, but that experience seems to have taught us absolutely nothing.

In the past few decades, drugs use has spiralled out of control to the extent that drug taking among young people is now almost routine. On the darker side of the drug-use spectrum, the economies of some of our most deprived inner-city communities have become almost completely drugs dependent. Drugs are big business. The revenue generated by the illegal drugs trade accounts for probably more than the GDP of small and even medium-sized nations.

Strategy after strategy has been employed to try to deal with drugs problems, but without success. Targets are set but are never met. We employ drugs tsars to achieve absolutely nothing. New campaigns are launched but are sunk beneath an ever-increasing tidal wave of new and impending problems.

As the Minister and the Secretary of State have suggested, we need—I think the Runciman report provides it—an inclusive debate that takes young people, in particular, on board. We need an inclusive and informative debate to which young people think they can contribute.

Two different debates appear to be happening at the same time. The first is held by adult society and particularly by the politicians, who like to legislate and take decisions. We have our preconceptions about drugs use; we come to the issue in a completely different way. We like prescriptive solutions; we like to make laws, launch campaigns and develop strategies and approaches.

The other debate is held by young people. Their terms of reference are sometimes a million miles away from ours. Their understanding of drugs issues is entirely different from ours. As I said, drug taking has become routine for many young people—it is just something that they do. Some of them are amused at our efforts to legislate, but many are irritated by what they see as the hypocrisy at the heart of our debate. We are prepared to legislate and launch campaigns on illegal drugs, but are not prepared to deal with the much more serious problems caused by alcohol abuse and alcohol dependency. At best, what we do inconveniences young people; at worst, we give them an unwarranted police record. The debate held by young people would probably not even be begun to be understood by the majority of people in the House.

Then there is the sinister side of drugs use. I refer to the drugs use that is fired by desolation, despair and depression; that inhabits our socially excluded inner-city communities; and that finances the drugs economy with all its connections with the criminal underworld. This is the drugs use that is responsible for all the drugs-related crime that affects nearly all communities in the United Kingdom; this is the drugs use that must become our priority because it sucks the life out of our very communities.

Drugs legislation must be determined to deal with such drugs use and strategies and approaches must be determined to tackle the dangerous drugs that bring so much misery to so many of our communities. Drugs legislation must become focused on the most dangerous drugs and on those that do the most harm.

The idea of forming one all-encompassing strategy to deal with all types of drugs is almost too absurd to contemplate. What we need are a number of strategies to deal with the different drugs problems and issues that society faces. For example, the inner-city despair that heroin causes is entirely different from middle-class after-dinner cannabis use. The routine taking of ecstasy by young people out clubbing at the weekend is entirely different from the desolation and despair of the crack dens. Different problems and different issues require different solutions and different approaches. There is not one distinct problem just as there is not one distinct solution.

To underpin all the different strategies we need a legal framework that is credible, particularly for young people, so that it will not be routinely broken, making the law look foolish. Current drugs laws are not easily understood by young people. They do not understand or are hopelessly unaware of the A, B and C classifications and the legal sanctions and penalties attached to them. For example, cannabis is currently a class B drug, but some cannabinoids are class A, which would seem utterly bizarre to many young people.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman's experience is slightly different from mine. I have found that young people understand the categorisations but simply regard them as unreasonable, which is one justification for ignoring them.

Pete Wishart: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remark, but that is certainly not my experience. Young people taking ecstasy in nightclubs are completely unaware of the legal tariff associated with that drug. Ecstasy is a class A drug, which means that we have decided that it is one of the most dangerous, but young people are not aware of the legal sanction that can be applied if they are found guilty of possessing it.

I find little to disagree with in the Runciman report on reclassification. The SNP suggested reclassification several years ago, and we are pleased to see that the idea has been taken on board. An important element of the report, which I mentioned earlier in an intervention, is that we must be serious in expressing our societal disapproval of drug taking. The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) gave an example, pointing out that through application of the law on driving offences we express society's disapproval of those offences. That idea is applicable in drugs legislation.

Too often, the debate about soft drugs, particularly cannabis, is a legal one. Should we legalise cannabis or continue to impose legal sanctions and penalties? A possible third way, suggested by the Runciman report

and by the comments of the Home Secretary and the Minister, is to consider reclassifying cannabis as a class C drug. We can continue to express societal disapproval without criminalising young people, and we can discourage them from starting a career of drug taking and experimenting. However, we must acknowledge that drugs use is likely to be a feature of our society, so we should offer as safe an environment as possible.

It is a tenable position to question our current drugs laws without giving wholehearted support to legalisation or even decriminalisation. As I said earlier, I would be concerned that if we legalised or decriminalised cannabis tomorrow, the people who supply and push drugs would remain in place and would make more vigorous attempts to sell more dangerous drugs. We should begin to place less emphasis on the legal debate by reclassifying cannabis, and then we could assess whether we needed to go further and introduce full decriminalisation or, indeed, legalisation.

There is an issue of resources. The public would be satisfied if we spent the bulk of the resources at our disposal on the drugs that are doing damage.

Treatment is as important as prevention. In the 1999 Scottish elections, the SNP suggested creating drugs courts for people whose drug taking was out of control and dependent on crime. We looked at successful American models and came to the conclusion that they could be used in Scotland. The Scottish Executive now agree and are prepared to pilot drugs courts experiments throughout Scotland.

Drugs courts are important because they compel the dependent criminal drug user to confront his lifestyle, and the regime includes treatment programmes for drugs problems as well as addressing criminal activity. The courts are not a soft option; the treatment is rigorous. In some communities drug-related crime accounts for almost 70 per cent. of recorded crime, and we need solutions that address that underlying cause. Drugs strategies will not work unless treatment programmes are available to keep problem users on the straight and narrow.

A drugs strategy—or, more appropriately, a series of drugs strategies—should be realistic and achievable. It should be clearly understood and properly defined. We have been told consistently over the past decade that we are fighting a drugs war. If that is so, we have definitely lost. The language of the debate should be changed. Let us enter new territory and have an inclusive debate. Only then we will be able to start to get on top of our drugs problems.

1.20 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): This is one of those debates in which everything that needs to be said has been said, but not everyone has yet said it, and I want to add my few words to this debate, which, as hon. Members have said, has been very interesting.

I can fairly claim credit for being, I think, the first Member elected since 1983 to suggest in a debate in the Chamber the legalisation of cannabis. I did so by way of an amendment to a criminal justice Bill, some 12, 13 or 14 years ago, when the climate was totally different. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) and I shared the same view when in opposition, but those then on the Opposition and Government Front Benches had a completely different attitude. Those on the Labour Front Bench were terrified because they felt that there was a stigma attached to the issue and that it would convey itself to the Labour party itself. Of course, the then Conservative Government were trying to make that connection. I was faced with Ministers saying, "This is really Labour party policy coming through," which forced those on the Labour Front Bench to jump up and disown me completely.

I welcome the fact that we can now debate this issue seriously. One of the reasons why we can have a proper debate is that, on this issue, the Conservative party has grown up, and I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) for escalating the seriousness with which the subject is being taken. Of course, with this issue, it is very true that it is not what is said, but who actually says it. When I said it, such views could be easily dismissed as those of a subversive and somewhat eccentric and outspoken Member.

Mr. Lloyd: Surely not.

Mr. Banks: I am afraid so. When a distinguished ex-Minister says it, commentators start to take it seriously, and a number of commentators and journalists have done so. For example, *The Economist* has long been a strong advocate for the legalisation of cannabis, and it is good to see that the weight of argument wins through in the end. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to the real world. I wish that I could say the same of his colleague on the Front Bench, the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins).

If the hon. Gentleman wants to make speeches against the change in the categorisation of cannabis or against legislation on it, he must come up with a much better speech than the one he made today. A bit of party political knockabout—it was not even good party political knockabout—is no way to address the issue seriously. I say that because I have some regard for the hon. Gentleman.

To those on my own Front Bench, I say that I understand that when one is in office, one sometimes has to trim the comments that one makes. During my short, but distinguished and glittering career as a Minister, I was forced to remain silent on this issue because I could understand how my views would be exploited, but it is good to see that the House has grown up and that we can now discuss an issue that is serious for many millions of our citizens who are law-abiding people in all other respects.

The Government are not going anywhere near far enough—indeed, they are still trying to hold the line, probably because of the Prime Minister's reluctance. I do not know what my right hon. Friend did at university, but he clearly did not get up to any naughty things, and we are all glad about that, of course. There comes a time when we in the House cannot stand against the tide of events. Millions of citizens in this country are doing something that we say is illegal; we are criminalising their personal activities.

I shall finish in a few moments, because I have made this speech several times before. We are trying to stand against the personal choices of millions of our citizens, which is not the role of Government. Indeed, I am a great believer in, and devotee of, John Stuart Mill's attitude: that we should not legislate on that which does not hurt other people.

I have been hurt by drugs, and so have many other people, but it is the violence associated with the trade rather than the use of drugs that hurt me: I was mugged

[Mr. Banks]

and robbed at knifepoint in my own street. I would like to think that the chaps who did that were trying to raise the money to go and watch West Ham—but I suspect that they were doing it to fund their habit.

A couple of months ago—I was about to say I was knocked up; I should be so lucky—I was woken up at ten-past two in the morning by two police officers saying, "Excuse me, but have you heard any gunshots?" I said, "No, I'm afraid I haven't. What's happened?" Three doors away, someone had been assassinated in a car. It was all to do with drugs, and it was a real assassination, because whoever did it legged it; the police never found them and I do not think they will. The serious crime squad came round, and it was all clearly connected with drugs and yardies.

What really affects us is the impact of drugs on law and order in our areas. That is another reason why I think that the sooner we move—

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: This is a debating Chamber, not a buffet. I have been watching the hon. Gentleman, and he keeps nipping in and out—but I will give way to him, on one ground only: the fact that he has signed my early-day motion in favour of Barney the lobster.

Mr. Rosindell: In view of the appalling circumstances that the hon. Gentleman has outlined, including his own experiences of the violence associated with the drug culture, why does he seek to legitimise it instead of fight it?

Mr. Banks: The violence is not associated with the drug culture as such. The drug culture is the millions of people who use cannabis, cocaine and other drugs. The crime is associated with the drug trade—supplying drugs that are currently illegal. If, for example, the Government were to say that smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol is far more harmful to an individual's health than smoking cannabis or snorting cocaine, they would be right—but they would be mad to do so, because the violence that would then be associated with supplying those substances, which people want but which would be illegal, would be enormous, and would make the present trouble associated with the supply of drugs look like small beer.

It is because drugs are criminalised that violence is associated with them. Extremely violent criminal activity is not associated with the supply of alcohol or cigarettes, yet—I am about to say something that I did not intend to say today—on health grounds one could well argue that nicotine and alcohol should be banned before cannabis or cocaine. That is what the hon. Gentleman has to understand.

There is another point too, which I shall respond to as the hon. Gentleman has raised it, albeit in an oblique fashion. As the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) said, if this is a war against drugs, it is a war that has been lost—probably before we even joined battle. In the United States some of the most restrictive laws are being used against drugs, and the fight against drugs sends people down into south and central America to napalm coca plantations and so on. What is the result? More people are doing drugs in the United States now than ever before, the quality has gone up and the price has gone down.

When people realise that they have gone into a war that they are totally and utterly losing, because they are up against people who simply want to pursue their own habit, they have to start thinking about their tactics and their strategy. That is what I hope the Government will do.

Lembit Öpik: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: No, because I am about to finish.

The Government have to do that, because in 50 years' time we will look back on this and wonder what all the fuss was about. I commend them on the small and timid step that they have taken, and I hope that I can encourage them to go much further in future.

1.29 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): It is always a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks). I was interested to hear his libertarian arguments, which I hope he will now extend to country sports and other such issues.

We have heard a lot about the number of property crimes that are drug related. The chief constable of Norfolk said the other day that he reckoned that more than 70 per cent. of crimes in Norfolk were in some way drug related. We have all had our own experiences. About a fortnight ago, my wife and I suffered a burglary at our house in London: the burglar started to rummage around the house, the alarm went off and—greatly to their credit—Lambeth police appeared within two minutes and apprehended the burglar about 10 minutes later in our neighbour's garden. That happened on a Monday. The lad, after spending two years in prison, had come out of prison the preceding Wednesday, since when he had committed four crimes, all burglaries—ours was the fourth. He is a drug addict. That poor soul needs help, not more prison.

The Department of Health has recently issued statistics on the number of drug misusers in treatment in England and Wales. It says that there are 118,522—a staggering number, although I am convinced that the true number of drug addicts in this country is far greater. The Minister pointed out that the national treatment outcome research study estimated that for every £1 spent on treatment, £3 is saved in the criminal justice system. The NTORS also monitored 276 clients who had been admitted for treatment and found that of those who were treated, 30 per cent. were free from all target drugs a year later. That shows how important treatment is.

One important group of specialists and experts is being largely precluded from taking part in the war against drugs: general practitioners. Of 118,522 misusers in treatment, only 8,180—a paltry number—are being cared for in the community by GPs. The Minister knows that "Tackling Drugs Together" stated:

"GPs are encouraged to address the needs of drugs misusers",

but as my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) and the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) pointed out, GPs are being discouraged by the General Medical Council. I would go further and say that, in fact those brave GPs who are committed to helping drug addicts through appropriate prescribing, are being targeted by the GMC.

Currently, 15 GPs are involved in various stages of disciplinary procedures, from preliminary procedures and interim orders to professional conduct committees. All 15 have been arraigned for irresponsible prescribing, but it would appear that no account has been taken of the clinical needs of their patients, many of whom have long and complicated histories of drug taking, as well as dire medical conditions that invariably justify larger prescriptions and sometimes require a combination of drugs.

I, too, wish to talk about Dr. Adrian Garfoot and the Laybourne clinic. Dr. Garfoot originally lived in North-West Norfolk; his father is a distinguished Methodist minister in my constituency. Dr. Garfoot started the Laybourne clinic in 1992. His philosophy, as the hon. Member for Bolton, South–East says, is to try to return addicts to the mainstream. He tries to stabilise them through a tight prescribing regime, helps to rebuild their self-esteem and works to return them to the community.

In an intervention, I pointed out that Dr. Garfoot's success rate is extraordinary: the recidivism rate among 1,200 addicts in his care was a mere 7 per cent. after two years, compared with 50 per cent. of those leaving the prison service system. His most recent group of patients said that their average daily spend on feeding their drug habit had been £100—money that was raised through burglaries, street crime and other crimes. Seventy per cent. of his male patients have previously spent on average four years in prison.

I have been to the clinic, and it is a centre of excellence that has achieved a remarkable amount in a short period. Many of those receiving treatment were refused treatment elsewhere. They had been to drug dependency units and detoxification centres, which had failed them. As the hon. Member for Bolton, South–East said, it is so sad that the clinic is threatened with closure as a result of the entirely blinkered and short-sighted attitude of the GMC.

Dr. Garfoot has been subjected to two preliminary proceedings and three interim orders, and has recently been before a professional conduct committee of the GMC. He has been struck off for irresponsible prescribing. As I said in my intervention, there has been no evidence of diversion and no evidence of any harm coming to his patients. A doctor of 25 years' unblemished service has now been struck off. It is a disgrace.

As the hon. Member for Bolton, South–East said, two of Adrian's patients have died since the summer. Terry Hold died in August from an injection of illegal street heroin. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham explained that ADAPT is an organisation in her constituency. It issued a press release the other day that makes sad, depressing reading. Terry Hold spent the last moments of his life dumped, like any piece of garbage, in a south London garden. The local treatment unit made no provision for treating this long-term addict. He was denied treatment locally, but he was receiving treatment at Dr. Garfoot's clinic.

Mr. Hold's death was directly attributable to the lack of addiction management provision for chronically long-term drug injecting addicts. Under Dr. Garfoot, Terry had stabilised his drug use. His family life blossomed and he was working and becoming a self-reliant and productive member of the community. He is now tragically dead. A female patient of Adrian Garfoot committed suicide the other day.

As the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East said, Dr. John Marks's clinic in Widnes was closed. Within two years 40 of his former patients had died.

I am concerned about the 270 or so patients in Dr. Garfoot's clinic. I am also concerned about Dr. Garfoot's professional position. As the hon. Member for Bolton, South–East said, his only right of appeal is to the Privy Council by way of petition. He cannot afford to pay the costs of that himself, even though he has raised some private funds for his defence.

Dr. Garfoot applied to the Medical Defence Union. His application was refused and the case is now going to the MDU board of management. When the Minister has considered the details of Dr. Garfoot's case and has read my speech and those of the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East and my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham, I hope that he will see fit to write to the MDU to point out that there has been a breach of natural justice. Surely a man's livelihood should not be destroyed without any right of appeal.

The GMC must be concerned about its professional image. It must be concerned also about its self-policing of the profession. Obviously, an extra onus has been placed on it since the wretched Harold Shipman affair, but I strongly believe that there must be a better alternative for examining the cases of doctors who are accused of wrongly prescribing drugs. There must be a better procedure under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Dr. Iddon: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a procedure, the Home Office tribunal procedure? It has not been used since Adrian Garfoot was before it in 1997. Is it not rather sad that for five years he went through Home Office tribunals but now has to go through the entire saga with the GMC and eventually be struck off? This doctor has suffered for nearly 10 years.

Mr. Bellingham: That is 100 per cent. correct. Under the Home Office procedure, there is an appeal to the advisory body. The key to the argument is that, under the Misuse of Drugs Act, if a doctor is disciplined and prevented from prescribing drugs, he can go back to his mainstream GP practice, but under the GMC procedures, Dr. Garfoot has been struck off and has lost his livelihood until further notice. The Minister must explain why the procedure under the 1971 Act has not been used in the past four years.

I have been reading *Hansard* and I see that the Bill that became the 1971 Act was first introduced in 1969. In 1970, towards the end of Labour's period of office, James Callaghan referred to

"irresponsible, careless or negligent prescribing or unduly liberal prescribing with *bona fide* intent, which may justify curtailing the doctor's authority in relation to controlled drugs in order to stop a supply for misuse, but not justify the drastic course of disqualifying him altogether."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 1970; Vol. 798, c. 1458.]

I urge the Minister to examine very carefully the way in which the procedure is currently being used, and to look into Dr. Garfoot's case specifically.

If we are to win the war against drugs—and we all feel strongly about the appalling harm being done to our youngsters—surely we must harness one of our most obvious and crucial resources: GPs, who are closest to the community and really care about their patients. Far from

[Mr. Bellingham]

being encouraged, GPs are being discouraged as much as possible. I urge the Minister to consider our pleas very carefully.

1.42 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), who delivered his speech with passion and a deep sense of injustice. I am sure that the case deserves to be heard and answered by the Minister. Indeed, it is a privilege to follow so many excellent speeches in this debate. That is the privilege; the downside is that most of the things that I intended to say have already been said, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) said, that does not stop me saying some of them again.

I congratulate the Government on an enormous step forward. The Home Secretary and his team have moved the debate on drugs policy forward after it had been stuck for the past two decades. That has made this debate possible. It is perhaps the Minister's desire that, having made that move, the whole world will now settle down, but, to paraphrase the Prime Minister, now that the kaleidoscope has moved, it will be some time before the colours settle down in a regular pattern. We cannot rely on the most recent change in policy to be the last one, because today's debate has shown that, although we have improved our drugs policy, it still does not meet the demands of evidence or of rational argument.

The least rational argument presented today—it was almost no argument at all—came from the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). He did his party a great disservice by the paucity of his arguments, especially as that party has done a great deal in recent years—in the past year, in particular—to open up the debate. Probably nobody has done more than the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe). I do not think that she intended the debate to go in that direction, but she certainly made an enormous contribution. All her colleagues who then sat on the Front Bench—some of them still do—and who admitted their cannabis use did us all a great service. I admit that I was cowardly, and it was only after the Tories had begun to admit their cannabis use from the Front Bench that I admitted that when I was a student I, too, took cannabis and enjoyed it.

I am no longer a young man, alas, but I still recall what I felt like when I smoked cannabis as a young man. Almost all the people around me smoked cannabis. I grew up in the 1960s and I was a teenager and went to university in the early 1970s—rather like the Prime Minister. I was keen on popular music at the time, like the Prime Minister—but apparently unlike the Prime Minister, I participated in cannabis use, together with the vast majority of my university colleagues. I thought at the time that those who legislated were entirely hypocritical because of the way in which they tolerated—indeed, promoted—drugs such as alcohol and tobacco, but prohibited the drugs of choice of young people like me.

Mr. Hawkins: I am curious. Is the hon. Gentleman a teetotaller?

Mr. Jones: No, I am not a teetotaller. I do not see the relevance of the question. I am against the prohibition of alcohol as well. My point is about hypocrisy. I am not a hypocrite. I do not believe that alcohol or cannabis should be prohibited.

In the early 1970s, I thought that the old people who were the politicians of the day did not understand, and that they were ignorant, which they probably were. We do not have the defence of ignorance, do we? There cannot be any of us under 50 who do not know of people who took cannabis. Where is the testament from those people that it did a great deal of harm to others whom they knew, even if they did not use it themselves? Where is the evidence? We have heard none today.

I have spoken of my personal experience, and I have other personal experience. I come from a small mining village at the top of the Rhondda valley. There was very little cannabis use there when I left, and there was no harder drug use, as far as I knew. Unfortunately, that is not the case now. I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister has a family connection with that mining village. I must tell him that a few months ago I went to visit my elderly mother, taking my three young children with me. One of my children went out to the garden and came back with a used syringe. I tried to hide it from my mother. I then went out to the garden and came back with 12 used syringes.

Some people will want to cast me as some sort of libertine who believes that drugs use is fine. I do not believe that drugs use is fine, but I believe that I must speak out. The evidence has been quoted, and I would have quoted it if that had not already been done in the debate. The evidence is damning, and it could not be clearer about the policies that we have been carrying out in this country and in other countries, but almost uniquely badly in the UK, which has the worst drugs record of any western country. The drugs records of other countries are pretty bad, but we have the worst in Europe.

Our policies clearly do not work. We can all agree that it is dreadful that there are people addicted to drugs which alter their mind, and that in order to feed that addiction they do awful things to get money. The argument must be about what we do to stop that, or at least to mitigate or reduce it. Surely that argument must be based on evidence.

Instead of basing their arguments on evidence, hon. Members on both Front Benches have put up false tests as Aunt Sallies and hidden behind them. The Opposition spokesman said that, just as drinking and driving causes accidents, taking drugs and driving will have the same effect, and that therefore we should not consider legalising drugs. He tried to hide behind that false test. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) dealt with that well by citing evidence on the effects of drugs.

My hon. Friend the Minister used another test. He asked whether legalising cannabis would increase its use. It is possible that legalisation would increase use, but is that the only test of whether a law should be changed? *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend says that it is one test, but there are many more. Prohibition may slightly reduce the number of people who take cannabis—we do not know whether it does—but is that a sufficient benefit to justify criminalising millions of people, including those who supply small amounts to friends and neighbours?

Mr. Banks: And family.

Mr. Jones: Yes. Is it a sufficient benefit to give criminal gangs a market worth £1.5 billion?

Lembit Öpik: I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument, and I agree with him. Does he accept that, to achieve the outcomes that the Minister rightly said we all support, the Government must consider supply objectively? Decriminalising a drug while supplying it remains criminal deals with less than half the problem.

Mr. Jones: I agree.

The scale of the trade is enormous. It is worth billions of pounds throughout the world, and it dwarfs the budget that almost any country can provide to fight it. To say that is not to be defeatist; it can lead to rational consideration of the problem, the evidence and the possible solutions.

We are currently locked into an international convention that is not based on evidence. Movement in the civilised world is overwhelmingly towards legalisation. I am sure that, without the convention, countries in Europe would have legalised already. Many European countries have all but legalised drugs.

Until now, I have talked about cannabis. I want to consider a different drug. On Wednesday, I had the privilege of meeting several people who had suffered grievously because members of their families had been addicted to heroin. Some families had lost their sons and daughters from the effects of taking corrupted forms of the drug. Others told more heartening tales of going through difficult and testing times but managing to get their sons and daughters off the drug. A few methods had worked, but the main method of getting their children off that dreadful habit was tremendous family support and mothers and fathers going out to buy heroin, bringing it back and giving it to their children in controlled doses, thus helping them to get off the drug. That is what had worked. Those addicts and former addicts told me that the systems that the state uses do not work because it takes so long—six months or more—to get on to the drug rehabilitation programme. What do the drug addicts do in the meantime? Also, the methadone that is prescribed to them can create a habit that is far more difficult to kick than heroin, which is perverse in itself. It is also much more dangerous than heroin and kills proportionally more people.

Why do we not give addicts heroin in controlled circumstances, and try to treat them and get them off the habit? Why can we not do what the families of those lucky ones are doing for them? If we could, we might end up not having the worst heroin problem in the western world, which is what we have now. I say to my own Government: we have been in office for nearly five years and our record to date on drugs policy is nearly as bad, if not worse, than that of the people we took over from, and their drugs policies were rubbish as well. We have made changes. We have to make more, but I welcome the changes that we have made.

1.57 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I am aware that time is short in what has been an excellent debate on both sides of the House. I shall do my best to make a number of new points as well as to reiterate some that have already been made.

I particularly want to draw attention to the excellent speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who has shown many of us the way forward on this subject. As a new Member, I have had a number of opportunities since my election in June to learn more about this problem. First, I had the chance to go on patrol with our police in Bishop's Stortford and to see at first hand the problems that they deal with, week in and week out. It is clear to me from that experience alone that it is alcohol that causes the principal social problem, rather than illegal drugs. I saw the very patient and professional way in which those policemen and policewomen dealt with often difficult and antagonising circumstances.

I also had the chance to observe the difficulties that head teachers and teachers face in schools, in holding the line and maintaining discipline. Similarly, a parent whose child has been expelled from a school is naturally anxious about where that child goes and whether he or she might fall even further off the rails.

Perhaps my most important experience in learning about this issue in recent months has been to visit Vale House in Hertford, one of the leading rehabilitation centres in the United Kingdom, which is led by the excellent Chris Hannaby. Every day, she and her team help another person to turn their life around. What struck me as important was that alcohol featured in 42 per cent. of the cases with which her team has to deal. I was impressed by the comments made by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) about the difficulties that would be faced by centres such as Vale House if there were to be an arbitrary imposition of the new rules on independent health care. Many centres would suffer as a result, and the hon. Gentleman made that point well.

At Vale House, I was also struck by how we can move away from the stereotypical image that we all perhaps have of a drug addict. I met a professional man in his 30s, a mum in her 40s and a young man in his late teens or early 20s who had been brought up by parents who were addicts as well. What possible hope does someone like that have starting on the straight and narrow? If I learned anything from Vale House, the police and others, it was just how widely drugs in all forms affect our society. Indeed, the British crime survey 2000 showed that a third of all adults have taken drugs in one form or another.

The debate today is on drugs strategy, but it is not clear that the Government have a strategy. In recent months, we have seen a series of conflicting statements and short-term fixes.

Lembit Öpik: When the hon. Gentleman has finished criticising the Government, could he explain his party's strategy? I understand from the Front-Bench spokesman that the current Conservative strategy is to maintain the status quo.

Mr. Prisk: Our party's strategy is clear: it is to take a long and sensible look at the matter, and not to make instant, off-the-cuff comments in Select Committees. The Government have a 10-year plan, and that is welcome, but three years on, it is not clear whether many of the targets that have been set are still to be met. For example, is it still the case that a strong attempt is being made to reduce the use of class A drugs—perhaps the Minister could tell us when he winds up—or has that target been adjusted or changed?

[Mr. Prisk]

What caused the demise of the drugs tsar? Was it because he disagreed with some or all of the policies, or was it because he was not involved in many of the decisions that the new Home Secretary and his colleagues have taken? Then we come to the decision to announce a change of Government policy at the Home Affairs Committee, which the Minister was kind enough to try to explain to the House earlier. I shall not rehearse that in detail because it has already been discussed, but it was either slip of the tongue or it was a deliberate attempt to move the debate on without undergoing the traditional consultation process. In any case, it is not the way to develop an effective, long-term and coherent drugs strategy.

In the muddle, the Government are sending out confusing signals to the millions of families involved—I mentioned some of my constituents earlier—about the exact Government policy on drugs. How are the policemen and policewomen in Bishop's Stortford supposed to know where to draw the line on cannabis possession and use? How are schoolteachers and heads meant to be able to hold the line on discipline? What are parents to say to their children about drugs use and possession?

Sadly, the strategy seems no longer to be driven by the long-term needs of our society but by special advisers' need for good news stories in tomorrow's papers. I say that with regret, because drugs are a fundamental issue for all of us. We need to reform our approach to them. Hon. Members have mentioned Drugscope and its extraordinary analysis that the UK has many of the strictest laws on the use of cannabis and at the same time the highest usage. That is an unsustainable position.

What is needed? We have to begin by recognising that good laws will only work because the majority of people naturally accept them. That is why it is right that we should address the hypocrisy—as it seems to most young people—of the way in which we deal with alcohol, prescribed drugs, tobacco and cannabis. We must also ensure that any drugs strategy is founded firmly on a balance between an informed freedom of choice for adults and the promotion of personal responsibility. We need to ensure that people understand the need to accept the consequences of their actions.

If we are to liberalise the laws on cannabis—and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden made a powerful case for that—that should be based on robust and independent information about the implications for health, the addictive nature of cannabis and whether it leads to harder drugs, as some evidence in New Zealand has suggested, or whether it is, as some hon. Members have suggested, the circumstances of its current supply that make it a gateway drug.

Most important of all, we need to learn far more about people who have an addictive personality, because they are most at risk. As I said, at Vale House I met three people of different ages, different backgrounds and different circumstances, yet they all had an addictive personality. If we are to reduce the destruction that drugs cause, we should consider much more carefully that vulnerable group and their addictions, whether it be to alcohol, tobacco, valium, cannabis or heroin. What makes someone a natural addict? Is it a state of mind, a biochemical reaction, a personality flaw or a combination of all three? If we can identify those people early on, we can help them to avoid getting hooked.

Drugs in all their forms affect millions of people across our society. To shape a coherent and sustainable strategy, it is essential to balance informed freedom of choice for adults with enhanced personal responsibility, while seeking to protect children and those most vulnerable to addiction. I am in no doubt that it will take time to get the right strategy: it should not be worked out on the hoof. It is worth taking that time, because we cannot afford to get it wrong.

2.6 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): In the time left, I want to raise a couple of brief points. The first is about the treatment of drug addicts. There are three Kainos wings in prisons: at Verne, Swaleside and Highpoint. They are run by the Kainos community, and since their creation have been funded by charitable donations. Before the Kainos wing opened in Verne in March 1997, the prison had suffered from one of the highest levels of disruption and problematic behaviour, yet it now scores well in those areas. The governor and staff of Verne are happy to ascribe some of the credit for that to the success of the Kainos wing.

The way in which the wing works is straightforward. Any prisoner can volunteer to move into the Kainos wing, but to do so they must sign a compact that commits them to live by community rules. They include renouncing drug use, which is enforced by a voluntary testing regime. Some rules are simple, such as being polite and respectful to other inmates, but they often represent a huge step forward for the prisoner concerned.

Contrary to the belief of some in the prison sector, the regime does not include intensive religious intervention, but rather encourages inmates to assess their criminal habits, kick their drug dependency and become people with something positive to contribute to society. Since the wing in Verne has become operational, the atmosphere has changed from an unsafe, hostile environment to one that is much more supportive. The wing is free of drugs, violence and criminal damage—that is what all prisons should be. Reoffending rates of those who serve their sentence in the wing are lower than the national average.

It is impressive that Kainos wings are often used as a last resort for the most violent prisoners in the system. Independent research has described the wings as a

"signpost to the Prison Service in terms of promoting standards of decency, humanity and order in prisons."

Therefore it is particularly disappointing that by March 2002 those wings will be closed down at the insistence of the Prison Service management board.

The reasons for that are confused. Lower reoffending rates have been described as statistically insignificant, but the fact that the Kainos wings have only had a short time to work has been ignored. Their purpose seems to have been misunderstood by the Prison Service, although they have received the support of governors, staff, the Prison Officers Association, boards of visitors and inmates themselves, all of whom want the wings to continue their excellent work. I ask the Minister to ask his colleague the Minister with responsibility for prisons, to whom I have written about this, to reconsider. I believe that the wings can make an important contribution to the reform of drug users in prison.

Let me return to the main topic of today's debate—the legalisation of cannabis, about which many Members have spoken. Although the philosophical arguments advanced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) sounded attractive, there is conflicting evidence about the practical implications of legalisation. We need a proper debate on it before such a move is made; certainly I have yet to be convinced by my right hon. Friend's arguments.

I am concerned about the message that the reclassification of cannabis from a class B to a class C drug would send to young people. It might give the impression that cannabis is safe, and I think that we all recognise that it has its dangers. If we suggest, by reclassifying it, that it is safe, more young people will be encouraged to use it, and more young people will go to dealers. I was impressed by what was said by the hon. Members for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), who suggested that pushers often deal not just in cannabis but in other drugs. By encouraging young people to go to dealers, having given them the impression that cannabis is safe, we may encourage them to use other drugs as well.

Lembit Öpik: I think there has been a misunderstanding. I was not arguing that that was a reason to criminalise cannabis; I was arguing that we should seriously consider decriminalising the supply side, to maintain consistency in the system.

Mr. Hoban: I take the hon. Gentleman's comments on board. He and I have a difference of opinion on this. My concern is this: reclassifying cannabis as a category C drug, and giving young people the impression that it might be safe to use, may encourage them to use it more often, and to go to dealers who sell more than one type of drug and will introduce them to class A drugs. An unintended consequence of the Minister's proposal to reclassify cannabis as a class C drug may be the ability to obtain class A drugs much more easily.

Mr. Hawkins: For a certain proportion of young people, is not the feeling of doing something dangerous and illegal part of the appeal? Might not the decriminalisation of cannabis tempt more people to go straight to hard drugs in order to have the same feeling?

Mr. Hoban: My hon. Friend makes a valid point.

Members on both sides of the House have bandied figures about, suggesting that millions of people use cannabis. Let us not forget that only 14 per cent. of those between the ages of 16 and 29 used it in the last month. While many may use it once, perhaps to enjoy the experience of illegal behaviour, that may not be a consistent pattern. It may not appeal to all young people. Not all young people are regular cannabis users. What worries me is that decriminalisation, and the sense that the drug might be safe, will cause more young people to try a wider range of class A drugs. We do not want them to do that.

2.13 pm

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: This has been an excellent and well-informed debate, although it was slightly skewed towards the side in favour of legalisation. It would be difficult for me to respond to all the points that have been made, but I will write to all those who have asked substantive questions that I have no time to answer now.

I do not want to send a message to anyone that we are not prepared to listen to what is said. We have shown that we are trying to lift the debate and to listen as a Government, and today's discussion has, I believe, contributed to that impression.

I want to give the Government's perspective to balance the argument. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) has been involved in the issue for a long time and encapsulated some of the opinions on the Back Benches when he congratulated us on our timidity. We want to keep to an evidence-based debate. He said that if the fight against drugs is a war, it was lost before we started it. He cited the United States and the tremendous effort there to fight the war against drugs, which has been extended to source countries. Someone in the US departments with responsibility for alcohol, drugs and tobacco, the FBI or the CIA might be doctoring the statistics from America. Perhaps there is an evil person in the Home Office who does the same thing, because I have not gone around with a clipboard to compile the figures. According to the statistics from the US national household survey on drug abuse, there has been a substantial fall in drug use in the past 20 years. Cannabis users have fallen from 23 million to 11 million and cocaine users have fallen from 4.4 million to 1.5 million. That is a substantial decline. The figures fly in the face of the arguments that the Dutch model works and the models here, in the US and Sweden, which has far lower levels of drug use—

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: No, I have little time to respond.

We can all throw around statistics to support our opinions, but we must be careful and ensure that we listen to other people. I just hope that my hon. Friends are as prepared to listen to me as I am prepared to listen to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham also cited a couple of personal experiences that proved to him the need to legalise drugs. Let me tell him about a couple of personal experiences that make me a little worried about that approach. The only time that I was confronted by drug-related violence, I escaped without difficulty because it was not a serious attempt. It had nothing to do with the supply of drugs. I was confronted by someone who was clearly out of their head on cocaine and, as a result, decided to threatened me. It was frightening. That problem would not be solved by the legalisation of that substance.

Many people who advocate decriminalisation and legalisation say that there would be no increase in the availability of drugs, but that is not true.

Mr. Jones: I did not say that.

Mr. Ainsworth: Will my hon. Friend calm down and listen to me, as I listened to him, because that would be conducive to a good debate.

Many people who advocate legalisation and decriminalisation accept that availability would increase. They bluntly say that it would be a price worth paying.

[Mr. Ainsworth]

I started to smoke when I was 10 because cigarettes were freely available and I knew no better. I steadily progressed to a serious nicotine addiction that took a great deal to lose. I did not manage that until my mid-20s and in the meantime did a lot of damage to my health.

I know that I grew up in a different age when illegal drugs were not as available as they are now. I take seriously the point that my hon. Friend made about needles in the streets, but if the availability of drugs such as cocaine and heroin increases substantially, the chances of children aged 10 developing the problems with those drugs that I had with tobacco must increase. That is something, although not the only thing, that must be put into the calculation when we consider where and how far we go with any changes in policy that we might want to advocate.

Our drugs policy has been described as an abject failure, but our strategy is relatively recent. People might think that we will get change overnight, but we will not. I have no desire to turn this into a party political issue—Opposition Members made some good speeches—but I remind my hon. Friends that we had a Conservative Government for 18 years. Some of the initiatives that are now being taken were massively underfunded as a result.

I am surprised that, until the past couple of years, no strategic customer group was working on the supply side of drugs to bring together the work of Customs and Excise, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, the National Crime Squad and other groups to try to cut off the supply of drugs. That simply did not happen. Relationships between those organisations left a lot to be desired until they began to work together. They have become a bit more effective since.

I am sorry that I have to depart from the main issue before us, but I must deal with the speech of the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). He made only two substantive points. The first was that the Home Secretary must have come out with his statement at the Select Committee on the spur of the moment to cover up something else. The hon. Gentleman suggested that that was dreadful and said that no thought or strategy was involved.

The main evidence that the hon. Gentleman had for that extraordinary load of nonsense was an answer that I had given in Home Office questions. He claimed that it proved that the Home Secretary had not shared his idea with me and that I knew nothing about it. Let me make it clear what I said at Home Office questions the day before my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made his announcement. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) asked:

"What proposals he has to amend the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971".

My answer, which supposedly proves the hon. Gentleman's point, was:

"The Government keep the misuse of drugs legislation under continual review."—[*Official Report*, 22 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 11.]

I am pleased that the hon. Member for Surrey Heath is not representing me in any capacity, because that answer shoots a great big hole in his argument.

The hon. Gentleman's other substantive point was about the reclassification of cannabis. He expressed the fear that that would lead to an increase in its use and would damage severely the efforts of law enforcement officers to take effective action against the traffickers of the drug. That is a serious point, which must be considered.

However, a couple of days ago, I answered a written question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West and the figures that came out surprised me. They showed that arrests for purely the possession of cannabis had risen from 14,857 to 22,303 between 1996 and 2000. However, arrests for supplying or offering to supply cannabis went down in that period from 1,559 to 1,001 and arrests for possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply had gone down from 2,765 to 2,194.

As I tried to tell the hon. Member for Surrey Heath, the Home Secretary has several motives for making the change. First, the Government are trying to improve the message that we are sending out. Several hon. Members have said today that if that message is to be credible, it must differ according to circumstances. Young people will not listen to us if we try to tell them that cannabis is every bit as bad as heroin or cocaine. Our message is that although we do not want people to take cannabis, it is much more dangerous to take heroin or cocaine, and we put them in a different category.

A second consideration is our desire to bring the law into line with the practice of police forces the length and breadth of the country. We also want to make the best use of police time and focus their attention on what we consider to be important. Those were our reasons, and they were thought out during the recess, which was why the announcement was made at that time. It was not done on the spur of the moment to cover something up.

Mr. Hawkins: How does it assist the Home Secretary's message if law-abiding members of the public see that, under his proposals, large-scale suppliers of cannabis may face only 12 months in custody, instead of eight years, as at present?

Mr. Ainsworth: The Home Secretary is not trying to bounce anybody into anything. We now have a period in which hon. Members and people outside the House can discuss all the ramifications of what he said and come to a conclusion, and the issue raised by the hon. Gentleman will be part of that process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) made a high-quality contribution, as usual. Like me, he has a significant constituency problem, and I am sure that that is true of many other hon. Members. My hon. Friend urged us to consider, among other things, the availability of heroin prescription. The Home Secretary has said that we want to reconsider the guidelines on heroin prescription, which say at the moment that heroin should not be prescribed unless the doctor concerned has considerable experience of doing so. We want to make absolutely sure that our policy is correct, and that doctors feel able to prescribe heroin where that is appropriate.

I must point out to my hon. Friend that we have not moved away from heroin prescription as a matter of political policy; there has been a move by GPs out in the field towards prescribing methadone. We anticipate that methadone will continue to be the main drug of choice used by GPs in dealing with heroin addicts. However, we want to consider the matter because we feel that a lack of confidence may lie behind the reluctance to prescribe heroin. If the guidance can be clarified, that can only be to the good.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) made points that must be taken up. He described the problems that care homes are facing. I know that he has a number of contacts and a great deal of credibility in that sector, so perhaps he can assist us in considering those problems. I am told by the Department of Health that it has repeatedly consulted on its proposals for care homes, and tried to get the owners to gather evidence so that it can seriously consider their claims. Perhaps my hon. Friend and I can help in that process, so that any decision is evidence-based and its likely consequences are considered.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion of the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Mental Health (Racism)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Keith Hill.]*

2.30 pm

Mrs. Helen Clark (Peterborough): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate this important subject. I became involved in it due to the tragic death of a constituent who was a patient in the Norvic secure unit in Norwich. I should like to acknowledge the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) in pursuing the case and the issues it raises.

David Bennett—"Rocky" as he was known to his friends and family—was certified dead in the early hours of Saturday 31 October 1998, after being restrained and held down by at least three, possibly five, staff for 25 minutes.

David's sister, Dr. Joanna Bennett—a lecturer in mental health—her legal representatives from the organisation Inquest, my hon. Friend and I have had a series of meetings with Ministers and officials at the Department of Health in the past three years, the most recent of which was held this September.

We have consistently stressed the need for a public inquiry as the most appropriate means to investigate all the circumstances of David's death in a way that will highlight the more general issues and the occurrence of similar cases in the mental health services.

The Minister was generous with her time and listened sympathetically. In her subsequent letter, she confirmed a number of the steps that the Department will take, offering Dr. Bennett considerable input into an inquiry, which will have a broad remit but will not be a full public inquiry. Only parts of the inquiry will be public, over which the chairman will have discretion.

Although grateful for such progress as has been made, David's family, through their representatives, have expressed a number of reservations about those proposals, especially about which issues will be heard in public. They naturally think, as I do, that racism should be one of them, as should be the use of control and restraint. There are other concerns about the membership of the inquiry panel; how the results of the inquiry will be made public; and how they will be fed into future policy and practice.

Dr. Bennett has also stated her concern that the black and minority ethnic mental health strategy lacks definition, especially in its use of terms such as "culturally appropriate non-drug therapy" or "culturally sensitive". Such terms are hard to put into practice and do not therefore lead to real changes for service users. The strategy group has not adequately consulted black service users, providers and families, and so may be unsupported by key stakeholders.

An inquest into David's death was finally held in May this year, and it returned a verdict of accidental death, aggravated by neglect. The coroner, William Armstrong—a specialist in mental health—took great pains to ensure that the circumstances surrounding David's death were explored in depth and made public a number of recommendations that he felt the whole NHS should take on board.

Of particular relevance to this debate is the fact that he stated that many NHS trusts do not take racism seriously and that all trusts should have a written and active policy on dealing with racial abuse, which the Norwich trust has now addressed.

[Mrs. Helen Clark]

It has been established that David was racially abused by other patients on several occasions before the incident that caused his death—there was no indication of that being addressed by staff—and that he wrote a letter to the ward manager suggesting that more black staff should be employed at the clinic, as there was a significant number of black patients. He complained to the family that he felt he was being treated unfairly because he was black, and he told staff that he felt white people were treated better.

The trust's internal inquiry identified a case in which a member of staff had racially abused another patient, and an incident of racial abuse against Rocky by another patient started the chain of events that resulted in his death.

William Armstrong said:

"There seemed to have been a feeling that here was a man who was big, black and dangerous, would always be big, black and dangerous and would not respond to medication."

As he also noted, David had the advantage of a family who were very caring and well informed about mental health issues.

The recommendations following the inquest reflect many of those following previous inquests and inquiries. For example, 10 years ago, following the inquiry into the deaths of three other black men at Broadmoor hospital, similar recommendations regarding medication, the use of restraint and racism were made.

The organisation Inquest has drawn national and international attention to the disproportionate number of deaths of black people in custody following the use of force or gross medical neglect. Following deaths in police and prison custody, there have been detailed coroners' recommendations on the use of restraint and the dangers of positional asphyxia, yet prone restraint continues to be used in other settings, including psychiatric settings, without regard to the potential dangers.

In February, the report of the ethnic issues project group in the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which it kindly sent to me, stated:

"African-Caribbean individuals are over-represented among admissions to psychiatric hospitals, especially as compulsorily detained patients. Various reports have shown that"—

such patients—

"on the whole receive a more coercive spectrum of care. Among offender patients, African-Caribbean men were 26 times more likely than white men to be detained on criminal sections."

It also cites research that suggests that psychiatrists tend to overpredict dangerousness in black people, and that such bias leads to a more restrictive outcome.

I am grateful to MIND for the information in a 1997 study called "The Black Experience of Detention under the Civil Sections of the Mental Health Act". It shows that more than 75 per cent. of professionals from all agencies interviewed felt that black clients were more likely than white clients to be perceived as dangerous, and black patients were twice as likely as white patients to be detained on a longer section 3 order. White patients were more likely to be on the shorter section 2 orders.

The research also showed that 85 per cent. of black people were being given medication, compared with 72 per cent. of the white group; 61 per cent. of the black group were being given at least two types of drug, compared with 39 per cent. of the white group; and 35 per cent. of the black group were in receipt of three types of drug, while that was true for 22 per cent. of the white group.

I understand that evidence of racial inequality in mental health services has been available for 20 or even 30 years. All this together shows that black people are more likely than whites to be removed by the police to a place of safety under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983; retained in hospital under sections 2,3 and 4 of the Act; diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia or another form of psychotic illness; detained in locked wards of psychiatric hospitals; and given higher doses of medication.

The research also shows that black people are less likely than white people to receive appropriate and acceptable diagnosis of, or treatment for, possible mental illness at an early stage, and to receive treatments such as psychotherapy or counselling.

There is no legal requirement to report sudden deaths in custody to a central body, but I am told that in the past 10 years there have been at least 12 cases of black people with diagnosed mental health problems who have died in this tragic way—12 lives lost which, with more appropriate treatment in the widest sense, might have been saved.

Last year the Health Committee report on the provision of mental health services made the following recommendations. The Department of Health's requirement that all NHS trust boards should undertake training on management of diversity should be expanded, so that all front-line NHS staff receive training on race awareness. All educational bodies providing pre-qualification training to health professionals should be required to include training on cultural and racial issues as part of their curriculum. All NHS trusts should designate a board member to take the lead on issues of race and culture within their trust and to ensure that active policies are in place to champion the needs of the ethnic minority groups in their areas. The Department of Health should ensure that trusts have access to a comprehensive network of interpreting services, if necessary providing grants to the voluntary sector to enable the services to be developed. Priority should be given to early intervention services, such as providing easy access to counselling.

The Health Committee believes that it is crucial that users and carers are involved in all aspects of service delivery, and that user involvement in setting the outcomes that services aim to achieve should be central to service planning. As that would be a new way of working for many professionals, the Committee recommends that both pre-and post-qualification training of all health and social care professionals should include structured input from users as part of the national programme.

All mental health service providers need to acknowledge the importance of social factors, including race. They need to understand how what MIND calls "mental distress" is differently experienced and expressed in different cultures, and that prevailing white, western concepts are not always appropriate to understanding the behaviour of patients.

I was glad to read that the Royal College of Psychiatrists is undertaking an independent review of race equality issues, to identify and tackle institutional racism

in its structures, policies and procedures. Indeed, I note that it is the first medical royal college to do so. The report to which I referred states that

"all patients have the right to equal access to services, that is, services must be equivalent not necessarily the same"

since the needs of a diverse population are likely to be equally diverse.

A national expert on ethnicity and mental health, Professor Sashidharan of Birmingham university, has consistently demonstrated the need to tackle inequalities in mental health services. In his paper on institutional racism in British psychiatry, he says that

"despite efforts . . . to provide ethnically sensitive . . . services, the overall experiences . . . by black and south Asian people remain largely negative."

He suggests that the practical emphasis placed on improving services has distracted attention from the more fundamental task of addressing racism within mental health services. To achieve real change, we need to understand how the procedures and practices of those services affect black people's experiences of mental health care and the outcomes of treatment; therefore we must closely examine the experience of which David Bennett provides a tragic example.

I am aware that I am skating over many topics that require detailed consideration, but time is short, so today I have focused on the extent and the seriousness of the problems that policy makers and practitioners must resolve if they are to end the pernicious effects of racism in mental health policy and practice. It is because those problems are so pervasive and so serious that the Bennett family and those of us who have worked with them continue to say that a full public inquiry is the best way in which to collect and examine the evidence and arrive at proper evidence-based recommendations for future policy and practice, which can then be implemented nationwide.

2.43 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) on securing a debate on this important subject. The Government have made public their commitment to delivering a health service that is truly inclusive, available to everyone on the basis of need and without prejudice, and delivered in a way that is not only accessible to everyone but is appropriate to the communities that it serves.

To provide such a service, the NHS has to understand the obstacles facing ethnic groups in Britain today. As well as racism and racial harassment, those obstacles include institutional discrimination that arises not necessarily from malice, but from ignorance and a lack of understanding between people from different backgrounds and cultures. To deliver the service that we all want and that our communities deserve, we need both to tackle racism and to ensure that the NHS develops services that recognise cultural differences and are of a high standard for all people.

My hon. Friend raises the specific issue of the untimely death of David Bennett, which has rightly focused attention on the wider issue of the experience of people from black and ethnic minorities who have mental health problems. First, I take the opportunity to express in public my sincere sympathies to the family of David Bennett, as I have already done in private. I have met David Bennett's sister, Dr. Joanna Bennett, and have been impressed by her commitment to ensuring that lessons are learned from this tragic event and that they are translated into real change in mental health services.

My hon. Friend has called for a public inquiry into the death of David Bennett. I hope that the action that I shall outline in relation to this case and in the wider development of our mental health policies will persuade her that I share her and the Bennett family's commitment to improving mental health services for black people. As I have already explained, I am not convinced that holding a public inquiry is the best way to achieve changes and improvements.

I have already proposed a range of actions that will lead to a full investigation of the circumstances surrounding David Bennett's death; address the issues raised in the coroner's inquest; tackle wider issues of concern regarding the care and treatment of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in mental health services; and provide an appropriate platform and gravitas for this important issue.

These measures include the health authority undertaking a local independent inquiry, with Department of Health officials working with the authority to ensure that the inquiry's remit addresses concerns that the family has raised, that there is full access to the inquiry by family members and others, including decisions as to the membership of the inquiry panel, and that the findings are made public.

Furthermore, I have given a commitment to write to ministerial colleagues in other Departments to ask them for their support in considering the specific issues raised by my hon. Friend again today concerning restraint of people with mental ill health. I am commissioning research to address issues of supporting and informing families through traumatic events such as those experienced by the Bennett family, and ensuring that the lessons learned from this inquiry, and other similar inquiries, are taken fully into account in the developing of a mental health strategy for black and minority ethnic groups.

As my hon. Friend has ably outlined, there have been specific concerns for some time about the care and treatment of people from black and minority ethnic groups with mental health problems. I accept that there is still much to be done. However, there is much that we have already done to start tackling these serious issues.

The report of the Select Committee on Health on mental health services raised important issues involving challenging institutional discrimination in the area of mental health. In the Government's response, we acknowledged that challenging institutional discrimination is the responsibility of those who lead and deliver mental health services, as in all other areas of public service. In its report earlier this year, the mental health work force action team highlighted the need for the work force to represent the ethnic diversity of the community that it serves. We are committed to supporting the NHS locally to deliver this diverse work force, and to address some of the important training and education issues that my hon. Friend raised.

Through NHS Direct, we have begun taking action to overcome some of the language barriers to which my hon. Friend referred. NHS Direct sites are now engaging with

[Jacqui Smith]

their local black and minority ethnic communities to scope out their needs, promote NHS Direct and raise awareness of the service to the local community. Sites have systems in place to ensure access to advice and information in languages other than English. Currently, help is available in more than 30 languages.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, professional bodies need to be active in tackling racism and discrimination. I welcome the fact that the Royal College of Psychiatrists, for example, has set up a committee to examine ethnic minority issues and stated that it will make training in cultural competence, including racial sensitivity, mandatory for psychiatrists. It has initiated an internal audit to examine its policy and practice on ethnicity. However, as my hon. Friend also rightly said, more needs to be done.

We are pleased to be making progress, but we are not by any means complacent. The mental health taskforce, set up to drive forward the NHS plan and the national service framework for mental health, has been given a specific remit to consider the mental health needs of black and ethnic minority service users. Taskforce member Professor Sashidharan, rightly referred to by my hon. Friend as a leading expert on ethnicity and mental health, who is also the medical director of North Birmingham mental health trust, is leading the development of a strategy that will address head on many issues of concern surrounding the provision of mental health services to people from black and minority ethnic groups.

I take very seriously the points made by Dr. Joanna Bennett and by my hon. Friend. Both the timing and the way in which we engage users in the development of our strategy will be absolutely crucial in ensuring that it makes the difference in practice that we intend. A strategy is no good on its own unless it affects service and the treatment that people from black and minority ethnic groups receive in the mental health system.

Many of the services that Professor Sashidharan pioneered are now part of the improvements that we have set out in the NHS plan and the national service framework for mental health services. It is very important that, as we improve our mental health services—which is clearly very necessary—we bear in mind the range of services available. Among other initiatives, early intervention, crisis resolution and assertive outreach services are to be made readily available in all parts of the country.

My hon. Friend rightly said that a range of high-quality services must be in place to respond to the different needs of different individuals, and black and minority ethnic communities in particular. I agree with her analysis that the provision of a uniform service is not necessarily the best way of responding to the varying needs of people from different communities. We need to ensure that the views and needs of minority ethnic users are at the centre of our service development.

To take one example, Professor Sashidharan has shown that black people are far more likely to seek help if they can have access 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to crisis resolution teams. The teams respond immediately and whenever possible treat people at home. Such a service is much preferred by many service users, but is particularly welcomed by black people, whose experience of hospital care has often been negative.

I have also asked the new National Institute for Mental Health to examine the issues of ethnicity and mental health as one of its first priorities. It will be developing a specific work programme on black and ethnic minority mental health, with a remit to include communications with black and ethnic minority groups and interests; the development of targeted programmes such as those on cultural competencies, outcomes and research; and the involvement of black and ethnic minority groups in the development of the institute. I am aware that words are not enough to improve the services for users, and that we need a vehicle to implement change and ensure that that becomes a reality in the services offered by the NHS. The National Institute for Mental Health will ensure that the recommendations from the strategy will be given substance and taken forward.

The consultation document for the black and minority ethnic strategy will be issued next spring, and the final strategy will be published later next year. I am confident that the strategy will be a major step forward. It will provide a coherent and clear direction for mental health services and highlight the key issues that mental health services must address to tackle inequality and injustice. The problems experienced by black and minority service users in mental health cannot be put right overnight, but I believe that our actions already speak louder than words. The actions we have already taken, and those that we plan to take, show the priority that we have rightly given to tackling racial discrimination.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 will help to ensure that public services, including the NHS, promote racial equality across the board. It will demand that all public sector bodies implement and audit race equality strategies, and that any major proposal to change service provision is assessed for its impact on black and ethnic minority service users. We have already taken action from the centre to ensure that all parts of the NHS recognise the significance of the racial equality agenda that is at the centre of the NHS plan. The plan sets out our vision for health services and our commitment to ensuring that, both as an employer and as a provider of services, the NHS works to eliminate discrimination and promotes equality across all parts of society.

We have moved from years of neglect by giving mental health a firm footing in the NHS plan and the national service framework. For the first time ever, we have a broad vision that is acceptable to and supported by service users. Now we must target areas of concern, which is why we have instigated the first ever national black and minority ethnic mental health strategy.

We have a particular duty in mental health to ensure that when people are ill and at their most vulnerable, they receive services that are respectful and address the diversity of their needs. To achieve that, we must acknowledge and understand those needs. Racism cannot be tolerated, and neither can ignorance. I will do my utmost, as will the Government, to ensure that these changes transform the experience of all those who use mental health services, across every community in the country. Everyone deserves the best that the NHS has to offer, and we are committed to ensuring the widest possible access to the best possible services for all our communities.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 12 November 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Child Support

1. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): If he will reinstate the first eight weeks of maintenance payments by absent parents under the child support regulations; and if he will make a statement. [11679]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): The deferral of maintenance liability reflects the complexity of the current scheme and the need to encourage non-resident parents to respond quickly. We are introducing new simpler child support arrangements from April next year, which will apply initially to new cases. In the new scheme, maintenance will be calculated quickly and payments should start flowing within six weeks. Maintenance liability will normally begin from the date that the Child Support Agency contacts the non-resident parent.

Mr. O'Brien: There is a family in my constituency in which there are twin daughters aged 11, a girl of 15 and the parent with care. They were deserted by the father earlier this year. For the first two months, no maintenance was received. As maintenance is paid in arrears, that period can extend to three months. The consequences are that no mortgage or energy bills are paid. There is difficulty in meeting food and clothing bills. It was decided to send the elder girl to a private school when the family was a unit. As a result, there are fee arrears. In addition, the parent with care has to meet £90 a month in legal fees for a divorce that she never intended.

A system that drives children into poverty is a bad system, and the system that props up that system is also a bad system. What advice can my hon. Friend give me to ensure that the people to whom I have referred do not lose their home, and that they will be able to enjoy the quality of life that they had before the CSA became involved?

Malcolm Wicks: I would be happy, with my colleagues, to examine the circumstances surrounding what is clearly a sad case. We all have experiences of the inadequacies of the current system. That is why the Government consulted widely and legislated. We will be implementing new child support measures from April next year. They are designed to put children first, and to ensure that children benefit from the maintenance that is received. I have described the new arrangement for maintenance liability, which will start from the day that the non-resident parent is contacted. I have every sympathy with my hon. Friend. I assure him that the reforms will make a substantial difference.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): If the Minister is to re-examine the regulations, surely he should look again at the very existence of the agency. Surely he will accept that maintenance orders should reflect the individual facts of each case and should not be determined in accordance with a formula. If that is right, does he accept that an agency cannot exercise such discretion? That discretion should be entrusted again to a court or to a quasi-judicial body.

Malcolm Wicks: We should not make the mistake made by many English people of being optimistic about the past. The court system did not work. I remember the facts and figures. That is why the House, led by the then Conservative Government, introduced the agency. We are all agreed that in circumstances of family breakdown in modern societies such as ours, we must ensure that there is parental responsibility. If we have a child, we must help to maintain that child. The agency did not work under the Conservatives, and that is why we are undertaking fair and efficient reforms to put children first. The right hon. and learned Gentleman and I would agree with that.

Jobcentre Plus

2. **Liz Blackman** (Erewash): What plans he has to improve co-ordination between the benefits system and the support given to help people find work. [11680]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): The Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency that deal with people of working age are being brought together to form a single gateway to the benefits system known as Jobcentre Plus.

Despite industrial action on the part of a minority of our staff, the first 49 Jobcentre Plus offices opened on 22 October, providing for the first time a fully integrated employment and benefit service. We plan to extend this integration nation wide beginning from next year.

Liz Blackman: I took the opportunity to visit Jobcentre Plus in Derby during the recess. I was impressed by the refurbishment and the atmosphere. However, there are some clients who on occasions will be difficult and challenging toward the staff at a Jobcentre Plus office, as elsewhere. What assurances can my right hon. Friend give that their security and safety remain the highest priorities?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for taking the trouble to see a Jobcentre Plus office. I think that everyone who has been to one of the offices has found that they are qualitatively better than the classic DSS office with which so many people were depressingly familiar.

I agree with my hon. Friend that staff safety is of paramount importance, as is public safety. That is why the new Jobcentre Plus offices will operate in a predominantly unscreened environment. There will be screen facilities available for people we know are difficult, or where there are benefit problems—for example, crisis loans.

In addition, each office has undergone a safety assessment. That has led to the installation of closed circuit television and, for the first time, security staff on the floor of offices, who are ready to intervene if someone is difficult or is not behaving in the appropriate manner. I urge all Members to visit one of the new offices. They are better, and I believe that in the long run they will show real results both for the efficiency of the system and, critically, in getting people into work.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Last week, with the Department's assistance, I too visited a Jobcentre Plus office; I am grateful to the Department for making that possible. I met committed staff who want to help people get back to work. It was clear that they lacked back-up in their information technology systems. For example, when clients phone in, the information is typed into a computer, then printed out and typed into a different computer because one system does not talk to the other. The Benefits Agency system does not talk to the Employment Service system. When I asked the staff about that, they did not have a clear idea of when the two systems would talk to one another. Will the Secretary of State tell us when that will happen?

Mr. Darling: Yes, I will. Following the spending review settlement last year, for the first time the Department has the resources to begin to replace its entire IT system. Our difficulty is that some DSS IT systems are nearly 20 years old and are woefully out of date, leading to the problems to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We are therefore in the process of making changes. Indeed, the IT equipment on staff desks will be changed over the next year or so, which will overcome a lot of those problems. However, the back-end changes necessary for the Department's main computer system will take longer simply because it is one of the biggest in the western world; it will take a long time and a lot of investment to change it. However, we are committed to doing so because otherwise it will continue to be riddled with the problems with which every hon. Member is all too familiar.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I commend the Jobcentre Plus initiative, but does my right hon. Friend accept that the co-ordination of the benefits system and the work system requires radical changes in housing benefit? That is particularly important for areas like Hemel Hempstead, where housing costs are so high that there is still a strong disincentive to go out to work.

Mr. Darling: I agree; it is not just the organisational change that will be achieved by Jobcentre Plus that is necessary, but changes to the tax and benefits system. That is why, over the past four years, we have reformed the tax and benefits system to make work possible and to make it pay. The working families tax credit is an example of the changes that we have made.

I agree with my hon. Friend about housing benefit. We have made a number of changes, including the benefit run-ons and so on, which will make the transition to work far easier. We also need to improve the administration of housing benefit which, in too many local authority areas, is frankly lamentable. Often the hassle of trying to get housing benefit leads to work disincentives. As my hon. Friend will know, we are committed to longer-term change in housing benefit, which will involve restructuring it, but that will take some time because housing benefit is quite expensive. However, I agree entirely with the general point that my hon. Friend seeks to make.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Secretary of State rightly identified the problem of attacks on staff. He will be aware that such attacks have doubled in the past few years and that there were 5,100 last year. He mentioned the introduction of closed circuit television cameras; he will also be aware of trade unions' concern. What practical steps can he take in addition to introducing screens so that that growing trend diminishes?

Mr. Darling: Since the hon. Gentleman raised that, perhaps I should make the position clear concerning the number of assaults. The figure of 5,000 that he quoted includes verbal assaults, in which someone perhaps uses words that we would not use in the House; that can sometimes happen—*[Laughter.]* More seriously, last year there were just over 160 physical assaults. Of course, that is 160 too many; however, when quoting the figure of 5,000 care has to be taken to disaggregate verbal assaults and physical assaults.

Another point is that some of our staff—those doing home visits, for example—are used to dealing with clients away from the general security of the office. That said, as I told the House a few moments ago, I take the security of staff seriously. Frankly, in the past, we did not do enough; we allowed the public areas in some benefits offices to be turned over to people who fought with one another, dealt in drugs and did all sorts of things that created an atmosphere and environment in which trouble was likely.

I am committed to carrying out a safety assessment in every Jobcentre Plus office, which may involve CCTV and having security staff ready to intervene. However, the whole reform will result in a better and safer environment. Finally, the test of all that is that nearly every single Jobcentre Plus office is open, despite the strike. Nearly every member of our staff who will be working with the public in those predominantly unscreened environments is at work. To a large extent, the people on strike, on the picket line, will not be seeing members of the public.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): We condemn the industrial action currently being taken over Jobcentre Plus. Will the Secretary of State continue to bear in mind what is being asked of staff, who will now have to deal with benefits and provide employment advice, and sometimes, as the hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) says, deal with challenging people and be exposed to verbal assaults? Will he also bear it in mind that those on the receiving end of verbal assaults are predominantly female workers? Is the right hon.

Gentleman aware of the views of Mr. Nick Burkitt of the Institute of Public Policy Research, who says that advisers might find themselves having to

"find a job for someone who hasn't worked in 10 years; understand a benefits system with a rule book the size of a phone directory; be sensitive to the needs of local businesses and be able to defend themselves against a client with a skinful of Special Brew"?

Does the Secretary of State agree that safety must be paramount? He said that, but will he see that every reasonable precaution is taken, that the number of staff available to help with incidents involving advisers is sufficient, and that advisers are not exposed to the risk of physical or verbal assault?

Mr. Darling: As I said a few moments ago, great importance must be attached to maintaining the safety of our staff and the public. That is one of the reasons why we are engaging security staff, who have instructions to intervene in the event of any difficulty. It has been known for members of the public to be attacked. The hon. Gentleman's second point relates to training. Yes, we are making sure that our staff have sufficient training. If he goes to one of the Jobcentre Plus offices—he may be one of the hon. Members who have been to such an office—he will know that one of the things that the staff like doing is being able to advise on benefits and on how to get into jobs at the same time.

Finally, it is the Government's policy, with which I take it the Opposition agree, to give help to people who up till now got no help in getting into work, and to get them into work. That means that there must be a single gateway to the benefits system. The old distinction between people who signed on as unemployed, and those who signed on for benefit and got no help or assistance, must stop. That is the rationale underpinning Jobcentre Plus, which is why we will make sure that all our offices are converted to Jobcentre Plus over the next few years.

Welfare to Work (Mothers)

5. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): What plans his Department has to assist the transition from welfare to work for mothers with young children. [11683]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): The key is to make work possible for mothers. The new deals have had a major impact. It is also essential to make work pay, hence the importance of the national minimum wage and the working families tax credit. Also, from 5 November, we have extended the new deal for lone parents to all lone parents who are not working or those who are working fewer than 16 hours per week. That further increases the wide range of help for mothers with young children, making possible the move from welfare to work.

Mr. Cunningham: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, but will he bear in mind the fact that lone parents often feel isolated and sometimes find it difficult to get child care?

Malcolm Wicks: There has been a great extension of child care places under this Government. Also, the role of the personal adviser is important—the face-to-face discussion that goes on to reassure lone mothers in particular, who may not have been in the workplace for many years, that getting back into work is possible. I have seen good examples of that in our Jobcentre Plus offices, which is why we must maintain and develop that policy in the coming years.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): If assisting people from welfare to work should assist in the alleviation of poverty, why is the gap between rich and poor still widening under the Government? Does the hon. Gentleman think that it still matters?

Malcolm Wicks: The hon. Gentleman and I used to debate many of these matters, although in those days, his position was often not the egalitarian one that it now seems to be. The fact of the matter is that we are being successful in combating child poverty. We are the first Government to say that we will eradicate it. When he was a social security Minister, the number of lone parents on income support in the dependency state was at record levels. However, since 1997, 100,000 lone parents have come off income support and into work. That is the difference between what we are doing and what he and his colleagues did.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): May I welcome my hon. Friend's statement? It is good to see people over the age of 50 being brought back into employment, especially when they have had hard disablement assessments. However, many of the permanent jobs that are being created are on the periphery of the new economy, where there is a great deal of flexible working and work intensity—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is speaking to Question 6, at which we have not yet arrived. We will do so now.

New Deal (Over-50s)

6. **Mr. Chris Pond** (Gravesham): What actions he is taking to assist unemployed people over the age of 50 years. [11684]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): We are committed to the principle of extending opportunity to everyone, regardless of age, and to tackling age discrimination in the workplace. A key element of that process is the new deal 50-plus, which has already helped more than 50,000 people move into work since its launch last year.

Mr. Pond: Given that age discrimination is not only an injustice, but a waste of talent and experience, what plans does my right hon. Friend have for enforcing the code of conduct on age diversity in employment? I am sure that those measures will be effective, but if they are not, will he consider introducing legislation to protect against age discrimination in employment?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend will know that the Government are committed to introducing legislation to strike against discrimination in terms of the European directive that was agreed earlier this year. There is a code of practice whose evaluation will be ready fairly shortly. My view is that, although a code of practice is all very

well, I am not sure that it will achieve what we all want. In particular, we need to ensure that we can raise general awareness of age discrimination.

I am concerned that people in too many organisations do not think about the consequences of discrimination or about the fact that they are wasting an asset, very often in their own company, by not keeping or encouraging people who are over 50. It is very important that we tackle the problem. It cannot be right that a third of the whole population over 50 are economically inactive and out of work. Too many of them depend on benefits for most of their income, so it is a priority for the Government to do something about it.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I have listened with interest to what the Secretary of State has said about the position of over-50s in the workplace. Given that unemployment in Scotland increased by more than 27,000 in the last quarter—more than half the entire increase for the United Kingdom—does he agree that it would now be appropriate to establish official targets to cut unemployment, just as such targets are set for inflation?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Lady may know, although she might not want to admit it, that this Government set themselves the objective of reducing the very high unemployment that we inherited and have made substantial progress in doing that throughout the whole country, including Scotland. It is wrong of her to paint a picture suggesting that life in Scotland is somehow completely different from that in the rest of the United Kingdom. She will know that, in my constituency and hers, unemployment has fallen dramatically since 1997. She is right to highlight the fact that there are pockets in different parts of the country where unemployment is far higher than it should be. The Government will make proposals in the not-too-distant future specifically to address that problem.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): One of the problems that we have found in Aberdeen is that there is a skills shortage, while at the same time, many companies, especially in the oil industry, force people into retirement once they reach 50. That mismatch of needing to fill the jobs, but at the same time encouraging people to retire early, seems out of kilter. Will my right hon. Friend encourage employers to keep employees once they reach 50? Ending the waste of enormous talent would help them to bridge the skills gap that we are experiencing in the north-east.

Mr. Darling: I agree with my hon. Friend. Many employers lay off people—in my view, shortsightedly—simply because they are over 50. At the same time, they claim that they cannot get skilled employees. Many people over 50 are motivated and skilled, and could easily be brought back into the work force. One of the specific tasks of Jobcentre Plus, which, as my hon. Friend knows, has an office in Aberdeen, is to do more to match job vacancies with the people available. In the past, we did not do enough to match individuals with the vacancies, and back that up with the required skills and training. Sometimes people could have returned to work if they were given the right skills and training. My hon. Friend is right to highlight the problem that many employers lay off people over 50 who have a lot more to give. *[Interruption.]* In reply to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), as I approach 50, such matters are much on my mind.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I know that you will find it hard to believe, Mr. Speaker, but I must declare an interest because I am over 50 and liable to be laid off any minute.

I wholly endorse the Secretary of State's comments, but may I urge him to rely little on codes of practice because they have a limited effect? The problem is so serious and so bad for the morale of those whom it affects that he and his Ministers should take every opportunity—I am sure that they do—to emphasise that such discrimination is unacceptable and deeply injurious to the financial health of this country.

Mr. Darling: I have no doubt that, after the last election, the hon. Gentleman was glad that he did not need the new deal for over-50s; he is all right for a year or two yet. I agree with the serious point that he made. I am sure that I am not the only Member of Parliament who finds that an increasing number of over-50s with skills and training attend surgeries. In areas such as my constituency, where unemployment is just over 1 per cent. and there is an acute skills shortage, I come across people who cannot find work. One cannot help but believe that there is an element of discrimination against over-50s by employers. In places where I have worked, I have heard people saying, perhaps unconsciously, "Of course, he's over 50. Let's give the younger person a chance."

I take the matter seriously, and I believe that the Government have to do more, but employers should also begin to rethink their attitudes. They cannot claim that they want to get rid of skilled, motivated over-50s and also say that they cannot get people to work for them. In today's climate, there is no better time to start thinking about the over-50s. The hon. Gentleman has reached 50 already; others have still to get there, but we should all approach the problem as if we were personally affected.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Does the Secretary of State accept that although the unemployment rate has fallen in almost all constituencies, that has not been matched by an increase in the employment rate? The answer that he gave a moment ago, that the Government will pay equal attention to putting people in touch with the labour market and to increasing the numbers of jobs, is therefore good news for our constituents. When will the Government be able to introduce ideas to effect that?

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend knows that unemployment has fallen dramatically in most constituencies. As I said earlier, unemployment remains stubbornly high in some parts of the country and people have been out of work for a considerable time. The over-50s are especially badly hit there. We need to do more. I have already mentioned the new deal for the over-50s, and Jobcentre Plus will do far more to match individuals with jobs and back that with skills and training. However, further measures are necessary to get as many people as possible into work. I assure my right hon. Friend that the Government will introduce such measures.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I join the consensus, and declare that I, too, have reached the magic age of true

maturity. Does not the Secretary of State accept that, even by comparison with other new deal initiatives, there is a danger that the costs of the new deal for over-50s will be high and that the personal adviser's skills may not always be able to cover the individual's precise needs?

The most common deficiency among this age group is probably a lack of information technology skills, because the subject had not been invented when we were at school. Will the Secretary of State have a word with his colleague, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, about the scrapping of individual learning accounts, which is likely to be a kick in the teeth for such people's chances of re-employment?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the new deal for the over-50s. This new deal is voluntary, which sets it apart from some of the other new deals. That might explain why not as many people as I would like have taken advantage of it; we need to keep that matter under review. There were particular problems with individual learning accounts, to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has referred.

Pension Service

7. **Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): If he will make a statement on the operation of the new pension service. [11685]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): The pension service will provide a dedicated, modern and customer-focused service designed to meet the individual needs of pensioners. The new service will be phased in from April 2002.

Mr. Stewart: Does my hon. Friend recognise that many pensioners across the country, from Thurso to Truro, want a local service with local staff who have local knowledge? Will she consider introducing interviews to give face-to-face advice to pensioners in the near future?

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend is certainly correct to say that some people, pensioners included, prefer to see advisers face to face. That is why we shall have a local service to enable home visits and face-to-face interviews to take place, when requested. That does not take away from the fact that many services that need to be provided nationally can be provided by telephone and run administratively through the pension centres that we are establishing. Pensioners are increasingly contacting us by phone; more than half of all retirement pension claims are now made in that way. It is sensible to centralise the administration of that process to ensure that it can be provided efficiently and give a good service throughout the country.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does the hon. Lady agree that the individual counselling to be made available from April 2002 will be no substitute for effective public policy on pensions today? Have not the Government betrayed pensioners through the Chancellor's additional tax burdens on pension funds, and through their failure to relinquish the annuity requirement? Above all, is not the fact that the number of private occupational pensioners has fallen since they came to power evidence that their policies are failing?

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman has a cheek to talk about the Labour party betraying pensioners. His party betrayed them over 18 years. We are putting right the mess. He will see that, with our new pension credit policy, we shall close the income gap even more, so that every pensioner gets a decent income in retirement. When his party was in power, pensioners who were carers or disabled did not get any pension at all. We are putting that right, and trying to close the income and wealth gap between pensioners. We are putting right the mess that his Government made.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): The Secretary of State told the House that the computer systems in his Department are ancient and do not talk to each other. Will the Government provide a new computer system to operate the pensioner credit system, and will it be able to talk to the other systems?

Maria Eagle *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again, that is a matter for the next question. The hon. Gentleman should bide his time.

Pension Credit

9. **Colin Burgon** (Elmet): If he will ensure that the upper limits indicators for pension credit will be linked to the minimum income guarantee and rise proportionately each year. [11688]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Our proposals for pension credit will ensure that all pensioners share fairly in the rising prosperity of the nation. Our plan is that the levels of pension credit will be reviewed routinely as part of the normal uprating process. As the pension credit consultation document makes clear, our intention is that the guaranteed income level of the pension credit will keep pace with the growth of earnings over this Parliament.

Colin Burgon: I thank the Minister for his reply, and I am delighted that we are now turning our attention to that large group of pensioners who have only modest savings and small occupational pensions. In my constituency, for instance, that includes people who have worked in tailoring and mining. They will be delighted when the pension credit comes into being. Will the Minister continue what I would class as a caring, committed and concerned approach by improving the quality of the financial advice and information that our pensioners receive? In my opinion, far too many pensioners invest their life savings in low-yield funds.

Will the Minister also consider the introduction of an effective equity release scheme, which would allow pensioners, with a great degree of confidence, to use their biggest capital asset—usually their home—to raise an income without fear of losing it?

Mr. McCartney: The whole purpose of pension credit is to get away from the system in which pensioners with a small second-tier pension or savings—such as those pensioners to whom my hon. Friend referred—were taxed effectively at 100 per cent. for every extra pound of income. Pension credit will give them a bonus or a reward for every pound of second pension or savings income up to a maximum level per week. That is the first time in pension provision since the creation of the welfare state that the state will make payment in recognition of the thriftiness of pensioners. The scheme will mean a guaranteed £100 a week for a single pensioner and £154 for a couple. Some 5.5 million pensioners—50 per cent. of all pensioners—will gain as a result of the credit.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): Will the Minister confirm two independent figures about pension credit? First, will he confirm that the House of Commons Library estimates that when pension credit is brought in, more than 57 per cent. of pensioners could find themselves on means tests? Secondly, will he confirm that independent experts calculate that the cost of pension credit could be more than £2 billion? For the first time, we will have a Government who have taken almost £5 billion from pension funds belonging to the pensioners, driven those pensioners into dependency, and then expected them to be grateful when they get the money back through a complicated new means test.

Mr. McCartney: When we publish the Bill, we will publish the costs. We are the first Government in decades to introduce a pensions policy that will increase income for pensioners, not decrease it as the Conservative party did in Government. Some 5.5 million pensioner households will benefit from the policy. Already, 2 million pensioners have benefited from the minimum income guarantee, and others are benefiting from the winter fuel allowance. One could go on, but the problem is that the hon. Gentleman would not like it because he would like to abolish all those measures.

Mr. Willetts: Let me ask the Minister another question. He is saying that 5.5 million pensioners will benefit, but he has been warned by Help the Aged that pension credit is far too complex. Why will not Ministers learn—*[Interruption.]* It is no good the Secretary of State telling the Minister of State the answers; I am asking the Minister. It is not surprising that the pension credit Bill will be introduced in the House of Lords if the Secretary of State does not trust his Minister to answer questions about it.

Why is the Minister assuming that 5.5 million pensioners will get pension credit, when we know from all the Government's schemes that one of the big problems is catastrophically low take-up, with fewer pensioners collecting benefits to which they are already entitled because the Government's schemes are too complicated by far?

Mr. McCartney: The problem is that the hon. Gentleman does not like this Government paying out resources to get pensioners out of poverty. He fought the last election on the basis of taking away benefits from pensioners. I made the position clear to the hon. Gentleman—when we publish the Bill, we will publish the costs. We made it clear during the consultation that our target is to ensure that half of Britain's pensioner households benefit from the policy. What a difference it makes having a Government who are on the side of pensioners, rather than one who attacked them.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Does the Minister agree that the minimum income guarantee, however well intentioned, has been a disaster for the Government's policy on stakeholder pensions? Stakeholder pensions have flopped, with very few people taking them up. The Minister offers people a guaranteed income in old age, and yet expects them to save their own money to achieve the same standard of living as they would achieve by saving nothing at all. In those circumstances, the scheme is bound to be a flop.

Mr. McCartney: The last Conservative Government drove almost 2 million pensioners into poverty. The minimum income guarantee has produced an average increase of £15 per week, and the very poorest pensioners—over 100,000 of them—have received an average increase of £20 a week this year alone. The hon. Lady must learn from history. When the Conservatives were in power they drove pensioners into poverty; it is the job of this Government to get them out of poverty.

Private Pensions

10. **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): What targets his Department has set to increase private pension provision. [11689]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): We are committed to encouraging private saving to meet the long-term demographic challenge of an ageing population. We will achieve this through a package of measures, rewarding saving through pension credit, with better information for current and future pensioners, through combined pension forecasting and a pensions marketing campaign. There will be better regulation of the pensions industry, notably reforms of the minimum funding requirement, adoption of the Myners report and a recently announced certification review. We are providing suitable vehicles for saving such as the stakeholder pension and the state second pension.

Mr. Viggers: Does the Minister agree that extravagant claims have been made for the stakeholder pension system, which is a bad deal for many investors, especially in the light of the guaranteed minimum pension? This is an important and detailed subject, so will the Secretary of State, unlike most of his Cabinet colleagues, be present during the whole of tomorrow's important debate?

Mr. McCartney: I will be present for the whole debate, and I am looking forward to it. We will punch a hole in all the misinformation that the hon. Gentleman's party is issuing about stakeholder pensions. The Association of British Insurers estimates that as many as two thirds of employers required to do so will have designated a scheme by 8 October. From a standing start, we have established in the marketplace a pensions vehicle for many people who

under the Conservatives had no access to personal pensions, group pensions or employer pensions, with or without contributions.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend has talked about the review of minimum funding requirements. He is fully aware of some of the details behind the disgraceful situation that affected some of my constituents employed by H. H. Robertson. I do not expect him to answer in detail, because some matters are still sub judice and covered by industrial tribunal proceedings, but when they are completed, will he undertake to examine the conduct of the case carefully and determine what lessons can be learned to protect other people in similar situations?

Mr. McCartney: I am aware of that case. Indeed, in opposition, and as a constituency Member in the north-west, I was part of the combination of Members of Parliament who sought the truth of what happened in that scandalous situation. My hon. Friend can rest assured that with all such scandals the Government review issues relating to pension protection. The whole point of Myners was to ensure that we had a transparent pensions system and a regulatory regime that fits the needs of not only the industry but its customers. We will have to await the outcome of the case before I can say anything specific, but I will be happy to meet him about it when it has been determined.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): What proportion of the £5 billion a year taken out of pension funds by the worst of all the Government's stealth taxes is handed back to pensioners in the benefits that the Minister has been claiming are so generous?

Mr. McCartney: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor reduced corporation tax and introduced many other measures, including, over some years, reducing taxation on pensioners' income. We have a comprehensive strategy on the stability of the economy, of pension funds and of the tax regime, to ensure that employers and employees alike will benefit.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I just want to check what the Minister has said. He claimed as one of the Government's achievements the fact that two thirds of companies obliged to designate a stakeholder pension have done so, but will he confirm that the law obliges them to have designated a stakeholder pension by 5 October? He has claimed as a great Government achievement the fact that one third of employers have still not even complied with something obligatory. If a third have not complied, is not that evidence of how much the stakeholder pension scheme is failing?

Mr. McCartney: First, I said that it was the ABI that had stated the position. Secondly, it was 8 October, not 5 October.

Mr. Willetts: Ooh!

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman might as well get his facts right.

If, from a standing start, we have got on board two thirds of employers who before the introduction of the stakeholder pension had no form of saving for their employees, that is a very good start indeed. Under the Tories, we had a 100 per cent. nil return, because they never provided an opportunity for a large proportion of people who will now benefit from stakeholder pensions to have any kind of pension. Instead, all we had was a mis-selling scandal.

New Deal (Lone Parents)

11. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): If he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the new deal for lone parents. [11691]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): Nearly 250,000 lone parents have joined the new deal for lone parents and so far more than one in three participants—just over 100,000—have found work.

Caroline Flint: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and I welcome what the new deal is trying to do, alongside sure start, of which I am a board member locally. What measures is my right hon. Friend considering to assist those lone parents who have been on benefit for some time, perhaps 10 years, and those whose youngest child is of secondary school age?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend knows that the new deal for lone parents has been very successful. The problem has been that there are still too many lone parents who, because the scheme was voluntary, did not come and find out what was on offer. Therefore, the Government have introduced regulations that will progressively require lone parents, beginning with those with older children and moving on to those with children of down to the age of five, to come in for interview and to find out what options are available to them under the new deal. If people live in one of the areas covered by one of the new Jobcentre Plus offices, they must go in to receive advice as a condition of receiving benefit and will therefore know what the new deal has to offer.

The more people who know about the new deal for lone parents, the easier it will be to get people into work. I remind the House that the number of lone parents on benefit has steadily fallen in the past five years. Our job is to ensure that we move progressively towards our target of 70 per cent. of lone parents in work.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I hope that the Secretary of State is aware of the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics that show that the percentage of people finding work after joining the new deal for lone parents is falling. Is that a sign that the system is failing, and what will he do to reverse the trend?

Mr. Darling: I have just said that the problem with the new deal for lone parents is essentially that it was voluntary and that too many people, perhaps for too many years, did not know that initiatives such as the new deal, the working families tax credit and others would help them into work. That is why we have decided to make it a condition of receiving benefit that lone parents will have to come and find out what is on offer. Once people know

that they can get help with child care, for example, or that the working families tax credit will increase the amount of pay that can be taken home, many more—who showed little interest until then in finding work—show much more interest. It is just a pity that the party of which the hon. Lady is a member opposed the new deal in the first place.

12. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright** (Great Yarmouth): How many people have entered work through the new deal since May 1997. [11692]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): Well over 500,000 people have been helped into work since we began introducing our programme of new deals in 1997.

Mr. Wright: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. However, some areas of the country experience unemployment far in excess of the national average. I have had discussions with my local employment office staff and they suggest that the new deal could be more flexible. For example, the six-month waiting time for unemployed people could be reduced to three months. That would have a dramatic effect in constituencies such as Great Yarmouth in reducing the unemployment figures even further.

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for the consistent support that he has given to the new deal. As he knows, we keep the matter under review and the regulations governing the different new deals—for young people and for 25-plus—are slightly different, but all the regimes make provision to get those people who need help the most on to the schemes before the normal waiting period.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Following the Secretary of State's earlier argument, does the Minister agree that many of those entering the new deal would have removed themselves from the jobless register anyway, and that the vast majority of effort should be put into the over-50s and the long-term unemployed?

Mr. Brown: I do not accept the argument. All the evidence is that the new deal for the under-25s has meant that around twice as many people have found work as would otherwise have done so.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Opposition, instead of constantly undervaluing the new deal, should recognise its success? Does he also agree that hon. Members could lead by example by employing new deal workers when they are suitable?

Mr. Brown: All support for the new deal is welcome. As my hon. Friend has said, it is worth pausing to think about the alternative: under the Conservative Government, about 3 million people were unemployed.

Benefit Fraud

13. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What targets his Department has set local authorities for benefit fraud prosecutions for 2001–02. [11693]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): We are working closely with local housing authorities on a range of initiatives. Until now we have been hampered by a shortage of information about housing benefit fraud. That is why this year, for the first time, we have introduced a continuous measure of the level of such fraud. When we have that data, we will consider the appropriateness of, and scope for, setting targets to reduce fraud.

Mr. Robathan: May I give the Minister some information? Last year, about 460,000 suspected cases of benefit fraud were reported by local authorities, of which 1,100 were successfully prosecuted. In the most recent financial year, only 42 per cent. of local councils successfully prosecuted anyone at all. Is it not the case that we have heard a great deal of talk and spin about cracking down on fraud, but have seen precious little action? There is no evidence that fraud is being reduced substantially, at a time when it should be going right down.

Malcolm Wicks: We have reduced fraud by about 10 per cent. above our target for income support and jobseeker's allowance, for example, so we are beginning to win the war against fraud. As for housing benefit, of the 370,000 cases that went for investigation, in 100,000 cases fraud was established and a weekly saving was claimed. If the hon. Gentleman feels that there should be more prosecutions locally, I tend to agree with him, and when we have the data about housing benefit fraud I shall be sympathetic to considering the idea of having local targets for prosecutions as well as for fraud reduction.

Lone Parents (Employment Targets)

15. **Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): What employment targets he has set in relation to lone parents. [11695]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): The new deal for lone parents has already helped more than 100,000 lone parents move into work. This is just one of a range of polices that we have introduced to help raise the employment levels of lone parents to our target of 70 per cent.—in line with those found elsewhere in Europe and the United States—by the end of the decade. Already we are making progress. In recent years, the lone parents employment rate has increased from 45 per cent. to 51 per cent.

Paul Goggins: Both sides of the House welcome the fact that through the new deal and other initiatives, the Government are increasing the employment rate for lone parents at almost three times the overall national rate of increase. Given that the lack of affordable child care remains a significant barrier for many lone parents who want to move into work, is the Minister confident that there will be sufficient child care places to meet the ambitious 70 per cent. target by 2010?

Malcolm Wicks: Yes, I am confident. Taking account of turnover—the fact that we always lose some child care places every year—we have added more than 200,000 to the stock of child care places available, and some 418,000

children are benefiting. In addition, through the working families tax credit and the child care tax credit, we are making child care affordable. That is a crucial part of our policy of enabling lone mothers to escape poverty by getting back into the labour market.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways to increase employment among lone parents is to ensure that job shares are widely available in the labour market? Has he any plans to provide incentives for employers to offer more job shares?

Malcolm Wicks: A number of employers, aware of the need for flexibility in the labour market and the need for many parents to work part time rather than full time at a certain stage in their lives, are attracted by the idea of job shares. I would certainly encourage that. Among other things, we need to ensure that work is family friendly, and job shares are one way ahead—although not necessarily in all jobs, I am bound to add.

Jobcentre Plus

16. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): If he will make a statement on the progress of the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder pilot scheme. [11697]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): The first 49 Jobcentre Plus offices opened on 22 October, providing for the first time a fully integrated employment and benefit service. First reactions from both individual customers and employers have been overwhelmingly positive. We plan to extend this integration progressively nationwide, beginning later next year.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I visited the first stage of the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder in my constituency of Bridgend, and it appears to provide an excellent service. However, a number of staff, especially Benefits Agency staff, remain concerned about the safety issues that will arise when the project is rolled out across the whole work and pensions estate, so to speak, and there is impending strike action. What efforts are being made to get everybody around the table to discuss what I believe are the quite small changes that will be necessary to make the majority of staff happy about the new environment in which they have been asked to work?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for having visited the Jobcentre Plus office servicing his constituency. I urge all Members of the House to visit one of the new jobcentre plus sites if they can. As my hon. Friend has said, they are very attractive and provide an excellent working environment for delivering the service. That is an excellent working environment for our clients as well as for our employees.

I regret that some of our employees have taken industrial action, and I believe that the reasons underpinning it are misplaced. Of course, the Government would like to bring the industrial dispute to a conclusion with a consensus and get a return to work. However, the Government will not resile from the underpinning principle of providing the majority of Jobcentre Plus services in an unscreened environment.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): What degree of uniformity has there been for risk assessments for various Benefits Agency offices? It has been put to me by staff in Jobcentre Plus offices that risk assessments seem to vary widely between different offices. Does the Minister agree that there is a huge difference between the American offices, where there are no screens and the guards are armed, and those in the United Kingdom where that is not the case?

Mr. Brown: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that we will not be introducing armed guards into the offices. We see no need for doing that. He is right that the risk assessments vary, although not as widely as he suggests. The reason is that individual circumstances in various parts of the country vary, and each risk assessment is tailored to local circumstances.

Private Pension Provision

17. **Mr. Andrew Rosindell** (Romford): What targets his Department has to encourage private pension provision. [11698]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): We are committed to encouraging private saving to meet the long-term demographic challenge of an ageing population. We believe that everyone who can save for their retirement has a responsibility to do so, and that saving should be rewarded. Through stakeholder pensions schemes, we are targeting moderate and high earners without access to a good occupational scheme or a cost-effective personal pension. Stakeholder pensions offer those with current provision a secure, value-for-money and flexible savings vehicle.

The new pension credit will ensure that savings pay, targeting those with modest pensions or savings. It will support state second pensions and stakeholder pensions by providing those with low incomes and modest pensions with a cash top-up. The simplification review led by Alan Pickering will target the layers of regulation that increase compliance costs for employers and providers, possibly making pension provision expensive or confusing. The review will report in July with recommendations.

Mr. Rosindell: I thank the Minister for his reply. However, does he accept that many younger people are concerned about whether the existing provision will help them in years to come? Many younger people will obviously depend purely on a private pension. Does he accept that the Government need to do a great deal more if that is to be sustained?

Mr. McCartney: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must ensure that we sustain our education campaign so that every individual in the community of working age takes some responsibility for long-term savings. The problem is that when we spend resources on doing that, the Conservative party complains. However, we will continue to do so.

It is important that, throughout people's working lives, we provide them with savings and pensions platforms. People have different needs from time to time. Until now, at any event, younger people have not seen the necessity to save for their old age. Through various vehicles and our educational campaign, we are trying to get young people not only to think about their old age but to start saving through appropriate vehicles.

We also need to look after the many people who have disabilities or are carers. The state second pension will be introduced to ensure that those with broken work records, for example, such as young people with disabilities, have the opportunity of a reasonable income when they retire.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Is not the cheek of the Opposition breathtaking? They are the party who brought in private pensions and who bribed and conned 6 million people out of safe occupational schemes, and now those people find that they are losing out badly. Young people know that they are immortal and will never grow old, so is not the only way to ensure that they have a pension to set up a safe, secure scheme that is compulsory and run by the state?

Mr. McCartney: I listened to my hon. Friend. This Government have reviewed and modernised the pensions system, and introduced stakeholder pensions, second state pensions and pension credits so that when people get to pension age, rather than facing a life of poverty as they would have done under the Conservatives, they have an income and are treated with dignity and respect.

BILL PRESENTED

ANTI-TERRORISM, CRIME AND SECURITY

Mr. Secretary Blunkett, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Reid, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Mrs. Secretary Liddell and Beverley Hughes, presented a Bill to amend the Terrorism Act 2000; to make further provision about terrorism and security; to provide for the freezing of assets; to make provision about immigration and asylum; to amend or extend the criminal law and powers for preventing crime and enforcing that law; to make provision about the control of pathogens and toxins; to provide for the retention of communications data; to provide for implementation of Title VI of the Treaty on European Union; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 49].

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will know that under the Human Rights Act 1998 an order was made yesterday and laid before the House today, and it will be effective tomorrow. You will know also that it provides for a derogation from article 5 of the European convention on human rights so as to allow detention without trial. It refers specifically to the existence of a public emergency in the United Kingdom and to an Act that has not yet been published as a Bill and cannot be obtained from the Vote Office.

Have you received a request by the Home Secretary to make a statement? If not, would you be good enough to use your good offices to try to persuade the right hon. Gentleman to come to the House at the earliest opportunity and make a statement on what is, on any view, a serious derogation from human rights?

Mr. Speaker: I have no power to make the Minister make a statement. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made his point, and I have no doubt that the Minister will have heard him.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is on a different matter. With a majority of the size that we face, it is to the power and protection of the Chair that the Opposition must look. Are you aware that the Animal Health Bill, which we will debate this afternoon, touches on issues concerning the slaughter of animals which are fundamental in light of foot and mouth disease? Is it sensible for such a Bill to be introduced before the report of the Government's inquiries, held in private, has been assessed by the House and when we are unable to determine whether the Bill is truly needed?

Mr. Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman seeks to have the occupant of the Chair make a political statement, and I would not want to do that. These are matters for debate, and it is up to the hon. Gentleman to catch my eye and make those points.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Further to the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), could you ask the Home Secretary to come to the House later today? The order laid before the House today proposes huge changes to our human rights legislation, and at the very least we need the opportunity to ask the Home Secretary on what basis he is making those changes.

Mr. Speaker: As I have stated, I have no powers to make the Home Secretary come to the House. As for asking him to do so, there is nothing to stop the hon. Gentleman asking him.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The climate change talks in Marrakech concluded over the weekend, and I understand that progress was made on agreements between countries on fighting climate change, but the United States still remains

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

outside the Kyoto treaty. Have you had any indication from any member of the Cabinet that they wish to come to the House to make a statement on climate change talks, which will have an immense effect on this country in future?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no contact from the Minister concerned.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have frequently criticised Ministers who have made statements outside the House before the House has been informed. You will be aware that, over the weekend, there were leaks in all the papers about the changes to human rights legislation and about the introduction of internment without trial. However, even now, after that leak to the press, there is to be no announcement to the House. Could you unequivocally condemn that, Mr. Speaker, and ensure that it never happens again and that statements are made to the House, not just to the newspapers?

Mr. Speaker: A debate will be held next Monday and the right hon. Gentleman can make those points then.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry to trouble you, but the Home Secretary has spoken of a public emergency. Are there no rules of the House that insist that, when there is a public emergency of such extraordinary dimensions as to require legislation and an instrument of this nature, the Home Secretary should come to the House?

Mr. Speaker: There are no rules.

Orders of the Day

Animal Health Bill

[Relevant document: The Minutes of Evidence taken before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 6th November 2001, HC 339–i, on the Animal Health Bill.]

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I would point out to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.36 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Today's Second Reading debate takes forward our contingency planning in the area of animal disease control. I shall try to cover what the Bill does, why the Government have concluded that we need to take these powers and, of course, why we are bringing the Bill forward now.

The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that we have the powers that we believe we need and that we tidy up some of the anomalies in existing powers, and to set up a consistent structure and regime for the handling of animal disease. Hon. Members will have seen that the Bill focuses on two high-profile diseases, foot and mouth and scrapie, but that the powers in it will be extendable to other animal diseases. So, specifically, the Bill should ensure that we have all the powers that we might need to deal swiftly and effectively with any new cases of foot and mouth disease, and will enable us to accelerate the eradication of scrapie from the national sheep flock.

Obviously, we all hope that we are near the end of the foot and mouth disease outbreak. The signs are encouraging; there have been no new cases for about six weeks, but we cannot rule out the possibility of further sparks of disease. That is why we continue to take every opportunity to stress the importance of vigilance and high standards of biosecurity, especially given the large number of animal movements currently taking place. If we do not need these powers in relation to the current outbreak, we shall of course be delighted. However, we need to plan ahead, whether on foot and mouth disease or on other diseases.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Beckett: If the hon. Lady will allow me to make a little more progress, I shall of course give way to her if she still wants to intervene.

We would normally have consulted the industry and all our other stakeholders before introducing legislation but it became clear during the summer that it was sometimes touch and go whether we stayed on top of the disease, not least because it was touch and go whether we could maintain the 24 or 48-hour slaughter deadline. It also became clear that in some instances we lacked the appropriate powers to deal with the disease as quickly as necessary. So the Government decided—albeit with considerable reluctance—that we needed to prepare to

take steps now, and swiftly, in order to prepare either for any resumption or for a fresh outbreak of that or another disease. In consequence, there has simply not been time to conduct the dialogue that we would normally seek. Of course, during the coming weeks and months, we will still be able to consult widely on key elements, as I shall explain. We were grateful that the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was able to take evidence on the Bill last week from my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Miss McIntosh: The right hon. Lady will be aware that the outbreak came very late in the day to the Vale of York, and that she received from me, on behalf of farmers, several serious representations that departmental officials, Army officials and, indeed, vets had come on to Mr. Bosomworth's farm and most likely introduced foot and mouth. Why is the Bill silent on the failure of the right hon. Lady's Department's officials to observe the Department's own biosecurity?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Lady is straying into what happened during the handling of the disease and into the various allegations that have been made. I am not sure what she would have the law say in this regard, but the law makes it clear that it is important that biosecurity observed. Whether breaches were committed by people whom the Department used to implement its policies is no doubt something that the inquiries will examine.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): A point that my right hon. Friend has made concerns me. The Bill will have an enormous impact and may introduce urgent changes, so many people will wish to give evidence on it. Since the Bill is subject to a programme motion, it is clear that it will go through the House quite quickly. Will my right hon. Friend consider allowing more time for its consideration, rather than proceeding on the basis of what appears on the Order Paper today?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend knows better than anyone that, on Second Reading, we deal with the principles of the issue. Much of what I suspect concerns those who have anxieties about the Bill is likely to be a matter of detail, and there will be an opportunity for much more measured consultation of that detail and of any orders that might be introduced. The question of the time scale has been examined and agreed, but I assure my hon. Friend that we hope and believe that it will be possible for it to be given adequate scrutiny. The Government will of course continue to address that issue as the Bill goes through its stages.

The Bill emphasises our precautionary approach to disease control per se. It will give us a wide range of options, ensuring that we have maximum flexibility to tailor our strategy to whatever might be the prevailing circumstances. I want to stress that the Bill is related not just to foot and mouth disease and that, in particular, it does not prejudge what policy on the disease in the longer term should be. The measures that it contains would also be needed if we were effectively to implement any kind of vaccination programme.

We remain of an open mind as to what our long-term policy for controlling foot and mouth and other animal diseases should be. It remains the case that we will be guided by the independent inquiries when they report next year and we will consider carefully any alternative options for disease control, such as vaccination, that the inquiries may put forward.

I wish to explain in more detail what the Bill does and why.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The right hon. Lady mentioned the independent inquiries but, as she knows, the "lessons learned" inquiry will not begin until the epidemic is deemed to have finished. Will the ministerial papers, including the advice from scientists, on those episodes in which vaccination was considered be made available to the inquiry and will they be made public?

Margaret Beckett: When the inquiry begins is partly a matter for Dr. Anderson, although if it appears that the commencement of the inquiry will not interfere with the tail end of handling the disease, it is possible that the inquiry may begin a little earlier. That is a matter for Dr. Anderson. Whatever papers he seeks will obviously be provided and, equally, as I understand it, what is published will be a matter for him. There is certainly no wish to keep hidden matters that ought properly to be considered in the inquiry.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The House will be aware of my farming interests. Will the Secretary of State tell the House why it is so urgent for the Bill to be introduced before, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) made clear, any of the three inquiries has taken place?

Will the Secretary of State also comment on that aspect of the Bill that makes it a requirement only to pay 75 per cent. in compulsory compensation, with 25 per cent. being discretionary? That is a departure from most previous Bills. Will the right hon. Lady explain why that is?

Margaret Beckett: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman's second point in due course. As he said, it relates to parts of the Bill.

I think I have already dealt with the hon. Gentleman's first point—perhaps too briefly, if he did not follow my point. It became apparent during the handling of the disease, and through our experience of handling it, that the Department lacked what seemed to be necessary powers, and I shall say a little more about that shortly. Consequently, I agreed to the drafting of a Bill, and that drafting was continued. I will say quite frankly to the hon. Gentleman and to the House that I was not enthusiastic about seeking to take these powers, but I have become convinced that they are necessary. Obviously, all that took some time. As members of any Government will know, time can never automatically be found in the legislative programme for measures, however much Departments might require it. So the answer to the hon. Gentleman is that we feel the need to take action, and I shall come to that in a little more detail later.

The foot and mouth disease provisions fall into two main categories. First, there are powers if need be to enter premises on a precautionary basis, whether for culling, vaccination or testing, to prevent the spread of disease—without having to proye, as under present legislation, that the animal has been exposed to disease. Secondly, as the

[Margaret Beckett]

hon. Gentleman has just identified, there is a new approach to compensation on infected premises, which is related to enforcement of biosecurity measures.

The current powers have proved insufficient in a number of cases. In stamping out the disease, it has for many years been the accepted policy approach to kill infected animals. However, it has also long been regarded as necessary to cull animals on contiguous premises as well as on infected premises, in order to protect against the spread of disease. Although that has been established policy, there has always been an issue of when animals could be culled. As required by existing legislation, only animals which have been "exposed" to FMD can be culled. Inevitably, when that is the criterion, there are liable to be, and have indeed been, disputes about whether animals have been in contact with or exposed to the disease.

The effect of those disputes has in some cases led to delays, which have in turn led to further spread of the disease. The Bill will give us wider powers to address that problem. It applies—I stress this—only to animals susceptible to FMD. Any such animals could be slaughtered if Ministers concluded that that would prevent the spread of FMD. There is no question of provisions in the Bill covering, as some media comment has suggested, hamsters or goldfish. Even animals susceptible to FMD could be slaughtered only when the scientific and veterinary advice is that that is necessary.

Although the Bill alters the circumstances in which an animal can be culled from culling following exposure to disease to culling in order to prevent disease, that would by no means automatically lead to the culling of more animals. In fact, considerable scientific evidence supports the view that, by culling quickly where it is necessary, we might prevent the further spread of disease and actually end up killing fewer animals.

Sadly, experience from the recent appalling outbreak has suggested that if we are to be able to act with the speed that is required, wider powers of entry are also needed. The current position is that if a farmer whose property is suspected of harbouring FMD refuses to allow access, vital days can be lost while an injunction is sought from the courts. That delay may mean—and we believe has on occasion meant—not only that the farm in question goes down with FMD but that the disease spreads even further.

I stress at this point that I am not saying that those who perfectly legally challenged action under the existing law should in some way be blamed. They were only trying to do what they believed to be best. The fact is, however, that there have sadly been times when taking such legitimate action may have hindered attempts to tackle the disease.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): The right hon. Lady says that she believes that the actions of farmers may have helped to spread the disease—that that may have been a factor. What evidence does she have that farmers' attempts to protect their animals actively helped to spread the disease, and will she publish that evidence?

Margaret Beckett: I used the word "may", because I am someone who tries to use words with great accuracy, and of course such things are never susceptible to 100 per cent. proof. I shall give the hon. Gentleman and the House an example.

In Thirsk this summer, 55 local appeals were lodged against the contiguous cull. Of the 29 upheld by the divisional veterinary manager, nine cases of infection were subsequently revealed—and that, in turn, triggered additional contiguous culling. In the cases where the appeal had been rejected by the DVM, two also became infected premises. Again, that, in turn, triggered culling on additional farms.

It is believed that the same occurred in the Brecon Beacons, where there was evidence to suggest that the handling of the disease lagged behind the spread of the disease because culling followed testing, which is what the Welsh Assembly decided to try to do, as it did not wish to kill unnecessarily. Only when a decision was taken to proceed with the contiguous cull to try to get ahead of the disease was that outbreak brought under control, so although these things can never be subject to 100 per cent. proof, it appears that there is evidence to suggest that that occurred. Certainly, that is very much the belief of the vets and scientists who dealt with those issues.

I repeat that we are not blaming people, but, sadly, without attributing blame, we still have to consider the facts and what may have been the unintended effects of people's actions. In the Thirsk area, for example, vets and epidemiologists believed that those events seriously hampered efforts to bring the disease under control.

Miss McIntosh: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Beckett: Hon. Members repeatedly expressed in the House their considerable concern and anxiety—indeed, the hon. Lady who is seeking to intervene did so—because of the fear that the disease might spread to the pig-intensive areas of Yorkshire and around the Humber. Again, there was great concern at that time.

Miss McIntosh: The issue that the right hon. Lady raises is indeed very serious. Each of the farms in Thirsk to which she referred is, I think, situated along a road. The evidence raised at the time was that there was something uncanny about the roadside connection, and it should have been incumbent on the right hon. Lady's Department to investigate that before introducing the Bill.

Margaret Beckett: With respect to the hon. Lady, she is making the same point about waiting for the inquiry. I simply tell her, as I have done at each stage—and to the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), who raised the issue with Mr. Speaker earlier—that none of us knows what will happen. She will perhaps know that I told the Select Committee that I thought it would be a miracle if we got through the period of increased autumn movement without a resurgence of the disease. We have been extraordinarily fortunate that there has been no resurgence of the disease for some time, but no one can rule out the possibility that it will recur.

If we had waited, I suspect that, if the disease began to reappear tomorrow, next week or in three weeks' time and we had not produced any proposals to tackle some of the issues that have been raised, we would have been asked

why we had waited. As I shall say in a few moments, given that, unfortunately, contiguous culling may be needed to get ahead of the disease, the Government are trying to get ahead of the circumstances in which we may find ourselves.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): If speed in introducing this measure is so much of the essence, why was it left until August this year to begin to draft the Bill?

Margaret Beckett: There was discussion on the matter and consideration of the issues raised a little earlier. It is only from memory that I say that it was about August when drafting began, but I remind the right hon. Gentleman that it was with some reluctance—certainly from my point of view—that the Government embarked on this course. We are mindful of the fact that these are strong powers and that they should be used, if they ever are used, only with great caution. However, it seemed right at least to have the preparatory work done so that if the Government became convinced that such powers were indeed needed, it would be possible to try to convince colleagues that it was necessary to continue with the Bill. I also remind the right hon. Gentleman that, as I shall say later, two diseases are specifically dealt with in the Bill—one is foot and mouth disease and the other is, of course, scrapie.

I want to repeat, because it is a matter of concern, that every time any of the issues concerning what actually happened and people's practical experience are raised, there is a tendency for people to respond by saying, "Oh, you are blaming X or Y," or, "You are blaming farmers." It is not a matter of blame; it is a matter of recording what seems to have happened so that we can try to ensure that we learn from some of that experience. It is also a matter of making a policy response that is related and proportionate to that experience.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Beckett: I will, but thereafter I shall try to avoid giving way. I am mindful of the time that I am taking.

Malcolm Bruce: If the right hon. Lady acknowledges that the powers are draconian, why are they so one-sided? Anyone who challenges them runs the risk of losing 25 per cent. in compensation. He or she will also have to make a payment to the Minister to have an appeal heard. If the Minister is unsuccessful in winning the case, should there not be compensation for having taken the action wrongly?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is in error. There is no question of someone even being considered to lose a part of their compensation because they seek to appeal. That aspect is related solely to issues of biosecurity, to which I shall come in a moment. It is not the case either, as some reports have said, that we are removing in any way the right of appeal against the decision to cull.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about making a charge. I think that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State conveyed to the Select Committee that the only purpose of making a charge—it is not a matter of covering the cost—is to discourage an appeal that is not well founded. If someone appeals and that appeal is allowed, there is no question but that the charge will be refunded. We will make provision for a charge not to be levied where there is a case of hardship. The position is not as simple as some media reports have suggested.

As I have said, there is no question of taking away the right of appeal against such a decision. A farmer will still be able, as now, to make representations to the local DVM, putting forward reasons why his animals should not be slaughtered. He or she will still be able to seek judicial review or appropriate interim relief from the court if necessary, if that is believed to be justified.

In cases of difficulty where access is needed, whether to test, to vaccinate or perhaps to kill animals, we propose a process that is based on a warrant from a magistrate. Such a warrant would be issued to inspectors only on sworn evidence. The magistrate will need to be satisfied that the conditions set out in the Bill have been complied with.

The House knows that the Government have kept the possibility of vaccination continuously under review during the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. We retain an open mind on its possible role in future. As I have reported to the House before, we are co-sponsoring with the Dutch Government an international conference in Brussels in December to examine the issues. If we sought to use any type of vaccination programme in future, we would need to have the necessary full range of powers to carry it out, including what is not now in legislation, which is the possibility of the payment of compensation.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Margaret Beckett: No. I ask the hon. Gentleman to forgive me. I must make progress.

The Dutch Government, who had a small and quickly detected outbreak of foot and mouth disease earlier in the year, used vaccination to reduce pressure on disposal capacity by allowing slaughter to be carried out at a rate that kept pace with disposal. Although this meant that they killed more animals per outbreak than we did, it worked in their particular situation. We are seeking to increase the number of effective options available to us by ensuring that we have the power, should we wish or have the need to do so, to carry out a similar programme in future.

In the Bill, we take a different approach to arrangements for compensation on infected premises. Part of a livestock farmer's responsibility—a fact of which most are extremely conscious—is to take precautions, including good biosecurity, to minimise the risk of animal diseases. In the Bill, we propose to reflect that responsibility in compensation arrangements.

I do not dispute that the vast majority of farmers ensure that their animals have the proper high standard of care and that they, the farmers, practice good biosecurity. However, the sad fact remains that a small minority have, through irresponsible actions or an irresponsible approach, either potentially or actually contributed to the spread of disease. I stress that that is undoubtedly a small minority. However, it is to the benefit of good farmers as well as to the public at large to send, as the Bill does, a clear message to the irresponsible minority that if they do not raise their standards to those of the majority, they may not receive full compensation.

[Margaret Beckett]

The Bill will only affect compensation paid in respect of infected premises. On contiguous premises and others where no infection is found, full compensation at market value will be paid, as before. But on infected premises, the automatic entitlement will only be to 75 per cent. of the market value of the animals slaughtered. An assessment will be carried out at slaughter of compliance with disease control measures and will look at whether the farmer has acted in a way which risked spreading the disease. Biosecurity will clearly be one of the key factors assessed.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): My right hon. Friend is talking about the actions of the irresponsible minority. What further investigations have there been into allegations that have appeared in newspapers, including *The Daily Telegraph*? On 30 July, that newspaper alleged:

"A farmer in Wales said that an anonymous caller offered to sell her a foot and mouth infected sheep for £2,000."

Have there been any investigations into those allegations and, if so, what conclusions have been reached?

Margaret Beckett: There have indeed been investigations, as my hon. Friend would expect. Investigations into the example that he cites were inconclusive. There are other cases of concern which may raise issues to be brought before the courts. However, my hon. Friend will appreciate that we cannot refer to that here.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Margaret Beckett: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I have given way to him twice and I must get on

Farmers will be informed in writing whether they are to receive 75 per cent. of the maximum amount, 100 per cent. or something in between. They will then have the right of appeal to an independent person if they wish; that right is set out in the Bill. No responsible farmers should suffer under the new measures. In fact, they will gain if all standards are raised to the best. The detail of what will be in the assessment and how it will be carried out are not in the Bill. We intend to carry out a full consultation on that issue, giving stakeholders sufficient time to comment, because we want to get it right and to take the farming community with us as much as we can.

The Bill also provides powers to extend the new measures on slaughter, compensation and so on to other animal diseases. If, for example, we were unlucky enough to experience another outbreak of classical swine fever next year, we could, if need be, seek similar powers in relation to that disease. Any such extension would be by affirmative resolution, so both Houses would have the opportunity to debate the proposal. Again, that is about putting the right framework in place now so that it will be available should problems arise in future. The House will recall that a key lesson of the Phillips report was that Government should seek to make preparations in advance to deal with issues of that kind.

It has been a punishing year for rural communities, many of which were already suffering serious harm to their economic prospects, which have worsened as a result of the rampant and unprecedented foot and mouth outbreak. The sheep sector has suffered particularly badly and, of course, we need to continue to act decisively against the disease. Again, as highlighted in the Phillips report, we must consider other contingencies with which we may have to deal in future. As I made clear in my statement to the House on 22 October, there remains an acknowledged theoretical risk that BSE could be found in sheep. We must be prepared to take timely and decisive action to limit that risk.

It is on that basis that we published in September, as required by the Phillips report, a draft contingency plan for tackling the risk of BSE in sheep. The plan describes options which would enable the Government to respond flexibly and quickly to the range of scenarios which might apply if BSE were to be found in our national flock. Those include, at one extreme, slaughter and disposal of the whole flock. At a less dramatic level, the Government could consider deploying the kind of abattoir controls with which we are already familiar in relation to BSE in cattle. I emphasise again that those are only options, the application of which would depend upon emerging knowledge and expert advice. That does not mean that we should avoid taking sensible and effective precautions now to deal with any eventuality.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton) *rose—*

Margaret Beckett: I shall give way to the hon. Lady because she has not sought to intervene before.

Mrs. Browning: The right hon. Lady is talking about the theoretical risk of BSE in sheep. Will she share with the House what is clearly new scientific advice to the Government? I noticed that, in a statement on 21 October, Sir John Krebs said that, if BSE in sheep were proven, the Food Standards Agency would advise banning the consumption of all dairy and milk products from sheep and goats. Clearly, there has been transmissible spongiform encephalopathy in bovines, but the idea is that, in a different species, TSE will mean a ban on the milk supply. On what scientific basis was that statement made?

Margaret Beckett: I am afraid that I cannot do so. The hon. Lady might raise the question with the Food Standards Agency. I am not totally familiar with the statement that she quotes, and I am not aware on what scientific advice it might be based.

It must be desirable to seek to eradicate from our sheep flock the risk not only of BSE but of the entire family of such diseases. That includes scrapie, which has been present in this country for centuries, although it is not always found in other countries where there are large sheep flocks.

We announced in July the establishment of the national scrapie plan, which is designed to enable us, through a rapid programme of genetic identification and breeding controls, to breed TSE resistance into the national flock. The plan has received much support from the sheep sector, but it is a voluntary scheme and it is becoming clear that take-up of the scheme at the present rate could take too long to have the desired effect. Moreover, the Food Standards Agency has specifically called on the Government to seek to speed up scrapie eradication in this country.

The Bill would enable us to accelerate the process by compulsory means. Ministers could specify those types of sheep which, by virtue of their genetic susceptibility,

stand the risk of developing scrapie or, theoretically, similar types of disease. The Bill would then allow not only for the identification of those animals but, where appropriate, for their exclusion and the exclusion of their semen, eggs and embryos from breeding programmes. Animals subject to those restrictions would have to be castrated or sterilised or, at a later date, slaughtered.

To ensure that we have the means to carry out this work effectively, the Bill contains limited new powers of entry and enforcement, consistent with similar provisions relating to the control of foot and mouth disease. I must emphasise that these powers are not intended to raise the prospect of mass slaughter. Rather, they are designed to facilitate the redevelopment of the flock in a managed way, without causing unnecessary disruption to farmers. Indeed, Ministers will be required to consider whether there are exceptional reasons that justify the continued use even of some susceptible sheep for breeding purposes, and farmers whose animals are subject to breeding restrictions will have the right of appeal to an independent adjudicator. We will be consulting in full on how the appeals process and other detailed arrangements are to be managed, so that producers' concerns can be fully addressed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. The Bill enables the Secretary of State to make arrangements for compensation in the event that the powers are exercised. Is it the right hon. Lady's intention to lay a compensation scheme before the House and make it available to Parliament?

Margaret Beckett: Those issues will have to be considered in time. I will not say today that the Government intend to introduce such a compensation programme. We shall want to hear from the industry and all involved.

We shall also consider carefully when the powers to which I referred should be introduced, taking account of whether further progress is made under the voluntary arrangements. We shall consult the industry organisations and other stakeholders, as it is essential that we have their views. I remind the House that we have always made it clear that a compulsory scheme was likely to be necessary at some stage. We believe that if we seek the necessary powers now to make that possible, they will enable the Government better to safeguard human health and consumer confidence; the future of our sheep industry and its integral role in the rural economy; and sheep producers who, by moving towards the exclusive production of scrapie-resistant rams, will achieve disease-free animals and a basis for more competitive trading.

The Bill provides the options that we need at this time to tackle risks posed by foot and mouth disease, TSEs in sheep and other diseases. We undoubtedly have more lessons to learn, and the Bill is by no means the end of the story, but the Government regard it as a vital step towards a more secure and healthy future for our livestock industry, and I commend it to the House.

4.9 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Animal Health Bill because it is inappropriate to legislate on this matter before an independent inquiry into the causes and handling of the foot and mouth epidemic has been established and before the Government's internal inquiries have reported; because the Bill confers undue powers on officials; and because it makes no provision for controls to prevent the importation of disease."

If the House chooses to accept the reasoned amendment, it will send the Government back to the drawing board, allowing time for the introduction of new, better and properly considered legislation. The Opposition are prepared and willing to support and speed the introduction of sensible, practical and proportionate measures to help to deal with future outbreaks of foot and mouth and other diseases. In particular, we welcome in principle the measures contained in part II, which will help to eradicate scrapie from the national flock, although we believe that they will require close and detailed scrutiny to ensure fair treatment and the future of certain rare breeds. Ministers will have to do a great deal more to convince the farming community that those measures are proportionate.

I am acutely aware that, given the scientific uncertainty about whether BSE may be present in sheep—an uncertainty that is not helped by the recent mix-up between cows' brains and those of sheep—there is an urgent need to speed up the scientific inquiry into this field and to take precautionary measures.

Mr. Hogg: I am sorry to press my hon. Friend on the same point that I put to the Secretary of State, but does he understand the importance of establishing a compensation scheme for farmers whose stock will be affected if powers are exercised under part II with regard to sheep?

Mr. Ainsworth: If my right hon. and learned Friend will be patient, I shall come to compensation in a moment. He has made an important and compelling point, and we will seek answers to the question that he asked the Secretary of State, who appeared unable to provide an answer.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I should like to make a similar point. My hon. Friend will be aware that, with regard to possibility of the recent experiment concluding that BSE was present in the national sheep flock, serious consideration was being given to total cull of the national sheep herd. The Bill provides that only 75 per cent. mandatory compensation would be available in those circumstances. Will he press the Secretary of State very hard on whether she has anywhere in her Department any current evidence of BSE, because if she has, the Bill could become oppressive?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend makes a compelling point. There are ways in which much of the Bill might become oppressive anyway.

Margaret Beckett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I should be delighted to do so. I shall deal later with the discrepancies in the compensation arrangements that are set out in the Bill. It is not entirely clear why they exist.

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) is mistaken. If he looks again at the Bill, he will see that the possibility of not paying full compensation at once is linked only to bad biosecurity.

[Margaret Beckett]

Obviously, whether there are genes resistant to TSEs—transmissible spongiform encephalopathies—in sheep is a completely different issue.

Mr. Ainsworth: We do not wish to give the Bill a Second Reading because it does not take a second glance to work out that it is poor legislation. It is badly drafted and targeted, and, in all likelihood, it is, as many suspect, badly motivated.

The foot and mouth outbreak was a catastrophe that cost millions of animal lives and billions of pounds. It brought heartbreak and financial ruin to thousands of businesses throughout the country—and not only those involved in farming. There are important lessons to be learned, but the Bill contains no evidence to show that the Government have learned from their mistakes. Indeed, it suggests strongly that they are in denial of their role in the whole sad affair. I fear that it represents another blow to the credibility of the Secretary of State and her new Department.

Although the Department has been in existence for only five months, it has already acquired a reputation for being by turns incompetent, feeble and vindictive. Today, it is in vindictive mode. I do not know how many times the Secretary of State repeated that she did not blame farmers for what had happened—I look forward to reading *Hansard* to ascertain that. However, the notion that farmers were to blame for the disaster of foot and mouth disease is at the heart of the Bill.

Whenever anything goes wrong, it is the Government's natural and cowardly instinct to look around for someone else to blame. However, I have rarely witnessed anything as low or contemptible as their attempt to blame foot and mouth on the farming community. After all that the farming community has been through in the past year, the Government produce a Bill that tries to punish it for a crime that it did not commit. It is a punishment inflicted on the innocent by the guilty.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman's comments are bizarre. It is hardly the Secretary of State's fault that foot and mouth disease spread throughout the country. Ministers did not go around spreading it. What about the pig farmer in Northumberland who fed his pigs infected swill and transported them all the way to Essex? Does the hon. Gentleman believe that that person is exonerated from any blame?

Mr. Ainsworth: I greatly respect the hon. Gentleman, but he should study the matter more carefully. He is clearly unaware of Professor Woolhouse's evidence, which suggests that if Ministers and officials had got to grips with the disease sooner, only half as many animals might have had to be culled.

Margaret Beckett: Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Professor Woolhouse made his calculation and assessment, and he clearly has a valid point of view, but at the time, many people, including Opposition Members, blamed the Government for acting too swiftly.

Mr. Ainsworth: If the Secretary of State agreed to a full independent public inquiry, we might get to the bottom of some of those important issues. The Bill has sweeping powers, yet the Government have produced no conclusive evidence that resistance by farmers to culling helped to spread the disease.

Part I is based on a false premise, which the Government use to try to justify disproportionate measures.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman remembers the outbreak in 1967 and the inquiry that followed it. Despite the inquiry and report, we were ill prepared for what happened this year. Holding an inquiry does not mean that we will be prepared if such an outbreak regrettably happens again.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman makes a strange point. We should like a public inquiry to consider why the Government did not consider the evidence of the Northumberland committee of 1967-68 and use it as a precedent for action of the latest outbreak. It is one of the greatest mysteries of the affair.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether the Opposition's policy is to hold a public inquiry into foot and mouth disease, and take legislative action only after the publication of its report, which could take two or three years? In the absence of an inquiry report, are they in a position to propose measures to tighten the regulations?

Mr. Ainsworth: We support a full independent public inquiry because that is the only means of getting to the bottom of what happened and when events occurred. Why did Ministers make decisions at particular times? What were the causes of the outbreak? How did the disease arrive in this country? We believe that legislation would be better informed and more useful to the farming community, consumers and everyone else if it were based on an understanding of the issues. Only a full public inquiry can get to the bottom of them. Presumably the Government refuse to hold a public inquiry, despite the massive public support and demand for one, because they know what they would find.

Margaret Beckett: That point is repeatedly made by Conservative Members. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Department is mindful of what was in the Northumberland report. Opposition Members say that they want something like the Northumberland report, and that that means a full public inquiry. The Northumberland report was not the result of a full public inquiry, of the kind that Opposition Members want, under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1971, and it was serviced by Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials, not by anyone outside the Department. But Opposition Members consistently quote that report. I have no quarrel with that; it is a very useful report. I have read it, but I do not see the lessons that Opposition Members have alleged can be drawn from it. That inquiry was thought to have been good enough then, and this Government have put in place a more independent process that is being run not by the Department but by people outside it and an independent chairman.

Mr. Ainsworth: It is being run by other Government Departments. The Government have set up a smokescreen, not a full independent public inquiry. If the

right hon. Lady had nothing to hide, she would have nothing to fear from a public inquiry. In the absence of such an inquiry, people will inevitably be led to the conclusion that the Government have something to hide. That suspicion will haunt her for the rest of her political life.

It has been left to county councils to fill the gap left by the Government's cowardice. Northumberland has announced a public inquiry, and Devon has already reported its preliminary findings, which have a direct bearing on the Bill. The Devon inquiry gave those who had suffered most from the foot and mouth crisis the voice that the Government seem determined to deny them. It found:

"the outbreak and the handling of the ensuing crisis was lamentable."

It also found evidence of

"insensitive and even belligerent operatives and bungled culls"—

which, it said, did

"little to enhance the professional reputation of all those involved, from Ministers downwards."

Those problems were not confined to Devon. Who could forget the television images of idiots with handguns chasing terrified animals round fields in Wales, for example?

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): First, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Bill is putting in what was left out of the Animal Health Act 1981? For example, a farmer who deliberately infects his sheep or cattle would, under the 1981 Act, get 100 per cent. compensation and not be prosecuted.

Secondly, with reference to the Devon inquiry, will the hon. Gentleman tell the House why Conservative-controlled Cumbria county council has not asked for a public inquiry when Cumbria was the worst affected area?

Mr. Ainsworth: Public inquiries seem to be breaking out all over the country in the absence of a national one. Shropshire is now holding one, and I have no doubt that Cumbria is considering the matter carefully, although I am told that it is concerned about the cost to its council tax payers. The issue should be handled and sponsored by the Government in a proper and considered way. On what the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) said, a public inquiry does not have to take two or three years but can be conducted far more quickly if given the right instructions.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend heard the remarks of the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), who now appears to support a Bill that proposes that someone who deliberately infects their own animals with foot and mouth would still get 75 per cent. compensation.

Mr. Ainsworth: It is one of the more bizarre aspects of the Bill that a farmer who infects his own animals will still get compensation. My right hon. Friend and others will no doubt wish to explore that issue in Committee.

A widely circulated letter from Alan Richardson, a retired veterinary surgeon who worked for the Home Office and for MAFF, and who was involved in the 1967 outbreak and offered his services in Cumbria during the latest outbreak, provides further compelling evidence of incompetence, bureaucracy and sheer stupidity on the part of officials acting on orders from Ministers.

Mr. Richardson reported for duty on 28 February at the Carlisle office, which he found

"completely overwhelmed. And the bemused confusion among the staff of all ranks proclaimed there had been no contingency planning at all."

He went on to report

"excessive bureaucracy . . . administrative chaos . . . dithering . . . wasted time . . . bizarre priorities . . . ludicrous procedures . . . Many young, foreign and inexperienced veterinarians were manipulated, even bullied, by HQ staff."

Worse still, he reports:

"Before the General Election, HQ tried to resist positive diagnoses; even where there was little doubt".

What instruction had those officials received from Ministers to resist positive diagnoses before the general election? Given that the Prime Minister had by then taken personal control of the crisis, was there perhaps a deliberate attempt to stifle bad news in the run-up to the general election? That is one of the issues that a full independent public inquiry could get to the bottom of.

As well as condemning the handling of the outbreak, the Devon inquiry offers a series of sensible recommendations for future action, dealing with the training of officials, animal movements, vaccination, the disposal of culled animals and compensation. None of those is to be found in the Bill.

Even more bizarre is the way in which the Bill pre-empts the outcome of the Government's own inquiries into the catastrophe. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), kindly circulated a letter to hon. Members in which he says:

"I also wish to make clear that in bringing forward these measures the Government is not pre-empting the findings of the independent inquiries that are considering aspects of the foot and mouth outbreak."

Setting aside the fact that the inquiries are not independent in the true sense, that is turning the truth on its head. He seeks to justify pre-empting the inquiries on the grounds that

"We are now at a critical stage in dealing with the tail end of the epidemic and must be ready to take timely and effective action should it reappear."

It would have helped had they taken timely and effective action in the first place. This is like locking the stable door after 4 million animals have bolted and been destroyed. There may well be a case for changes in legislation, but such a case could be made only after careful analysis of what went wrong and the lessons that have been learned.

As the National Farmers Union has pointed out,

"It is most important that the advice of the current inquiries is to hand before decisions about any changes in current policy are made."

The NFU also mentions next month's international conference in Brussels, which is co-sponsored by the Government and to which the Secretary of State referred. It will debate the merits of different approaches to future outbreaks. She confirmed today that it may bring some fresh thinking on vaccination.

[Mr. Ainsworth]

Yet, today, we have a Bill that pre-empts any fresh thinking. Not content with pre-empting their own inquiries, the Government have seen fit to pre-empt international discussions that could be vital to setting the course for future policy. Far from identifying and addressing the faults in the way in which the system was applied and seeking to right them, the Bill seeks to put even more power into the hands of the very people who were responsible in the first place for the bloody shambles, the heartache, the callous disregard for animal welfare and the massive costs to rural businesses and public funds.

The National Sheep Association said:

"We are extremely concerned that even more power should be given to a group of people who in far too many cases proved they did not understand farmers, livestock and livestock handling and frequently had extremely poor management and operational skills."

It is worth remembering that, right now, 18 DEFRA staff at the Exeter office are suspended, pending inquiries into financial irregularities.

The Bill provides for the mass slaughter of almost any animal that Ministers decide should be killed. Clause 1(3) makes it clear that it is "immaterial", in Ministers' considerations, whether any such animals have been

"affected with foot-and-mouth . . . suspected of being so affected . . . in contact with animals so affected . . . exposed to the infection",

or even "treated with vaccine".

Mr. Martlew: I expect the hon. Gentleman to attack the Government, which is the Opposition's job, but I do not expect him to attack the staff in the way that he has. Is it not a fact that, in Cumbria and throughout the country, DEFRA staff and MAFF staff before them have worked hard and tirelessly for long hours to try to get the disease under control? Can he give his statements some credibility by praising those staff?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am delighted to do that, because many staff, officials, vets and members of the armed services worked extremely hard. However, that does not mean that the instructions to which they worked were adequate or well directed. Nor does it explain why so many people giving evidence to the various public inquiries that have now been established have gone out of their way to criticise officials and the clumsy and often belligerent way in which they operated.

I know that officials will need to get approval from a magistrate before exercising the new powers, but I do not know how a magistrate will know whether a request for mass slaughter is justified. I hope that the Minister will explain that.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): We in the Select Committee questioned the Minister on that point, and I asked whether magistrates were to be given special training. I am afraid that he replied that that was not a matter for him. Given that the magistrate concerned might have to remove the livelihood of a member of his community, I ask the Minister to produce an answer today or, at the very worst, in time for Committee. I am glad that my hon. Friend raised the point, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's answer.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend who has unrivalled expertise in these matters and plays a distinguished role in the Select Committee. As she will have heard, I have asked that the Minister address the point in his concluding remarks, although the Secretary of State may wish to do so now.

Margaret Beckett: No, I have a question for the Opposition. What special training do those who deal with injunctions have?

Mr. Ainsworth: The right hon. Lady's attempts to run away from an important question are pathetic. She owes it to the people on whom the legislation will impact to provide an answer to my right hon. Friend's question.

Mrs. Shephard: I will happily answer the right hon. Lady, although perhaps she should remember that she is in government and responsible for finding answers to questions. Magistrates are, of course, provided with training to deal with injunctions and other matters. This is a matter of a different order, which is why I put the question to the Minister, and why I was so shocked that he could not find the answer. Clearly, the right hon. Lady does not know either. What a scandal.

Mr. Ainsworth: It is indeed scandalous.

Margaret Beckett: Let me point out to the hon. Gentleman what my hon. Friend the Minister sought to convey to the right hon. Lady, who should know that the training of magistrates is not a matter for our Department. It would be wrong of us to seek to intervene in that; it is a matter for the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We are getting into an awkward three-way exchange.

Mr. Ainsworth: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The fact is that the legislation will pose serious problems for magistrates if they do not get appropriate training. It envisages a magistrate receiving a telephone call and being told that there is an urgent case. That magistrate will have to rely simply on the word of officials or of the Minister. Given that the Government's credibility, and especially the Department's, is at such a low ebb, the magistrate will be in an extremely difficult position. The Secretary of State clearly has no understanding of how discredited her Department has become. Many will ask why, after all the mess and chaos over which the Government have presided and which they have, in many ways, abetted, anyone should trust the word of the Secretary of State's officials on FMD.

Farmers or other people responsible for animals will not get the chance to put their case. The sentence will, in effect, be summary and based on the evidence of the Department alone. That is not only unreasonable but unjust. On the front page of the Bill, the Secretary of State baldly states:

"In my view the provisions of the Animal Health Bill are compatible with the Convention rights."

That means the European convention on human rights. She may be aware of legal opinion that disagrees. If nothing else, it looks as if the Bill will be good news for lawyers.

Several of my right hon. and hon. Friends, notably my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), have already raised the

issue of compensation. Schedule 1 assumes that farmers must first prove that they have taken proper care to protect their animals before they are entitled to full compensation for any livestock, healthy or otherwise, that are to be destroyed on Government orders. The assumption is made against the farmer. For the law to be just, it should require the authorities to prove that the farmer or animal owner has been negligent. The Government appear to assume that farmers are more prone to negligence than Ministers or officials. That view is not widely shared in rural Britain.

Why does clause 4 distinguish between the compensation arrangements for animals slaughtered as part of a general carnage and those for animals slaughtered after vaccination? In the case of vaccinated animals, the Bill allows the Minister to

"pay compensation of such an amount as may be prescribed by order of the Minister."

Given that most people agree that vaccination would play a part in the event of another outbreak of FMD, that seems to give the Minister wide discretion to determine the level of future compensation payments.

The National Sheep Association goes so far as to suggest that the compensation arrangements in new section 35A in schedule 1 are

"an evil tool which is the product of a devious and nasty mind!"

Ministers have much explaining to do on compensation, and it is undoubtedly an issue that my right hon. and hon. Friends will wish to pursue with vigour in the Bill's subsequent stages, assuming that it gets a Second Reading.

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend will be aware that matters of compensation must also be considered by the European Commission. Was not it interesting that the Secretary of State made no reference to her discussions with the EU? After all, we are part of a single market.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend makes a good point, because it appears that the Bill has been drafted without reference to the EU framework. As I said, forthcoming international discussions may have significant ramifications for the handling of diseases and the Government have pre-empted their outcome.

The Bill is as notable for its omissions as for the new powers that it confers on Ministers. The most serious omission is the absence of any new measure to tackle one of the root causes of the FMD outbreak and other forms of animal disease: inadequate import controls. It is widely agreed that as FMD did not originate spontaneously, it must have been imported. The farming community has long argued for more stringent surveillance measures and tougher sentences for illegal or substandard food imports. It is arguable that such measures would make the greatest single contribution to reducing the risk of further outbreaks. As things stand, I am sad to say, we could import FMD again tomorrow, and the Bill does nothing to reduce that risk.

The Bill is premature, has been introduced without consultation, is misdirected, and contains measures that are unfair and disproportionate. It will do nothing to restore the Government's reputation among the farming community, nor to encourage much needed confidence in the wider rural community.

It is indeed an extraordinary achievement for the Government to have earned the severe criticism of both Compassion in World Farming and the Countryside Alliance. That must be a first. Better legislation would follow mature consideration both of the reasons for the outbreak and of the failure of the Government's attempt to bring it under control. I urge the House to accept our amendment.

4.40 pm

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I will support the Bill's Second Reading—but I have considerable reservations, which I will talk about later.

The parts of the Bill that merit its being sent for further consideration in Committee are, in particular, those relating to the national scrapie plan. I think we would all accept that we have for far too long tolerated a fatal illness in sheep which may also mask other serious animal diseases that may have implications for human health. The national plan, which the Bill will assist, may help us to accelerate the elimination of scrapie from our national flock. That measure alone means that the Bill merits strong consideration. The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), commended it, although he said that it needed further detailed consideration. I agree with him; it certainly is a strong feature of the Bill.

The second element that deserves positive support is the recognition that carelessness and ignorance may lead to the spread of disease, and that it may be worth while to give farmers incentives to avoid those risks as far as possible.

Those are the key elements that I think are positive. However, I am afraid that there are other elements that I regard with some doubt, and Ministers will need to persuade me. They will also have to take a more flexible view of the need to improve the Bill in Committee. Bearing in mind the haste with which the Bill has been put together, it would be prudent for Ministers to listen carefully to reasoned amendments in Committee, and to reflect on whether they would improve it.

I am concerned by any step to widen Ministers' powers to destroy animals without having to act according to clear criteria. I recognise and accept the rationale that the disease might have been slowed down by a more vigorous cull process applied with more rigour across our country, so if I can be persuaded that the powers in the Bill will ensure that those measures are available, I shall accept it. However, from Ministers asking for such exceptional powers, I would normally seek absolutely clear criteria for deciding on the application of those powers—which, as has already been said, would end a farmer's livelihood, temporarily at least.

The second issue that concerns me is the denial of compensation on the basis of biosecurity lapses over a 21-day period—a period that may go back before the outbreak even started. Unless it is the contention that those biosecurity measures should be in place as a matter of course on all farms at all times, the time of the outbreak of the disease would probably be the point at which most farmers would consider the need to introduce additional security measures on their properties. Yet the legislation, baldly written as it is, implies that for 21 days before the outbreak was identified on a property, a farmer would have had to have taken those measures already, even if he were ignorant of the fact that an outbreak had occurred elsewhere in the country.

[Mr. Mark Todd]

Ministers should further consider how the 21-day rule is to be interpreted. In the Select Committee, a number of Members questioned the Minister on how the principle operated, bearing in mind the fact that most farmers would receive a visit from a Department official at the time the outbreak occurred but would not normally expect to see such an official during the previous 21 days to identify whether the appropriate measures had been put in place. Of course, those measures are not defined. I recognise that they may be defined in regulations and note the assurance of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that there will be consultation on those issues, but at present we are slightly in the dark about them.

It would be prudent to ensure that the 21-day principle were tied much more clearly to matters for which there was a verifiable record, rather than a matter of opinion, such as whether a passer-by noticed a disinfectant trough next to a footpath. The outbreak gave rise to enough urban and rural myths without our encouraging yet more people to speculate, sometimes maliciously, or imagine how various things happened. This principle rather invites that process.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. His farming constituents, like mine, no doubt suffered during the foot and mouth crisis from MAFF's continual changes of instructions on biosecurity measures. In those circumstances, how is a farmer expected to know what the correct biosecurity measures are?

Mr. Todd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I disagree with him. I think that steps were taken. It is fair to say that the recommended measures changed from time to time, as experience demonstrated what measures were most effective. At a very early stage, all farmers received clear guidance on how to identify foot and mouth disease—which is extremely difficult in the main carrying species—and on the measures that seemed appropriate at the time. Farmers with longish memories remembered the use of footbaths and other measures to improve biosecurity. I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but I think that some steps were taken and some learning done. I do not blame MAFF for that.

My third point was made by the hon. Member for East Surrey and, indeed, I have made it before repeatedly. For the Bill to be a balanced approach to controlling the risk of disease in our land, the most sensible accompanying measure would be steps to control illegal meat imports. The main route is not illegal imports presented as legal imports but illegal imports on the backs of trucks labelled as containing vegetables, or in people's luggage. Thus far, the measures that have been taken are clearly inadequate and have been widely criticised. There would be greater hope of engaging with the other stakeholders in the rural community if more positive action were proposed to accompany these steps.

My fourth concern is that consultation has been extremely limited, although I appreciate why. I am reassured by my right hon. Friend's statement about substantial consultation on the various schedules and regulations. I hope that they will be extremely detailed and that they will fill the obvious gaps in the Bill.

Fifthly, although the Bill places specific obligations on farmers, it does not balance them with obligations on Department officials to carry out tasks within a certain time. There is the 21-day rule for determining whether people have properly followed biosecurity measures, but there is no precise timetable within which an official will be obliged to decide, for example, whether a farmer is entitled to compensation of 100 per cent., 75 per cent. or something in between. There is certainly no obligation on the Department to pay compensation within a certain time, which has caused a certain amount of grief in my constituency.

Margaret Beckett: Obviously, these are issues that the House will want to discuss, but the Department has it in mind to set a target of three weeks.

Mr. Todd: I thank my right hon. Friend. I take that as meaning that the Department will have three weeks in which to pay compensation. When the Select Committee asked the Under-Secretary about decisions on compensation, we had difficulty in drawing an answer out of him, but I got the impression that those decisions would be made in days rather than weeks, and that, in many cases, it would be plain to the official visiting the farm that a decision could be made on that day. I shall return in a moment to the reasons for my concern about that lack of definition of the Department's obligations.

I am concerned also about the lack of definition of what biosecurity measures will be required. The Select Committee asked questions about that. We asked how these measures differ from the requirements that the law already imposes. The Under-Secretary made it clear that several prosecutions for biosecurity lapses were in hand, so the law does affect farmers, particularly on matters such as dirty vehicles. That might be covered in a schedule defining the circumstances in which different biosecurity measures would be appropriate. There is a great deal more work to be done on that.

There are different farming practices and different means of species management, which will have to be reflected in the steps that are taken. The Under-Secretary, speaking to the Select Committee, rightly drew attention to the extreme biosecurity measures taken in pig units. There is such a property in my constituency, and it would have been extremely difficult to visit it or even to get near it when those measures were in place, and rightly so. Clearly, we need to reflect on such experiences and draw up specific regulations.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My hon. Friend's argument is cogent. Does he agree that there remains a significant problem with the division of responsibilities between central and local government in monitoring biosecurity?

Mr. Todd: I thank my hon. Friend for his typically astute remark. I was about to turn to the management of powers, which is another area of doubt. As those of us who have had foot and mouth in our constituencies are aware, the role of county councils and trading standards officers is vital. There was significant variation in the ways in which functions relating to movement restrictions were carried out. I commend the people involved in that task in my county, who worked extremely hard and were assiduous. When I asked queries, they answered promptly and pursued lengthy inquiries into the movement of

animals. One point that certainly came through was that often they did not receive sufficient information quickly enough to carry out their responsibilities as they felt they should. My hon. Friend is thus right to highlight that concern.

My final point has been touched on by the Opposition and it troubles me greatly: the Bill will pass considerable powers to a Department that, if we are honest, did not in all respects perform in a way of which we can be proud as public representatives. That does not mean that I criticise many of the junior officials who worked extremely hard. During the outbreak in my area, farmers were most complimentary about MAFF officials and spoke of the sensitivity, kindness and care with which they carried out their responsibilities. The problem lay further up the chain.

Although the problem was handled with great care and sensitivity, frustration arose when bills had to be paid and issues signed off at a more senior level in the Ministry and in relation to the overall strategic management of the outbreak. There is concern, which I have conveyed to the Under-Secretary, about passing more powers to a group of senior managers whose adequacy many people may criticise, even though those managers may have felt that they carried out their responsibilities in the best way, given the circumstances.

We require some assurance about the way in which such diseases will be managed in DEFRA in future, such as the accountability and roles of Ministers and the essential management tasks that will be allocated to the Department's personnel. Most of us will require greater reassurance on those key matters—not on the willingness of junior staff who, in many ways, performed well beyond the call of duty, and certainly not on the role of the armed forces and others who were drafted in to help in extreme circumstances. However, that critical strategic and operational management role was seen as being of poor quality in many areas—especially those that were under the most stress.

Before we pass such severe and draconian powers, even though they may be justified, we must be assured about the quality of the people who will make judgments.

4.58 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) trod carefully on egg shells. He showed a degree of dexterity, and he highlighted many of the concerns felt not only in the House but by people outside.

It is good to know that Labour Members are prepared to express those concerns. Opposition Members can be a little less constrained in the force with which we express our views, but it is good that Government supporters recognise that the Bill does not seem to justify its introduction as an emergency measure. It seems neither timely nor to have been subject to proper preparation or consultation. The Secretary of State has not explained why there is such a desperate need to pass the Bill in haste.

Although many of us who called for a public inquiry still believe that the Government will live to regret not holding one—many questions will go unanswered and will fester beneath the current performance of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—I wholly accept that a public inquiry would not of itself allow for the introduction of more urgent measures. If the Government believe that legislative changes are required—no one is suggesting that they are not—they have a duty to explain exactly what is informing their policy and to explain the reason for their haste. They have not even taken time to consult those directly affected—the farmers—and the other agencies concerned for animal health and welfare. Although the Secretary of State said that the Government would consult on the secondary legislation, that apparently could not be done for the primary legislation.

Ministers must be well aware of the feeling—I am sure that the Secretary of State has encountered it—that the Department and the Government are indifferent, if not hostile, to the interests of those engaged in agriculture and the rural economy. The absence of consultation does not help to reassure those people that there is a genuine desire to engage them in a partnership to deal with a problem that has destroyed many people's livelihoods, and continues to do so. That is why I and my colleagues do not believe that the Bill is justified.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The hon. Gentleman is Scottish, so does he share my concern and amazement that there has been no consultation with the devolved Assemblies or Parliaments? In particular, does he share my concern that there will be a different system of compensation in England and Wales from the one that pertains in Scotland? As he suggests, many cross-border issues will prove to be a festering sore for the Government.

Malcolm Bruce: I have read the amendment to which the hon. Gentleman has attached his name and I know that he is concerned about the role of the National Assembly for Wales. I suspect that his concern is shared by my colleagues in Wales. Consultation has taken place between Departments north and south of the border, but I agree that it has not taken place with the Parliament. I shall return to that point.

Given the slaughter that has taken place over the past few months and the appalling spectacle of pyres and bulldozed bodies, the wider public will be concerned that the Government are planning an even bigger scale of slaughter next time. People will want to know whether that is the right way to respond to the crisis.

The hon. Member for South Derbyshire made the reasonable point that the Department needs to put its own house in order before it begins to legislate about the behaviour of the others with whom it has to work. There can be no doubt that the Department has been run down progressively over a number of years. That process began under the Conservatives, but it has continued under Labour. Regional offices have been reduced or closed and policy has been applied inconsistently. The hon. Gentleman may believe that changes were made according to the information available, but different advice or instructions appeared to given at the same time in different parts of the country. I am told that that actively encouraged farmers to take legal advice and action against the Government. That might not have happened if policies had been applied consistently.

The veterinary service has been run down substantially over many years and the relationship between state veterinary services and private vets, which used to be an

[Malcolm Bruce]

important part of the delivery of policy, has broken down. As has rightly been said, biosecurity or the lack of it at ports may have allowed the disease to come in.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley) *indicated dissent.*

Malcolm Bruce: Although we do not know that, my view is based on strong reports. Before 11 September—I am sure this is still true—those of us who travelled to the United States knew that at any international airport we would be surrounded by sniffer dogs. They were not looking for heroin or for cannabis, but for ham sandwiches or anything else that might infect American food. We have no such security in this country, and nothing in the Bill suggests that we will get it.

The hon. Members for South Derbyshire and for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) alluded to the definition of inadequate biosecurity, which is now to become an offence that could compromise someone's right to full compensation. There may be a legitimate argument for having such a rule, but the problem is that the Department will decide what biosecurity is and when a breach occurs. A magistrate will have to decide on the basis of departmental information whether a breach has taken place.

Reference has been made to the training of magistrates and to injunctions, which involve a point of law. However, determining questions of biosecurity involves a point of professional judgment with which a magistrate has more difficulty. A farmer might ultimately persuade a magistrate that the advice was wrong, but that might happen after the flock had been slaughtered.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is again mixing up parts of the Bill. Appeal on the ground of biosecurity is not to a magistrate but to a separate tribunal, which will be experienced in dealing with such issues. The intention of consultation is to agree the assessment with the industry—which does not object to the proposal in principle—to make it as simple and understandable as possible, and to use it as part of the guidance that we give farmers about the practices that they should be applying. That could be done logically and straightforwardly, and such a provision would be to the advantage of the whole industry.

Malcolm Bruce: That is a helpful intervention, but the industry will want to know why that could not have occurred before the introduction of emergency legislation.

Mr. Martlew: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that only this weekend 400 sheep were killed in south Cumbria on suspicion of foot and mouth? We are not over the outbreak yet; there was a lull in the 1967 outbreak of the kind we face today. I disagree with the slaughter policy, but we need to pass the Bill so that we can get on top of the disease and reduce the number of animals that have to be slaughtered. We have learned the lessons of the outbreak since the end of February.

Malcolm Bruce: I suppose that the hon. Gentleman would say that, if the disease flared up again on the previous scale, such legislation might be justified, but I still do not think that we would have enough answers to suggest that the policy had been thought through. Given what we hope is a diminishing problem, what has been learned over the past few weeks and months suggests that we can manage. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman's intervention implies that we are doing so.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I was about to make that point; the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) argued against his own position. Is not one important factor that under clause 1(3) there no longer has to be even a suspicion of infection? Action can be taken simply because the Minister feels like it.

Malcolm Bruce: Exactly. The Minister is much respected in the House and in the farming community, but it is not good enough just to say, "I'm the Minister. I wouldn't misuse those powers." He may not be the Minister who uses them. The point of scrutiny in this House is to justify in an absolute sense the powers that are conferred, regardless of who the Minister may be. The power of the Secretary of State or the Minister to determine that any animal should be slaughtered without any justification seems extremely strong, and one for which the House would have to have an overwhelming reason to grant. The case for that has certainly not been put to us convincingly.

More to the point, the public want the outbreak to be eliminated. I and my party defended the slaughter policy at times when it was extremely difficult to do so—for example, we said that it should not be changed half way through and that there was no adequate alternative. The Minister may accept that or not.

Many of us also said that the scale of the slaughter and the images that it created should never be repeated. We need to find a better way. Indeed, my colleague, Ross Finnie, Minister for Environment and Rural Development in Scotland, is on record as saying that he does not believe that he could get away with such a policy if there were another outbreak on the same scale.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is making a fair and reasonable case for his legitimate concerns about the Bill. The powers relate to such matters as a firebreak cull, which was implemented in Scotland following veterinary advice. Such action would not be one of my personal preferences. I should make it clear that I do not want culling on such a scale to occur ever again in this country. The Bill does not pre-empt any different approach, but whatever approach we take is bound to include some elements of vaccination, zoology and culling. The Bill strengthens all those aspects.

Malcolm Bruce: Let me be clear: some practical amendments to the legislation in the light of experience may be justified, but given the way in which the outbreak has been handled, we could have waited a little longer to introduce a Bill. There could have been more consultation, and more questions could have been answered. We fear that the Government are taking more powers than they hope will be necessary just in case they need them. Opposition parties have a responsibility to call Ministers to account and to question and challenge powers that we believe are too sweeping and unjustified.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) mentioned the different system in Scotland. The Bill will apply to Wales, although the National Farmers Union in Wales is worried about the confusion that might arise over who will take which decisions. Ross Finnie has told me that, after consultation, he will introduce legislation in Scotland and that there must be a parallel rule on the scrapie measures. As the NFU in England has said, we want to know what will happen in Scotland, because there is no point in having a regime in England and Wales if there is no parallel regime in Scotland. I endorse that view as someone who is strongly pro-devolution. Parallel measures are needed.

Mr. Russell Brown: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that much of Ross Finnie's argument for taking that decision centres on the fact that the last outbreak in Scotland occurred on 30 May, so he has had time to consider what has happened?

Malcolm Bruce: Yes, but I am not persuaded that the situation for Ministers south of the border is fundamentally different. I appreciate that there was a bigger, more expensive and extensive outbreak in England and that it is not yet over. I accept all that, but it beggars belief that we cannot manage our way through what may happen without taking draconian powers.

People assumed that lessons were being learned that might be appropriate for the next outbreak, not that measures were being taken this late in the day to finish off the current outbreak. Indeed, the Minister has implied that the Bill is intended for the next time, but he has used the fact that we are not quite in the safety zone to justify its introduction now.

As the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) implied in his intervention, the disease affected his constituency very badly, and it affected mine tangentially. Nevertheless, the outbreak in Scotland was more manageable and was dealt with quickly, but there was also much more co-operation, understanding and shorter lines of communication, all of which helped. The watering down of the regional offices in England lengthened the lines of communication there, which created some of the difficulties. Lessons may be learned from that, but perhaps Ministers could have considered the situation in Scotland and said, "This is relevant and this is not" and applied the best practice and discarded the rest, and explained why. It would have been reassuring if that had happened.

The scale of the powers to deal with scrapie and the lack of justification for them give me considerable cause for concern. For example, clause 6(4) states:

"The Inspector may take with him such other persons as he thinks necessary to give him such assistance as he thinks necessary.

The inspector may require any person on the land or premises to give him such assistance as he reasonably needs for the purpose mentioned in subsection (2)."

If a farmer expresses resistance, the inspector will tell the farm workers that he is co-opting them to help him deal with their boss's concerns. What message does that send? Will the inspector turn up with the Army or half the constabulary? We have seen that happen, and people want to know the specifics of what will happen.

The Library brief makes it clear that the legal measures may fall within the European convention on human rights, but it suggests that the compensation rules may not. As I said in an intervention on the Secretary of State, my concern is that the legal measures seem to be loaded in favour of the Department and are not even-handed in relation to the smaller beast—the farmer who challenges the Department's judgment.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I merely want to say that a farm worker who refuses to assist in those circumstances will commit an offence.

Malcolm Bruce: Indeed—the hon. Gentleman's intervention is helpful. I hope that the Minister will understand that our opposition to the Bill is not a knee-jerk or negative reaction, simply produced by the fact that we are in opposition. We believe that very substantial powers may be created in a hurry, and it behoves Minister to justify doing so. At present, we do not think that Ministers have justified them.

When the Secretary of State came to the House after the debacle of the sheep and cow brain research, she indicated that legislation to eliminate scrapie was at an advanced stage of preparation. No reference was made to other powers, and it is interesting that the reference to scrapie in the Bill, as opposed to the schedule, occupies one line. The rest of the Bill relates to foot and mouth disease and all its implications.

There is a general recognition that if we can breed scrapie out of the herd, there is merit in so doing. Obviously, questions arise about how effective that will be. Another question is how to decide which breeds are scrapie resistant. Where is the cut-off point? Where is the determination? Who decides?

As the Government and the Minister have said, measures will be taken to protect special breeds. We need to know what those measures will be. If we want diversity of breeding, we need to ensure that we do not, in the process of trying to eliminate scrapie, create such uniformity among the sheep flock that we make it less resistant to another unknown disease that would have so much of a common thread that it would run through our genetic stock.

We have an obligation to maintain diversity as well as having an attachment to some unusual breeds. That is true in some of the wilder and more remote parts of Scotland and elsewhere. We need to know that we are not going down a path that is incompatible with maintaining diversity. Perhaps the Minister will indicate how that can be achieved when he replies. He will find that many people want answers.

If this measure had merely been the scrapie Bill, I suspect that it would have received a Second Reading without a Division. Given the other provisions that it contains, there certainly will be a Division. We shall vote against the Bill.

5.17 pm

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Like many right hon. and hon. Members, I was rather surprised when the Bill was placed before the House, and I am surprised by some of the reasons that lead us to be debating it this evening. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs spoke to the Environment Committee last week and mentioned that there was a slot in the legislative programme that enabled

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the Government to deal with the scrapie problem. Perhaps it is not surprising that officials in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had been busy examining ways in which foot and mouth disease had not been handled as well as it could have been and had found that there were measures that could be introduced and tagged on to the Bill.

By rushing through the proposed legislation without much consultation, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and his colleagues risk fanning the flames of opposition within the rural community. I represent a semi-rural constituency that has not been affected by foot and mouth. I recognise that within it farmers are not natural supporters of either the Labour party or a Labour Government. They are happy and prepared to use anything that is done by the Labour Government within the agricultural community as a reason to object to and vilify that Government. Therefore, my hon. Friend's Department must be careful about the handling of any legislation that relates to the agricultural community.

Over the past eight or nine months while foot and mouth disease has been rampaging across England, I have noticed that there has been no consensus on how the disease should be handled. There was criticism that the Government were being too draconian. At another stage, there was criticism that they were not moving fast enough and were not culling enough animals. There were arguments in favour of vaccination, but there was strong opposition when the issue appeared on the agenda of the NFU. It was said that vaccination would be a complete disaster.

As the disease has moved round the country and as it has been handled and seen to flare up again, I have learned from the debates and swings of opinion over the past eight months that there is no consensus among scientists or farmers on how best to deal with it. That makes it difficult for Ministers and DEFRA officials in any Administration to carry out policies that will take the farming community with them. In a way, that is part of the problem. There were strong arguments in the spring for a limited use of vaccination, but I well remember ministers' advisers telling the Select Committee that they would not advise Ministers to use vaccination, even if there were good scientific reasons for doing so, without the support of the farming community.

The same goes for the culling policy—contiguous culling and firebreaks. Measures on vaccination and culling in the Bill could be used only when there was a majority view in the farming community in favour of vaccination or contiguous culling. They could be used only against the odd individual in a particular locality who sought to resist the consensus on the right approach to deal with foot and mouth. The extravagant opposition of some newspaper articles and correspondence, which, I am sure, right hon. and hon. Members have received, comes partly from the assumption that Governments would use vaccination or a firebreak policy when there is overwhelming opposition from the farming community. Ministers need to be clear that those powers should be used only when there is a majority in favour of using them and a handful of farmers who do not go along with the consensus.

On the specifics of the Bill, I am concerned about the issue of appeals. I accept that farmers can go to the divisional veterinary manager and appeal against vaccination or a policy of culling. The second stage is an appeal before a magistrate. I understand that that appeal simply involves a DEFRA official going to see a magistrate and saying that the Department wants to carry out a cull or have access to the farm to vaccinate. At that stage, there is no opportunity for farmers to put the contrary case to the magistrate. They can only take action by going for judicial review, most likely after the action has been taken.

There may be good reasons for taking action quickly, but I am not convinced that we cannot devise a system whereby the magistrate is accessible to both farmers and DEFRA officials. We must be careful to carry the farming community with us as much as possible when such measures are used. We are setting up a situation in which a farmer's animals can be culled and then, at a later stage, judicial review can show that he was right all along, and compensation is paid because the Government got it wrong. In doing so, we risk making the Department even more unpopular with farmers and discrediting the policy that we seek and on which there is a general consensus. When the provision dealing with that is debated in Committee, I hope that Ministers will have much more information about how it will work. They need to work hard with the farming community, the National Farmers Union and other organisations to persuade them of the merits of their policies. It would be a disaster if, in two or three months, the Bill is enacted in the face of fierce opposition from the farming community. That is not in the interests of the Government or of defeating foot and mouth disease in the future.

Mr. Morley: Almost all the main farming organisations and some of the special organisations have welcomed the principles behind the measure. They have concerns about some of details, but there is not widespread opposition to the idea of the Bill. Many organisations, understandably, want clarification about how it will work and about some of the procedures.

Mr. Borrow: I accept that. The majority of organisations dealing with farmers can go along with much that is in the Bill. They are worried about how the provisions are to be carried out in practice. The fact that the Bill has been rushed into the Chamber without a long period of consultation has given rise to concerns and suspicion that might not have arisen, had there been a longer period for such consultation. It is important that in the weeks ahead, everything possible be done to ensure that the farming community is on board on the Bill.

The other aspects that are likely to be controversial can be seen as tidying-up measures. In the Animal Health Act 1981 there is no provision making it an offence deliberately to infect an animal with foot and mouth disease. One may consider that a daft thing to do, but as the Bill provides an opportunity to rectify that omission, it seems sensible to do so and make that act an offence. That is not the same as saying that there are thousands of farmers out there deliberately infecting their animals in order to claim compensation.

I shall deal briefly with biosecurity and the withholding of the final 25 per cent. of compensation for infected animals. That is a useful measure. I take on board the

point made earlier by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the way in which the appeals will be dealt with is still the subject of consultation. That is important, because we need the support of the farming community for the measures in the Bill—useful measures which we hope will not be needed, but we must carry the farming community with us.

Finally, I shall comment on the remarks of the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth). As I understand it, the Opposition would hold a public inquiry and only after that would they decide whether any tidying-up measures were necessary to improve the legislation in respect of foot and mouth. I do not find that a sensible position for the Opposition to hold. It may be sensible to argue that there should be a public inquiry, except that that would take a long time.

In the light of their experience of fighting the outbreak, it is sensible for officials at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to advise Ministers and tell them that if particular powers had been available, or if certain measures had been introduced, the Department would have been more effective in dealing with foot and mouth. Those officials should press Ministers for legislation to be introduced if the opportunity arises. I think that there is a lot of work to be done on the Bill in Committee and I shall support its Second Reading. My final word is on the view that I have expressed throughout my speech: we must do all that we can to ensure that the farming community supports the legislation and that proper explanations are given, point by point, of the way in which it will operate in practice.

5.30 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): It is a privilege, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to catch your eye from the Back Benches for the first time in nine years or so—something that I hope to do on rural matters on many occasions in the years ahead. As you can imagine, the Bill is of pressing importance to my constituents in Richmond, Yorkshire, in the Yorkshire dales. Ours has been one of the hardest hit areas in the whole foot and mouth crisis, which is one of the worst events with which I have had to deal in almost 13 years as a Member of Parliament. We have had 39 cases of foot and mouth disease, deep human and animal hardship, and huge losses in the local tourism industry.

Other hon. Members who represent similarly affected constituencies will agree that it is hard to imagine from central London the effect on the feelings, way of life and economy of the parts of our country that have been hit so hard by this disease. The farmers who have suffered it on their farms are among the most robust and stoical people one could ever come across, anywhere in the world. However, their stoicism has been tested to the limit this year by desperate animal welfare problems and severe economic consequences, as well as by the fact that those difficulties have been accompanied and exacerbated by some of the worst instances of bureaucratic bungling, mismanagement and, sometimes, indifference that I have ever come across.

We cannot consider the Bill in isolation from that record. Indeed, the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) made the same point from the Labour Benches. We cannot consider granting to a Department new and rather sweeping powers without looking at how it exercised its powers over the past year. The matter cannot be considered in isolation. The Secretary of State used as one of the justifications for urgent legislation—indeed, this was the only justification that she gave—the argument that there had been protracted legal cases involving farmers who objected to culling. She gave the example of Thirsk, which is situated in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh). However, one of the reasons why those legal cases and disputes arose was that farmers no longer had confidence in the exercise of the Ministry's powers, because of the way in which the outbreak had been handled until that time.

So I fear that the Government are introducing legislation to deal urgently with a symptom of the problem, rather than with its actual cause. We in this House are law makers. That is our principal job. In the end, we are judged collectively by the laws that we make and by whether they are good. It is our collective experience in all parties that, if measures are rushed in their conception, introduced without reasonable consultation, unlikely to command wide support—a point mentioned by the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow)—or presented via weak arguments from the Front Bench, they are unlikely to be good law. Sadly, all those factors are present in the Bill. There is no clear reason why these measures alone, rather than others, should be introduced today, except a degree of frustration in the Department with some people who have argued back, a desire to ensure that the Government can always get their way, and, from a financial point of view, a little bit of meanness thrown in.

The Government would be in a far stronger position to introduce these or any other measures if they had announced, at this stage or previously, the establishment of a true, public, open and detailed inquiry into the origins and development of foot and mouth disease, and if they had said that any emergency legislation that was necessary now, in the interim, would be subject to review after consideration of the results of such an inquiry. They would be in a far stronger position if they had a comprehensive plan about how they would tackle foot and mouth disease if it were to arise again in the next few months. However, they have presented nothing of that sort to the House. There is simply this measure on its own. No comprehensive plan has been put forward to the House, nor even a list of measures that must be urgently effected to tackle the disease more competently than before. We have not heard about a wider contingency plan. In fact, we have not heard much about the previous contingency plan. I know that the Government claim to have had a contingency plan when they were asked about the purchase of railway sleepers, but they seem reluctant to give it to anybody.

I have seen a written answer from the Under-Secretary, which said that the contingency plan had been placed in the Library and that it is published on the Department's website. However, as far as I can tell, it is not on the Department's website today and the Library has no knowledge of it. I hope that the Under-Secretary will undertake to publish—or republish if he has already published it—the contingency plan that was followed by Ministers when this year's foot and mouth outbreak began.

Mr. Morley *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hague: No argument, such as that the Government are having an inquiry and that that is part of a bigger plan

[Mr. Hague]

and urgent list of measures, is available to Ministers during the debate because they are not doing such things. They refused to hold a true, public and independent inquiry despite the comments made by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) when he announced the inquiry on BSE. He said that BSE

"has also threatened the livelihood of thousands of people throughout the farming and food industries; it has cost the taxpayer huge sums; and it has caused considerable difficulties in our international relations. It has been . . . a disaster. We have a responsibility to . . . look at how circumstances developed in this disastrous manner."—[*Official Report*, 22 December 1997; Vol. 303, c. 678.]

Do such factors not apply to this case? Has it threatened the livelihood of thousands of people throughout the farming and food industry? Yes, it has. Has it cost the taxpayer huge sums? Yes, it has. Has it caused difficulties in our international relations? Yes, it has been a disaster. Do we not have the same responsibility as we had for BSE to examine the development of such disastrous circumstances through an equivalent inquiry?

Mr. Martlew: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman and I am glad to see him speaking from the Back Benches. I remind him that when my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made the announcement, the Opposition said that an inquiry on BSE was not necessary and, when they were in government, they refused to hold such an inquiry. It was two years later when the Labour party, which was then in government, apologised for the fact that an inquiry on BSE had not been held.

Mr. Hague: I recall the Opposition's policy because I was Leader of the Opposition at the time. We did not oppose the establishment of the inquiry, and all of us who were even slightly connected with the matter when we were Ministers co-operated fully with it. There is no reason why Ministers today should not co-operate with a similar inquiry into the origins of the foot and mouth outbreak. What misdemeanour was so serious that it cannot be openly aired in such an inquiry? What evidence is so dangerous that it cannot be brought out in public? What gaps in the Government's handling were so wide that they cannot be publicly aired? By what standards can we have an inquiry into BSE and not foot and mouth, except by the standards of hypocrisy that the Government have set on other occasions?

An inquiry is not being held because the attitude of the central personnel in the Government—not necessarily the Ministers specifically involved with the matter—is that disaster in the countryside is an inconvenient news story, rather than a major policy matter that should be resolved. That is why they slapped down the Minister for the Environment when he said that there would unquestionably be a public inquiry, because we would want to know how the disease took such hold. We have not heard from the right hon. Gentleman on that subject—I am not sure whether we have heard from him about any subject since he was slapped down by Downing street for making the statement.

I have three major objections to the Bill. First, it is not based on a sound, independent, considered and comprehensive analysis of what happened and it is not accompanied by such an undertaking with the Bill as an interim measure. Secondly, the Bill places an onus on farmers that the Government are not prepared to carry. The public inquiry in Devon, which is the most authoritative assessment so far, said that the Government's handling of the crisis was lamentable. Its first recommendation was:

"We therefore find that methods of import control must be tightened to the highest international standards and if necessary be the subject of new legislation."

The authors of that report raised an important point, which is my third objection to the Bill.

It is now clear that we need urgently to take tougher action on bringing food into the United Kingdom—or the European Union, if that is the level at which such decisions should be made. It is incredible that passengers on an aeroplane can still bring meat into the country, provided that they claim that it is for personal use. Large quantities of meat are being brought in, in this way, and sold on to markets.

Recent examples—I know that these are the most lurid—have included: a cargo declared as vegetables that included 15 dead monkeys and an anteater; another that contained a whole freshly slaughtered deer; maggot-infested fish; and live crabs in a suitcase. In March, baggage handlers at Heathrow refused to handle a suitcase that was leaking blood and covered in maggots. The Government have to deal with those problems quickly, to prevent not only foot and mouth but many other diseases, such as brown rot in potatoes, or classical swine fever, which came to this country last year.

If the Government expect farmers to improve their biosecurity, it is time the Government improved the biosecurity of the entire nation. They are proposing to pay 75 per cent. compensation initially, then 100 per cent. if DEFRA officials—applying some as yet unspecified criteria—are satisfied that biosecurity has been maintained on a farm. In any fair system, it would be the other way round. There should be a presumption that 100 per cent. compensation should be paid, unless it could be shown that biosecurity had been insufficiently maintained, in which case 75 per cent. would be paid. Would Ministers apply their criteria to themselves? Would they agree to receive 75 per cent. of their salary initially, and get the balance only if the biosecurity policies of the nation were judged by a third party to be secure? I cannot see the Minister being gripped by enthusiasm for such a proposition.

Mr. Todd: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that my plea on this subject was based on rather stronger ground than his, bearing it in mind that exactly the measures that he now criticises—and that I criticised in my speech—applied during the 18 years of Conservative government?

Mr. Hague: This problem has existed for a long time. I stand on exactly the same ground as the hon. Gentleman on this subject. He tactfully explained in his speech that he supported the Bill, then went on to give seven or eight reasons why he had grave reservations about it. I am standing on exactly the same ground, except that I am freer, on this side of the House, to vote against it, which I suspect from the hon. Gentleman's speech is what he would dearly love to do.

Ministers would not be gripped by enthusiasm for applying those same compensation criteria to themselves. They would not be keen on the idea because they would

know that their salaries would be unlikely ever to be paid in full. The biosecurity of this country has not been secured, and is not being secured. No Bill is adequate unless it tackles this indefensible situation.

Mr. Morley: I do not dispute for a moment that biosecurity in relation to imports of animal products is a serious issue. In fact, I wrote to the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), about the measures that the Government are taking. In many aspects, we do not need primary legislation to tighten up those procedures. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if disease gets into this country illegally—we can never guarantee 100 per cent. that that will not happen—we must take measures to prevent it spreading? That is the problem that the Bill addresses.

Mr. Hague: Of course I agree with the Minister's argument that, if disease enters the country, we must be equipped to prevent it spreading. That brings me to my third objection to the Bill, which is that it seeks to extend ministerial power in ways that are both sweeping and vague—a terrible combination. It seeks to extend the centralisation of ministerial power. I put it to the Minister that, in this year's outbreak, centralised Government decision making was often part of the problem, and that many people will, therefore, be sceptical that the extension of that decision making could be part of the solution.

I know that the Government like to conjure up the idea that Ministers knew what to do all along, but that recalcitrant farmers sometimes stood in their way. The experience in my constituency was often the exact reverse. In many cases, farmers desperate to slaughter their own and surrounding stock were waiting for a decision from London, with local vets entirely on their side also trying to get a decision.

I remember one instance in April, when I telephoned the office of one of the Ministers in what was then the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on a Friday afternoon on behalf of a farmer, begging the Department to make a decision on farmers who were wanting to carry out a cull in an area of Wensleydale. No decision was made for days. We could not get a decision from London over the weekend. Foot and mouth disease did not take the weekend off; it continued its march, whatever day of the week it was.

I know that there are many hard-working people in what was MAFF and is now DEFRA. The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) asked about the staff and the civil servants earlier, and they are hard-working people. I am not someone who takes potshots at civil servants; indeed, I was so fond of them when I was a Minister that I married one. However, it must be said that the administration of the affairs of MAFF during the foot and mouth outbreak left a great deal to be desired. In the words of the hon. Member for South Derbyshire, it was not something of which we could be proud. It often took five days to get a decision; that has been recited in some of the evidence to the Royal Society inquiry, and may have contributed to the spread of the disease.

Now Ministers are saying that they need these new powers because time is of the essence. Actually, we needed more rapid decision making at the time of the outbreaks; we needed more decentralised decision making, with local vets playing a bigger and more authoritative role, rather than more power given to the centre. The decision making of Departments during the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in my constituency was often slow and often led to massive confusion. Putting that right would make a bigger contribution to preventing the spread of disease than the Government's proposals in the Bill. Such proposals could at the very least be accompanied by those changes and reforms.

In my constituency, lorry loads of dead animals were transported 40 miles through uninfected areas. Then, a reversal of policy from London meant that they had to be taken 40 miles back and, in one case, they were delivered right back to the farm on which they had been killed. If we had such instances, it is no surprise that the Government ended up in battles with farmers later on in the outbreak about whether their livestock should be culled.

Today, administration of the Leeds office of DEFRA is hardly an advertisement for smooth competence. Again, I have no doubt that it is full of hard-working people, but there is a big problem in terms of its recent work and the granting of movement licences. Licences have been delayed for weeks; they are often lost, or duplicated; they have been sent out after movements have taken place on the authorisation of a previous licence; frequently, they are full of errors; and sometimes the licences are sent to the wrong place.

If it were necessary today, with a fresh outbreak, for the Minister to trace animal movements in Yorkshire from the records of the Leeds office of DEFRA, he would find that any knowledge of what had gone where was surrounded by complete chaos. When we are told that the same Government Department is going to decide on the level of compensation by criteria that are not set out and on what animals will be slaughtered without any criteria being set out in the Bill, people are deeply sceptical and they are right to be so. Is it any wonder that the agricultural community is hostile to greater powers going to a Government Department that, in their daily experience, is so deeply disappointing?

For farmers in the dales, there is a further problem, which adds to their scepticism about the Bill. The 21-day standstill period on animal movements, proposed by the Government, may mean that farmers who buy animals cannot then sell livestock for 21 days. If so, the consequences for the hill livestock industry in the dales are serious, since a huge amount of trade must be carried out within a short few weeks in the autumn. I acknowledge that more work may be necessary on that and that we may require better tracing mechanisms to go alongside any relaxation of the rules that the Government allow. Such a mechanism should be introduced urgently for the benefit of the economy of livestock farming in our country, particularly in North Yorkshire. That is the type of thing the Government should be doing.

The Bill is not the correct response to the disaster in the countryside. Good legislation would be based on the results of, or accompanied by the setting up of, a clear, open and comprehensive public inquiry. It would be founded on widespread consultation, part of an overall strategy to improve the nation's defences against animal disease, and on an understanding of how Government

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bureaucracy has performed in the 2001 crisis. The Bill is none of those things and this House should decline to give it a Second Reading.

5.50 pm

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): It is worth acknowledging that the Bill has been introduced in the context of the Government's growing recognition of the importance to national life of the countryside, farming and food. That is an important backdrop to today's debate. However, it is also a specific response to the current foot and mouth outbreak, although not exclusively so.

Given the devastation caused by the outbreak, the fact that there remains a real risk of further cases at the tail end of the epidemic, and its heavy financial and psychological costs, it is deeply disappointing that many commentators—including some Opposition Members—have put so much of their energy into deliberately stirring up exaggerations about the Bill's intentions. There are certainly serious matters to be addressed, but energy must be put into serious constructive scrutiny to serve the interests of farmers, which will not be assisted or advanced by some of the things that we have heard.

The hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) missed an opportunity to set a constructive tone. That was quickly put right by the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who might be looking for his job. One never knows—time is a great healer.

Matters have been raised here and outside that must be carefully addressed. Unfortunately, the lack of pre-legislative scrutiny has not yet allowed that to take place. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister—both today, and more particularly in Committee—will take on board all measured and constructive suggestions for amendment.

I am prepared to accept the Minister's explanation that the Bill is urgently required and that it would have been helpful had some of its measures been in place in the past, because of the experience of the 1967 outbreak. About three months after everyone believed that that outbreak was over, there were several further outbreaks and they lasted many more months. I am prepared to accept that these are urgent matters, although some of them are controversial and need careful scrutiny.

I am also prepared to give a fair wind to Ministers' contention that nothing in the Bill will override any conclusions and recommendations in the "lessons learned" report or yet to be made by future inquiries into legislative and scientific aspects of the foot and mouth outbreak. If any conclusions arising from those inquiries suggest a need for amendment of this or other legislation, or for other measures not requiring legislation, it is vital for the Government to be open to them. I am pleased that the Minister and the Secretary of State have given assurances that that is the case, but I would like it to be confirmed again today.

There are concerns that must be taken seriously about the contiguous cull, compensation, vaccination, appeals and the justification for the enhanced powers of enforcement in the Bill. They are indeed controversial matters. The Bill does not promote a particular method of disease control, but the answer to the question, often posed in the media, as to whether the Bill facilitates the contiguous cull policy, is yes. It removes barriers to the process and puts it on a statutory basis.

Much commentary on the Bill has focused on, and attacked, the proposed new powers. That is sometimes done on the basis that the majority of animals killed under the contiguous cull were not diseased. However, it is entirely consistent with such a method of disease control that that be so. It is logical that such a policy could not succeed if only infected animals were culled. By the time animals are infected and the infection is confirmed, there is a high chance that the disease will already have moved elsewhere and be incubating in other animals in the neighbourhood or even beyond, if biosecurity has not been effective and movement bans have not been introduced or respected.

A contiguous cull is undoubtedly rough justice, but the evidence of last spring and summer's experience shows that it has merit. I hope, however, that vaccination and other measures, such as more effective biosecurity or different management, might lead to changes, reducing the need to rely on it.

There is strong evidence that, if the disease is to be contained, action must be swift. Time is of the essence. If the contiguous cull policy is to be followed, it must prevail. That is the hard logic of the matter. Anything that obstructs or delays its implementation must be examined carefully.

Mrs. Browning: My constituency had some of the earlier foot and mouth outbreaks. There were delays to the contiguous cull there not because the farmers protested or appealed but because the Ministry delayed for 19 days before turning up to carry it out. That totally defeats the purpose of a contiguous cull.

Mr. Hall: I am happy to accept the hon. Lady's point, and I hope that the "lessons learned" and other inquiries will take it on board. We all want to learn from what has gone on, and ensure that lessons are learned and mistakes are not made should we need to apply the policies again.

The present system allows a farmer who has been informed of a decision to cull his or her livestock to appeal to the district veterinary manager—I believe by letter. The vet may accept the appeal. Although the majority of stock saved by that process remained healthy, a minority went on to become infected. That included a case that went to the High Court, in which the farmer's appeal was upheld. So there are clearly risks in the process, and we must make a judgment about what level of risk is acceptable, given that we cannot eliminate risks 100 per cent in human affairs. It is part of our job in the House to weigh up the balance of the arguments.

In the majority of cases, the appeal to the district veterinary manager was turned down. Many farmers—possibly most—accepted the outcome and reluctantly agreed to an immediate cull of their livestock, but others refused access to departmental vets and officials, who then had to apply to the High Court for an injunction to access those premises to carry out the cull. That was the principal cause of delay in implementing the cull once the system was working more effectively and the administrative problems of the policy had been solved. That delay led to more infection and, therefore, the need to cull more animals. It is that delay that the Bill seeks to eliminate.

The first appeal to the district veterinary manager will remain intact under the Bill. It has not been abolished. However, if such an appeal is not upheld, DEFRA

officials, instead of having to go to the High Court, with the delays inherent in that process, will be able to seek a warrant from a local justice of the peace. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) pointed out, in those circumstances, the JP will hear the case for the warrant from the DEFRA officials who apply for it. However, the farmer will not be permitted to be heard, and that does not seem fair. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider that point carefully. I do not expect him to be able to pronounce on it this evening, but I hope that he will consider it further in Committee.

Even if the contiguous cull is necessary and even if it is, at best, rough justice, the denial of the right to be heard reduces the element of justice being seen to be done. We must question that. There is nothing wrong with a farmer exercising the right of appeal and seeking to save his or her livestock and livelihood. Indeed, on occasion, such appeals succeed, depending on an assessment of the local veterinary situation, so the system has some flexibility. The enjoyment of a right to appeal should be set in a system that is seen to be fair. The whole process that is triggered by the appeal, including the seeking of the warrant, should be fair and open, and seen to be so.

Some of those who advise the Government as experts on such matters believe that the right of appeal represents too much of a risk, because it introduces delay and because decisions to allow appeals might turn out to be wrong. We know that some premises have become infected in just that situation. I put that point to Professor David King, the Government's chief scientific adviser, and his colleague Professor Mark Woolhouse of the University of Edinburgh, and they confirmed that, from a purely scientific point of view, anything that delays the culling of potentially infected animals is a real risk. Given the awful consequences of living with a higher rather than a lower level of risk, we must ask whether we are justified in retaining the right of appeal. I think that we are, but we must be clear that we retain it on social, legal and political grounds—because it is the right thing to do in a free society—but we do not do it on the best available scientific advice. We must acknowledge that. The right of appeal is not threatened by the Bill, but I imagine that the logic of some of the advice that Ministers have received is that it could and should be abolished. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to be clear about why he has not accepted that advice or perhaps the strong inference of the advice.

Difficult, controversial and hard as these issues are, there is no easy option. Tough powers are needed to prevent the spread of disease, to get ahead of it and stop matters getting worse, and among all the many groups in society, farmers are those who best understand that. However, it is important that the procedures be effective, open and fair so that they are supported and understood and so that we can all accept that we are trying to make something work in the national interest.

6.6 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Earlier this year, when I needed to get over to Bentham and Ingleton for my surgeries, the quickest route was to drive up Wensleydale in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). Normally, it is a wonderful drive against the sun and along the river, with the dales on each side. However, then FMD arrived in his constituency and the journey became rather sinister. I could see the pyres alight, with their smoke, and smell them from a long way away. The fields were empty of animals. Above all, there was a terrible sense of claustrophobia.

I wondered how FMD could be in Cumbria and Wensleydale, north and south of my constituency, but not in mine. I spoke too soon, because two days after the Prime Minister announced the general election, we had our first case in Ribblesdale and, by the time that we had finished, we had had more than twice as many as there were in my right hon. Friend's constituency. Indeed, one of the few remaining totally restricted areas is in the Skipton area in my constituency.

I saw at first hand the coruscating effect on people of all sorts and businesses of all descriptions of the countryside being literally shut down. I reflected on what the lessons might be as we tried to learn them. The first lesson is still true today. Ministers frequently announced schemes—to get animals to slaughter, to get animals to market, to get animals into processing plants, or to provide welfare for animals—and a week later, I would inquire of the people who had to implement them, often trading standards officers, what had happened. They would say that they did not have the operating instructions yet, so they could not do anything. The gap between instruction and implementation throughout the epidemic has been far too long.

An enormous amount depends on the most recent autumn movement programme, because people in my constituency who are caught with too much livestock up on the hills that they cannot sell are sucking the pebbles dry. However, the DEFRA computer failed. It has continually failed, which has meant that wrong orders have been given, people were cleared who should not have been and farmers were caught in an immensely frustrating, Kafkaesque situation of knowing that they could achieve something if only the machine would provide the right answer. That is still a problem. I recognise that the public sector has a catastrophic record of trying to make information technology work and that enormous strains are placed on it, but a lot of problems still need ironing out.

The second lesson is the fact that there was no central personnel function; I do not think that MAFF ever applied one. A very limited number of the departments in the Ministry supplied almost all the people to handle the epidemic; some departments escaped with almost none of their people being taken. To what extent was somebody at the centre considering whom to send, where to send them and how to bring the teams together? It took a tremendously long time to put co-ordinated management teams in place.

Foot and mouth came to my constituency a long time after it came to Cumbria, Devon and Wensleydale. It was not at the beginning of the experience but towards its end, yet the vets seemed to be in an autonomous organisation, managing themselves—not very well, because that is not what they are there to do. It took a long time to bring the components together and introduce some sort of integrated management programme.

Because of all that, and because the election was taking people's attention away, the idea grew up in my constituency that the Government did not want people to know about our epidemic. It took place out of the

[Mr. David Curry]

public eye, without attention—because after all, it had already been announced that the epidemic was under control. Indeed, that announcement was made before the outbreak in Skipton and Ripon even started.

Even before one professor mentioned the fact to the Select Committee, I thought that the biggest problem was that MAFF was terribly out of touch with the industry that it was in charge of. In my constituency, as well as in that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks, and in Cumbria, it seemed to have an image of agriculture derived from watching "All Creatures Great and Small". Wonderful and entertaining though that programme was, it was only a partial mirror of agriculture in my constituency. The number of people who commute between different holdings seemed to catch the Ministry entirely by surprise. The industry had moved away from the Ministry's perception of it.

"Agentisation"—if that is the right word to describe the acquiring of agency status by the various MAFF organisations—certainly played a part in that. We must now ensure that we have the necessary information about what is happening and where, which is crucial for the future handling of outbreaks.

What I have said so far is just a preliminary, because now I shall turn directly to the Bill. It is not about the prescription of a certain method of fighting foot and mouth disease. It is, we hope, clearing the way to fight that disease more effectively, either by slaughter or by vaccination—although there are questions to be asked about the compensation that would be paid in the event of slaughter as part of a ring vaccination scheme. That subject was skated over cautiously, which makes me think that the Treasury did not want to be too precise about what might ultimately be paid. The Minister will, of course, have said from the beginning that getting farmer consent is crucial to combating the disease, and that is linked to a perception that the payments are reasonable.

In pursuit of the goal of rapid slaughter—if and where that becomes the policy—there is great curtailment of the right to resist. In practice, the right to resist, protest and appeal becomes all but extinct under the Bill.

The key emotional issue has been the contiguous cull. The Select Committee took evidence from Professor David King, Professor Mark Woolhouse and Professor Ray Anderson, and I thought that they made a convincing case that the contiguous cull was a crucial weapon in getting ahead of the epidemic, which had got ahead of the Government and roared out of control. One reason why it was out of control—and here I have some sympathy for the Government—is the fact that they did not take action immediately the first outbreak was detected, during those crucial three days between 20 and 23 February. We have been told that had action been taken immediately, the epidemic might have been cut to between a half and a third of its eventual size.

I can understand that if Ministers see one outbreak, there is some hesitation about the extent to which draconian action must be taken. That is why it would be good to see the papers that were submitted to Ministers at that time—and we would also like to see the papers that scientists wrote for Ministers, and for the Prime Minister, when vaccination was actively being considered. I hope that they will be made available to the inquiry, and that the inquiry will publish them. I have heard reports that the "lessons learned" inquiry may take evidence in private; I hope that it will not, because that would be a serious error, not only from the Government's point of view—that does not concern me much—but from that of the farmers and the rest of the community, which concerns me greatly.

There was a catastrophic failure to get to grips with the illness in Cumbria. It simply got out of control and the local people could not cope with it. That happened in Devon as well, and it meant that the contiguous cull became, perforce, the instrument by which we tried to catch up.

Of course some farmers were irresponsible—just as a percentage of any group of people, such as politicians, estate agents or anyone else, will be irresponsible. We have all heard of the famous farmer in Thirsk with seven holdings who commuted freely between them without any effort at biosecurity. However, I do not think that that was the predominant mood among farmers, by any means.

Most farmers were petrified of the disease, although that was against their own economic interests. In my constituency—and, I am sure, in that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks—for the many farmers who are still stuck up on the hills trying to keep on practising agriculture, the irony is that the disaster that overtook them was the fact that their animals did not get foot and mouth disease. Their economic interests would have been better served if their animals had contracted it. Now they are desperately struggling to maintain some form of normal agriculture, which is a testimony to the sheer guts and determination of farmers. What they can do is survive, as they have done for generations, but there is no logical or practical reason why they should carry on. They just hang on in there, because that has been bred into them through generations of farming stock.

If slaughter is the policy, the logic of the Bill is implacable, because 50 per cent. of outbreaks occurred within one and a half miles of the local source outbreak, and it is crucial to be able to kill animals before the incubation period—three to five days—is up, and the disease can be transmitted. However brutal it sounds, killing the animals quickly is at the heart of the argument once we embark on a slaughter policy.

It is therefore inevitable that many uninfected animals will be killed. There is no guarantee, however, that those animals would have remained uninfected, and the few that might have been infected would have set up other centres for the spread of the disease. We were told that there was a 17 per cent. chance of the disease moving from infected premises to surrounding premises; if slaughter is the policy that we are to embark on, then if it were done, it were well it were done quickly.

The Bill clears the way to do that, but at an enormous cost. It is draconian. If the farmer cannot come to an agreement with the Government's regional vets, in practice he has no further recourse. The Government appeal to the magistrate, and the magistrate issues a warrant. The farmer has no right to appear and state his case before the magistrate, and although there may not be a man waiting outside on a motor cycle, someone will be on the telephone as soon as the magistrate issues a warrant, and the slaughter will take place.

As the Minister told us, the farmer can go to judicial review, but that is about process and legal competence; it is not about the substance of the issue. The farmer may

get some retrospective intellectual satisfaction, but he ain't going to get his animals back. He will have to start from scratch again.

Mr. Patrick Hall: Is the right hon. Gentleman arguing for the retention of the current system, whereby DEFRA officials would have to apply to the High Court for an injunction, with all the inherent delays?

Mr. Curry: No, I am not, because one has to follow the logic. If a slaughter policy is to be implemented, it has to be effective. But I want reassurances. Because farmers had the right that the hon. Gentleman explained to the House in his speech, it was imperative for the Government to get them on side and ensure that the maximum number were willing to co-operate. One of the instruments for doing that was a compensation scheme for compulsory slaughter—a scheme that everybody agrees was relatively generous.

If the Government do not need to do that because they can get the farmer on side through compulsion, does that mean that in any future outbreaks, they are likely to take a more stringent view of the appropriate level of compensation? I ask that as a speculation born of an eternity of suspicion of the Treasury, both when I was a Minister and under the present Administration. The Treasury is unchanging; perhaps that is good for society as a whole, but it just does not feel like it at the time.

The Bill also provides a penalty for poor biosecurity by docking up to 25 per cent. of compensation. That provision needs a great deal of examination in Committee. How do we arrive at 87.75 per cent. as opposed to 74.66 per cent.? Is there a scale of biosecurity? Will it be published so that the farmer has a checklist and can ensure that he does not fall foul of it? How will the Minister ensure that biosecurity measures are not installed at the last minute? It is perfectly possible to make things look impressive for an inspection, as the Government, having introduced such a gendarmerie of inspectors, must surely be aware.

Mr. Martlew: Does the right hon. Gentleman think it fair that farmers who did not give a damn during the outbreak, leaving gates open and going from one farm to another—although there were very few of them—should receive the same amount of compensation as those who took the proper precautions and still got foot and mouth? Or should there be some way in which the farmer who took precautions is compensated fully?

Mr. Curry: I am not arguing against the principle of a penalty. I want to ensure that the farmer knows what measures he will be assumed to have taken to comply fully with the regulations, and I want the process by which the figure is finally arrived at to be transparent. He should also have assurances about the means that the independent person he can appeal to uses to undertake the task. As in much legislation, the principle might be difficult to dispute, but how it works in practice is the key for people on the ground. Will it work in a way that is clear and evident to everyone?

Then we come to the Bill's curious nooks and crannies. We have all heard the rumours that have abounded during the course of the epidemic about farmers infecting their own flocks, with infected apples, and tongues, bits of tail and other parts of the carcase being discovered on farms. Nobody, as far as I am aware, has had a charge pressed against him for that reason. However, if a farmer does infect his flock, he will be in a curious position. The Minister said that at present he cannot be prosecuted and gets full compensation. Under the Bill, he will spend two years as a guest of Her Majesty, he is banned from keeping animals for life and he takes, in some cases, up to £400,000—75 per cent. of the compensation—to prison with him.

Mr. Morley: The right hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point. He made it before in the Select Committee, which is one of the advantages of pre-scrutiny. I have discussed this with officials and understand that the advice remains that we have to pay the 75 per cent. compensation because of human rights legislation. The animals are being compulsorily taken and killed. However, if someone deliberately infects their animals, there is the possibility of implementing action for fraud and getting the money back in that way.

Mr. Curry: I am glad that the Minister has discovered a way. When he discovered this curious fact in the Select Committee, he gave the impression that he had trodden in an unpalatable substance and wondered what it was doing in the Bill and why someone had not told him about it. No doubt he had an earnest conversation with his officials immediately afterwards. I am delighted that he has sorted the matter out, even by this curiously circuitous route.

If farmers are to be discouraged from infecting their own animals and if they are to maintain the rigorous attitude that they have maintained until now, it is important that those who are struggling to carry on farming in these most difficult circumstances have all the help that they can get. They want things to be rigorous; they do not want risks taken. They have the right to expect that schemes reflect their circumstances, work and can be accessed easily.

The other big question that inevitably haunts this debate is that of vaccination, because it would have avoided the need for a contiguous cull and the shutdown of the hundreds of thousands of businesses that were part of the epidemic's collateral damage. If there is an effective option for vaccination and effective equipment to test in the field—the two prior conditions—it is a persuasive argument.

We were told categorically that the equipment to test reliably in the field was not ready for use. There have been some arguments that it is, but we were told categorically by our witnesses that that was not the case. We were also told categorically that present tests do not distinguish between an animal that is infected with the disease and one that has been vaccinated and displays the antibodies.

We need vaccines that are available and efficacious. They must be able to deal with all strains of polyvalent viruses and should be long-lasting: what the Government's chief scientist called "smart vaccines", to use the jargon. Even he emphasised the danger of vaccinating an already infected animal in a ring around an infection.

I echo what my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks said with regard to the public inquiry. I do not think that it needs to replace the more rapid inquiries. I do not see why it cannot crown the various,

[Mr. Curry]

more informal, inquiries that are taking place, so that we can learn some early lessons. This is not a zero sum game. We need to learn lessons and make sure that we have access to that crucial advice. There will be a central argument about vaccination and we need the advice of the scientific communities. Ministers are not scientists and neither are we. We are trying to understand and, ultimately, we have to decide who we are going to believe. We need the facts to make that decision.

I do not want the scrapie issue to be entirely lost. I draw the Minister's attention to an article on the back page of *Farmers Guardian*, a journal to which I have warmed considerably since it invited me to write a column. The article refers to Professor Malcolm Ferguson-Smith of Cambridge university, who argues:

"The Government is drafting a Bill to completely remove those sheep that are susceptible to scrapie—that could mean culling three quarters of the national flock as that is the proportion susceptible to it . . . We need to know if those sheep resistant to scrapie are resistant to the development of the disease or resistant to infection, as if it is the latter they could pass the disease on".

The professor also said that it had already been shown

"that sheep resistant to scrapie are susceptible to BSE so the culling policy as a BSE measure did not make any scientific sense at all."

Those are the professor's claims. As I said, I am not a scientist, and do not know whether he is right or wrong. If he is right, some serious questions need to be asked about the course along which the Government are about to embark. I hope that the Minister will deal with that point.

The issue of tests is important. Professor Donaldson has argued that the Government are not carrying out adequate tests for BSE on cattle. Similarly, tests on the continent are not adequate, even though they are dealing with greater cattle numbers, because they are capable of detecting only the last stage of the disease.

Finally, a number of colleagues, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks and the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) mentioned meat imports. A sense of equilibrium and balance needs to be achieved. If we are introducing increasingly draconian measures at home—which, for the most part, farmers agree to and think are necessary—and curtailing the right to appeal so that a policy can be dispatched rapidly, it is incumbent on the Government, out of simple fairness, to ensure that equal rigour should be exercised so that inadvertent or false imports cannot put the health of the country at risk. I know that that may have to go through the European channels. My concern is not that arrangements exist to permit trade—I am in favour of that—but whether the formal arrangements that exist operate in the conditions that are prevalent, and that we are as satisfied that the rule is enforced there as we are that it is enforced here.

Secondly, as the hon. Member for South Derbyshire said, we must deal with the level of illegal imports. We can ask people to make a particular effort only if they believe that other people are making the same effort and that the Government are, in that sense, on their side. A sense of solidarity has held the farming community together, and apart from the sheer problems of administering the regime, the one thing that farmers have constantly mentioned is that if they are to be exposed to meat from abroad, there is no point to their efforts because there is no equivalence of pain.

The Minister and the Government said that they are considering that matter, but what we have been told is very imprecise, and I invite the Minister to clarify the point. It is in his own interests to do so, and he owes it not only to farmers but to the whole rural community to ensure that we are taking every step to prevent another such outbreak, so that the draconian measures in the Bill need never be used.

6.30 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): May I say to the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who made his usual thoughtful speech, that the one time when I did not feel at all sorry for him was when he was describing his trip through Wensleydale to his advice surgery? He should try the trip to my advice surgery, which is a walk down the Romford road from Forest Gate to Stratford during which I am assailed by a number of sights and smells that are nothing like those in his constituency. He is very lucky indeed.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman probably sees more foxes on his walk than I do on mine.

Mr. Banks: Thanks to foot and mouth disease, we are probably seeing a few more than usual.

May I say to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) that it is a pleasure to see him on the Back Benches? I do not mean that in a nasty way. He looks far more relaxed than he did as Leader of the Opposition, and we can see that in the excellent portrait of him by Johnny Yeo, our election artist, which is in Portcullis House. I hope that all hon. Members will have the opportunity to see it. We have got ourselves a pretty good deal because it will not take much amending to portray the new Leader of the Opposition—although of course we would not do that.

I admit that there are not many farmers in Newham, although all the cattle on the Wanstead flats, which were culled because of BSE, used to represent a pleasant connection with the rural aspects of the area, which is on the edge of Epping forest. I had many letters from constituents about the images of foot and mouth disease on the television and in newspapers, which were not good at all.

I have several serious reservations about the Bill, starting with its short title, Animal Health Bill. I resent and dislike the euphemisms used in this place, particularly those concerning animals and MAFF, or DEFRA, as it is now called. The Bill is about the more rapid slaughter of animals, so perhaps it should more appropriately be called the Slaughter of Animals Bill, although given the propensity of DEFRA officials to kill things it might plausibly be entitled the "We have come to slaughter your pet llama" Bill.

I have not plucked that example out of the air—although plucking a llama out of the air would have been a good trick—because it is one of the animals at risk from foot and mouth disease. The reference is in no way connected to the fact that our former colleague, Matthew Parris, has two pet llamas, which are suitably exotic pets for an exotic gentleman. Under the Bill, people should take steps to protect their pet llamas and, given the extensive powers that Ministers will have, a number of other animals that will be at risk in any foot and mouth outbreak.

The welfare aspect of the Bill concerns the livestock industry. I fully appreciate that foot and mouth had a profound impact on livestock farmers, but I understand that 68 farmers received compensation cheques for more than £1 million, and I do not hear many complaints from them. When everyone is jumping up to defend farmers and those who work in the rural economy, it is worth bearing it in mind that the total cost to taxpayers of foot and mouth was more than £2 billion. The Secretary of State and other hon. Members have referred to an irresponsible minority, and surely that irresponsible, and indeed criminal, minority must include the pig farmer in Northumberland who probably kicked off the whole wretched outbreak when he fed his pigs infected swill and transported them all the way to Essex to be slaughtered.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster) *rose—*

Mr. Banks: I give way to the hon. Gentleman because he is obviously going to defend that farmer.

Mr. Wiggin: I am curious about how one could start an epidemic by feeding one's pigs infected swill. Surely the person or persons who provided the farmer with that swill triggered the epidemic.

Mr. Banks: That goes back to the points that were made about biosecurity. The swill was probably infected by imported products, but the fact that the pigs were transported so far down the country shows that the farmer was acting irresponsibly.

There are other examples of irresponsible behaviour, including one from *The Daily Telegraph* in which it was suggested that a farmer was offered a sheep infected with foot and mouth. There is anecdotal evidence involving a number of infected animal parts on farms, but I heard that there was not enough evidence to proceed with a prosecution. I am only going by what I have read and heard, but unless someone is making all that up, there must be farmers who were responsible for the rapid spread of the disease throughout the country, and we ought to be investigating them.

Opposition Members, including the Front-Bench spokesman, seemed to be trying to point the finger at my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her ministerial colleagues, as though they were responsible for the spread of the disease, which is bizarre. Ministers might be criticised for their conduct during the outbreak, and that is a matter for debate, but they cannot possibly be accused of having kicked off the whole damn thing.

I accept that there is no conclusive evidence of how foot and mouth entered the UK, although there seems to be general acceptance that the speed with which the disease spread was due to the fact that animals were transported in and out of markets and other premises several times in quick succession. It seems crazy to have allowed that. There is also the matter of animals being transported long distances to be slaughtered. I mentioned the pigs taken from Northumberland to Essex, and I understand that in September several consignments of sheep were transported by sea from Scottish islands to the west coast port of Oban and then by road to Birmingham to be slaughtered. It cannot be sensible to transport animals such a long distance to slaughter, particularly at times of high risk.

Mr. Drew: Does my hon. Friend accept that the specific, overwhelming evidence of the role of the dealers in that process needs close examination and must be dealt with?

Mr. Banks: I do accept that. I echo the comments made by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber when I say that perhaps we ought to pause and give more extensive consideration to the way in which the disease originated and spread and to how we can deal with it in future. I shall not assault my Front-Bench colleagues—although I am sure that they have the substance to withstand any puny blows from me—but I am singularly uneasy about a number of points in the Bill. Concerns have been expressed by Labour Members as well as Opposition Members.

Obviously, one of the most significant mechanisms by which the disease is spread must be contaminated animal products, and we need to look at how those are brought into the country. I find the stories of people importing infected meat amazing. Indeed, the idea that people are allowed to bring meat into the country is amazing. As a regular traveller to the United States, I know how vigorously one is questioned there about any products that one is taking into the country. We have no such procedures, and given the importance of agriculture in this country, we should have far greater controls and protective mechanisms at the point of entry. I hope that the Government will turn their attention to that.

I shall certainly not accept criticism from the Opposition about the supposed failure of the Government to act, given that for 18 years the Conservatives were in charge of agriculture policy. Apparently, they can see with clinical vision exactly what is wrong now that there is a Labour Government: somehow they could not see it at all when they were in government. The Opposition should be careful before they point the finger and mount opportunistic and unjust criticism of Ministers.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: One of the reasons why we are calling for a full, independent public inquiry is precisely because we want to know what went wrong.

Mr. Banks *rose—*

Mr. Martlew: What about BSE?

Mr. Banks: As my hon. Friend says, the Conservatives were not so keen in government to call for an inquiry into BSE. I remember the complacency with which various Conservative Ministers approached the problem of BSE and CJD. I can still remember the questions. One does not have to be an expert to know when something is likely to happen. One can rely on one's sensibilities and instincts. Anyone who was interested in the processes of nature could work out that BSE was going to get into the human food chain, yet Ministers constantly said that it was impossible. They were saying that not because they had scientifically deduced it: they were going on the advice of MAFF officials, and that advice was rubbish. That is what bothers me. That is why I keep telling my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs and my hon. Friend

[Mr. Banks]

the Under-Secretary to beware of those experts who still inhabit the Department. The acronym has changed, but the cast has not changed much—nor has the culture.

When I criticise the Bill, I want my hon. Friend the Minister—who is a good friend—to know that I do so to try to protect him, not to attack him. For years, I watched as MAFF officials sabotaged Conservative Ministers; now that they are called DEFRA officials, they will sabotage Labour Ministers.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Do I smell a whiff of double standards? In opposition, the hon. Gentleman was one of those who called for a full inquiry into the causes and handling of BSE. Incidentally, the Government of the day received advice not only from MAFF officials, but from top scientists, that the disease was a new phenomenon and that sufficient research had not been carried out. If the hon. Gentleman believed that there should have been a full inquiry into BSE, why do he and his party not believe that there should be a full inquiry into the latest foot and mouth outbreak? That seems to me to smack a little of hypocrisy.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Lady makes a nice point but it goes straight over my shoulder because she has not heard the rest of my speech. I actually support an independent inquiry, but I was responding to her Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for East Surrey. He was the one who was exhibiting a touch of hypocrisy; he was speaking for a party that would not hold a full inquiry into BSE, but now demands one into foot and mouth disease.

I supported calls for an inquiry into BSE and I support calls for an inquiry into foot and mouth disease. I want to know how it happened, what went wrong, the criticisms that might be made of officials and what we can do to ensure that it never happens again. The hon. Lady was rather too abrupt; it was too early to accuse me of hypocrisy, but if she stays around she may have ample evidence to make that criticism stick.

I apologise to the House. I cannot resist temptation and when I am dragged into such arguments they take me away from what I was intending to say. I realise that many Members want to speak.

The additional sweeping powers to be given to Ministers are the aspects of the Bill that really concern me. If that involved only my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, I should sleep easy in my bed, but it does not: it will involve all those DEFRA officials and all those so-called experts—the people who got us into all the difficulties in the past and who will undoubtedly get us into difficulties in future. That is why I am uneasy. The Bill goes much too far in giving Ministers additional powers, and I am not happy about that.

Indeed, the idea that Ministers can order slaughter whether or not animals have been exposed to foot and mouth disease is one that I find wholly unacceptable. I hope that my hon. Friend is getting the idea that I am not a happy bunny—*[Laughter.]* If I were, I should probably be slaughtered by some of his officials in the next outbreak.

During the current outbreak, the policy was to cull contiguously for up to 3 m—[HON. MEMBERS: "3 km".] Yes, three metres would have been a bit close. The scientific evidence seems to show that that was unnecessary. I hope that my hon. Friend has read the interesting article that was published in *The Veterinary Record* on 12 May—"Relative risks of the uncontrollable (airborne) spread of FMD by different species".

Mr. Morley: Yes.

Mr. Banks: The resigned way in which my hon. Friend acknowledged that he had read the article suggests that he may not have been wholly convinced by it, but I hope that he will at least answer the points raised in it. That would save me reading them out to the House. As he knows what is in the article, no doubt he will be able to address it.

The scale of the slaughter during the current outbreak was abhorrent. I say "current" because it has not yet officially finished. Although I can understand the logic that if everything is slaughtered we shall eradicate the disease, I cannot go along with the lack of humanity in that approach. As I have said on several occasions, it is just as well that DEFRA is not in charge of the national health service, given its attitude to disease control.

What about isolation, vaccination or surveillance? They are all worth consideration. I hope that an inquiry would examine in detail all those alternatives to mass slaughter so that we can avoid the scenes we witnessed. I cannot accept that contiguous culling was in the interests of animal welfare.

I am trying to find something nice to say to my hon. Friend, but it is a bit difficult at the moment—even though he knows that I am one of his strongest supporters in the House and I pay him due credit for everything that he has done in support of animal welfare. He is being badly advised on the Bill. If Ministers had introduced the Bill during the outbreak, there might have been much greater justification for it and they could have argued far more persuasively for its acceptance by the House. The obvious signs of the crisis were all around. However, it seems strange to bring in the measure at the very fag end of the damn thing. I agree that the outbreak is not officially over, but we appear to have gone way past its strongest point, so to introduce legislation at this stage is not only unnecessary but premature. In those circumstances, it is difficult to understand why we should be asked to support the measure.

We are being asked to support a Bill that gives far greater powers to Ministers before we fully understand the causes of the outbreak. The powers given to DEFRA officials are so extensive that they terrify me. I am terrified on behalf of all the animals that could be slaughtered. I have already mentioned llamas, but elephants, deer, rats and goats can all be affected by foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Morley: And hedgehogs.

Mr. Banks: Indeed. God forbid—if I believed in him—that along should come the DEFRA officials saying, "Minister, it's getting very bad, we shall have to slaughter all those animals." They will go into the zoos, take out the llamas and the elephants and so on. That might sound a bit exaggerated but, given the evidence of the past,

that is the sort of advice that I would expect my hon. Friend's officials to give. It is to protect him against such advice that I tell him that it is a bad Bill.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: No, I am about to finish. This is my peroration; surely the hon. Gentleman recognises that.

I do not intend to support the Bill in the Lobby, nor do I intend to join the Opposition's opportunistic attack. I shall abstain in person, as they say. However, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister recognises that I will do so out of concern for him as well as for animals. I hope to serve on the Committee and perhaps to help him to improve this wretched Bill.

6.50 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The speech of the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) almost reached biblical proportions in terms of its broad-brush description of the animals that might be vulnerable under the powers in the Bill. He joins a growing list of right hon. and hon. Members who have, in their own ways, asked telling and searching questions about it.

The hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) took his usual careful and considered approach and he almost got to the stage of saying that he would not support the Government. He thought better of that, but asked some important questions. The hon. Members for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) and for Bedford (Mr. Hall) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) did exactly the same as the hon. Member for West Ham. They illustrated one of the major problems with the Bill: the speed with which it has been introduced and the lack of any consultation with the people who understand the problem and, more important, may understand something about how one deals with it.

It is interesting that there has been little mention of the Prime Minister so far in the debate. I recall that he took charge of the foot and mouth outbreak and some improvements supposedly resulted. We can understand the good reasons why he has remained quiet at this time, but it would be interesting to learn whether he had anything to do with the Bill. I always think that one judges a Government by the way in which they handle a crisis. This Government have handled this crisis badly.

The chief vet, Mr. Scudamore, gave evidence to the Select Committee and he is reported as saying:

"Government vets were forced to 'learn as we went along', as the number of cases increased rapidly. He added, 'We had a major problem with manpower on the ground and ran out of vets and we didn't have enough technical staff.'"

Such people form the basis of the scientific advice that lies behind the Bill.

As a former Minister in MAFF, I recognise that science has an important and powerful role to play in the operation of DEFRA. However, with the Ministers' advisers learning as they went along, there is also a powerful case for listening to other arguments. As the Minister will understand from the evidence that the Select Committee has received, there is still no definitive science on exactly how the disease started. We know how it spread, but we do not know how it started.

We also learned recently that there is no definitive science that explains how the disease moves from farm to farm. We think that we understand some of the ways in which it can do that but, again, there is no definitive answer. One of the arguments that people have used to challenge the powers that will give DEFRA officials the ability to arrange for slaughter on the basis of suggestion came from farmers in Devon who offered powerful arguments about why their farms should be protected.

The Select Committee therefore held an interesting discussion on contiguous culling. If there is contiguous activity between an animal on a diseased farm and one on a farm without the disease, one can imagine how disease might be spread by contact or by its release into the air. However, when the animals involved are on farms two valleys away and round a bend in the river, we do not know exactly how the disease spreads between them. Yet farmers in such circumstances might be the ones to challenge the powers in the Bill. Therefore, despite the strong science base in DEFRA, it is right to ask questions about the nature of the powers in the Bill.

In a letter that the Minister sent to colleagues in the House, he said:

"The Government has had to act swiftly in bringing forward this legislation, in particular in relation to foot and mouth . . . We will nevertheless be working with our stakeholders"—

people with an interest in an issue are now described as "stakeholders"—

"in the months ahead".

Hang on a minute, were we not supposed to be rushing to get the Bill on to the statute book? Yet the Minister said that they would be working with stakeholders

"in the months ahead on how key elements of the proposed measures would work in practice and"—

believe it or not—

"there will be full consultation on that."

The man who wished to act swiftly appears to have slowed things down remarkably.

The hon. Member for West Ham made a telling point when he said that the Bill might have been justified if it had been introduced at the peak of the disease. I am also intrigued about the timing of its introduction, so that is why I asked the Secretary of State about that.

The Minister told the Select Committee that the Bill's drafting began in August, which is an interesting month because many people are on holiday then. I suspect, therefore, that officials were thinking about the Bill and making submissions to Ministers in May or June. The Minister would have replied, "Oh, those powers are a bit steep. How am I going to sell that? What am I going to do?" The Bill was probably thought up some time ago but, if it is central to fighting foot and mouth, he should have introduced it earlier and with a degree of proper consultation.

All the arguments made have questioned the Bill's practical implications. Despite Professor King's argument about there being a 17.5 per cent. chance that a contiguous farm would be infected, we have not been able to debate what that means in practical terms just as we have not been able to debate how a decision on the operation of the powers can be challenged. Although reference has been made to magistrates and to judicial review, I can imagine what might happen in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon.

[Mr. Michael Jack]

Someone is up on the fells with the wind blowing; telephone lines are down; there has been a power cut and the mobile phone has not been charged, so how would he get in touch with his lawyer to mount a judicial review to challenge the operation of the powers? The provision is not practical in the real world.

Although farmers will have an opportunity to talk to the veterinary authorities about the operation of the powers, I would like some form of stay of execution, at least, to be built into the procedures so that a second opinion can be obtained and the farmer can be heard. Even if he does not necessarily have his day in court, an element of informed arbitration would help to decide whether it was right and proper to use the powers.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: My right hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. Is he aware that the Bill substantially reduces the flexibility that Ministers already have and have exercised during the foot and mouth outbreak? For example, culling was due to take place on 34 farms in the Forest of Dean, but it took place on only 18. A successful legal challenge by farmers resulted in the Minister using his discretion to arrange for blood tests to be carried out on the animals on the remaining 16 farms. Those animals were saved from the cull, and it eventually turned out that none of the farms had any infection at all. The discretion that existed will no longer exist and that will result in substantially greater costs to public funds because of the compensation that will have to be paid.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend's powerful point echoes the concerns of the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ). She asked searching questions when the Select Committee twice took evidence on the issue. I recognise the scientific justification for culling and accept the power of the concept that a diseased animal is a disease factory unless action is taken early. However, the circumstances under which the powers are operated have been justifiably questioned in the debate.

Mr. Morley: The right hon. Gentleman raises a number of serious points which I am sure can be addressed when the Bill is further considered. It is certainly true that ministerial discretion was exercised in relation to blood testing on the farms in the Forest of Dean. I was the Minister who took that decision, and I was happy to do so. Nothing in the Bill rules out such discretion. The key is to make clear the criteria that one would want to apply in the appeals process. In the Forest of Dean, more blood testing was possible and some time had passed, so the situation just required some common sense.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the Minister for saying that, but the very fact that he had to give us such a lengthy response illustrates the point that I and so many others have made about lack of consultation on the Bill. If drafting began in August, at least some discussion with interested parties was possible. The Ministry quite often calls in people. Why did not DEFRA call in the interested parties, perhaps for a one-day conference? Perhaps it did; we have not been told.

Mr. Morley: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is no point in the Government consulting on a Bill unless they intend to introduce it. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear, only in the later stages of our consideration was she convinced of the need for the Bill and that parliamentary time was available for it. That window was very narrow, which meant that there was not an opportunity for detailed consultation.

Mr. Jack: I would cast a little doubt on that. I suspect that there was a legislative slot and that somebody had suggested such a Bill. It is very much a tail-end Charlie measure. If it really is that important, it should have been introduced earlier.

In evidence sent to right hon. and hon. Members, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, while welcoming certain aspects of the Bill, seeks clarification. Vegetarians International Voice for Animals—the hon. Member for West Ham will be interested in this—says that it is concerned about the human rights implications of the Bill. The Countryside Alliance wants a public inquiry. The National Farmers Union expresses surprise at the Bill, and the National Beef Association questions the content of it. One could go on; the number of people who want to know more is legion.

Let us consider the operation of the culling powers. Mr. Anthony Gibson, who looks after matters for the NFU in the south-west, has said that the Minister's accusation that farmers spread the disease by resisting the cull is

"simply not true here in Devon. None of the herds or flocks which were saved from the contiguous cull, either by direct or by legal action, subsequently developed FMD."

Mr. Morley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Jack: I can only quote to the Minister what has been sent to us. It is up to him to deal with it.

The Secretary of State told the House what was in the Bill without spending a moment on justifying its powers. She did not go through the science about culling or mention the findings of Professor King and others, but strode straight in to say, "This is what we are going to do; this is how we are going to do it. Take it or leave it." She drifted on to talk about scrapie, but that was it. Yet we are supposed to say that that is justification for such measures.

Let us consider those who have had to go to court to defend their interests. Peter and Gillian Cave, who are farmers in the west country, were successful. They saved 100 pedigree Devon cattle which were earmarked for slaughter. They described the Government's approach as "jackboot tactics". They said of the measures:

"This smacks of Nazi law, malicious and spiteful—you bloody well behave or we'll get you."

They are people under stress. The point about the need to win over the hearts and minds of the rural community on these measures is well made by such powerful statements from farmers who have been affected.

Other evidence that reached the Select Committee came from Lucy Gent, Mark Higham, Darrell Gibbs and Julia Harding. They said of the Bill:

"To make it compulsory is unscientific, immoral, cruel to animals and their owners, and highly counter-productive in terms of disease control by diverting resources away from the crucial task of culling infected animals as quickly as possible."

The Minister knows—because his advisers said so—that the biggest failings in running the disease control system were the lack of planning, lack of a contingency plan,

lack of resources, and the falling behind in the slaughter programme. None the less, we find that the Minister is to rely on such measures in the future.

It is a pity that the Secretary of State did not comment on some of the people who, it is suggested, did cause a problem—so-called hobby farmers. Owing to the nature of their farming, they may have been less justified in making claims than those who are knowledgeable, run large-scale operations and are well advised and informed farmers. We have heard nothing about that from the Government in presenting the Bill. It is sad that there has been no in-depth justification for the measures.

Right hon. and hon. Members have discussed the mechanism of the courts and compensation, but I want to touch on the biosecurity measures. It is interesting to note how biosecurity is a firm feature of the pig industry. It is breached occasionally, but not often. Why has not the Minister decided, for example, to introduce under the cover of this Bill a national code of practice on biosecurity?

Mr. Morley: We can do that.

Mr. Jack: The Minister says that the Department already does it.

Mr. Morley: I said that we can do it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. We cannot have sedentary interventions. If the Minister wants to respond, perhaps he might intervene.

Mr. Jack: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker—so anxious was I to engage the Minister in debate. I am delighted that he says that such a suggestion can be implemented. Why has the Secretary of State not said the Department has learned a lesson and will, from now on, advise farmers on some practical, permanent and implementable biosecurity measures—not just on foot and mouth but for the list of other animal diseases covered by the Bill? That would have been practical, but it has not been done.

The National Pig Association produced a powerful video on meat importation showing the failings of the current system. The former Secretary of State for the Department, the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown), said that all kinds of new controls would be proposed. Where are they? I keep hearing that Ministers are rushing in with this Bill, yet we were told in July that they were working hard on new defence mechanisms to stop infected meat entering the country. Where are those mechanisms? We have had no detail; the Minister says that he will write to us. It is now November, so the Department's priority has been to draft the Bill and not to strengthen the import defences of the UK. As the NPA video showed, our defences were wide open even until recent weeks.

There is some doubt about the measures on scrapie. What struck me in the submission from the National Sheep Association was the sense of disappointment and shock that the voluntary work could not have been allowed to continue. Interestingly, in the note that the NSA sent to Members, it says:

"It might be more profitable if greater effort was put in by Government to help breeders to develop resistant genes by using artificial insemination and embryo transfer in carefully controlled programmes. It is vital that breeds are given adequate time."

Mr. Morley *indicated assent.*

Mr. Jack: It is all very well for the Minister to nod, but the Secretary of State did not review progress on the voluntary scheme. She said virtually nothing about resources for it; she said nothing about the signs of vulnerability of some genotypes to transmissible spongiform encephalopathies; she gave us no comfort by suggesting that the matter had been considered properly; she gave us no details on discussions with the NSA; she answered none of the points raised by the association. For example, the NSA said:

"The Minister cannot at this stage cope with the voluntary work which is available—what therefore is the benefit of compulsion?"

That is central to the power in the Bill, but we heard nothing from the Secretary of State about it.

The Countryside Alliance says in its briefing:

"The Bill could be used as a vehicle to allow for the indiscriminate eradication of large sections of the national flock".

Interestingly, Lord Haskins in his report on Cumbria advocated a reduction in the national flock, so some people might put two and two together. We have heard no answers to such questions. That accounts for the fact that many hon. Members on both sides of the House question the details of and the justification for the Bill. That is why Opposition Members will vote against it, and the Minister now has an awful lot of work to do.

7.10 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I normally like to welcome Government Bills: this time, I acknowledge the Government's need to introduce the Bill. I have heard reservations about the Bill expressed by hon. Members on both sides of House. Like my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), I found the title "Animal Health" slightly confusing. The Bill clearly deals with foot and mouth and other livestock diseases, and it could have been given a more accurate title.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham and other hon. Members have said that they might have accepted the Bill if it had been introduced at the height of the crisis, but if such measures would have been right then, they are right now, and I recognise and acknowledge the need to introduce them.

There was a serious outbreak of foot and mouth disease in my constituency, especially around Cross Ash, Grosmont, Chepstow, Raglan and Usk. There were about 20 cases when the outbreak was at its worst. When we thought that it was all over, there were further outbreaks in Llanelen, which is very close to the Brecon Beacons national park, and it was felt that the outbreak was related to the serious outbreak in that area.

I will never forget the despair of the farmers who were most directly affected. I also have great sympathy with the farmers who were not directly affected but whose livelihoods have been directly affected as a consequence.

[Mr. Huw Edwards]

Many of them have suffered a greater financial loss because they have lost their markets and the price of their livestock has been depressed.

I will never forget seeing farmers who had heard that they had an outbreak of the disease on their farms. In one case, I had to leave the farm, which those who were with me and I did immediately. I will not forget the impact in the Cross Ash area in the northern part of my constituency, or the sight of bloated carcases awaiting disposal after delays. Many of my constituents have written to me because they were repelled by the level of slaughter that was occurring. That put me in a difficult position because I represent a strong agricultural area. Many of my constituents have written to me about the need for vaccination. We should consider what is said by those most directly affected, rather than by mere observers. The general view of those farmers was that the culling policy was correct to get ahead of the disease, even though it caused considerable distress.

I recognise that there are reservations about the Bill, especially in relation to its timing and the lack of consultation. I recognise that many organisations in the industry have expressed surprise that there has not been more time, but I accept that, if these are emergency measures, they need to be introduced as soon as possible. If there were anomalies in the law relating to foot and mouth disease and the way in which officials could intervene during the outbreak, it is right that they should be resolved. We all sincerely hope that there will not be another outbreak next spring, but if there were to be another outbreak, I should not want to hear hon. Members say that the Government should have introduced such measures immediately after the 2001 outbreak. I hope that the precautionary principle is right in this case.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says. Does he agree that if another outbreak occurred next spring, people might equally say that the Government had not been sufficiently assiduous in dealing with prevention by introducing measures that would avoid infection from imported meat or meat products, and that they had concentrated far too much on internal measures rather than on the external measures that would provide us with greater protection?

Mr. Edwards: I acknowledge the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, and I would have made it a little later in my speech. I regret that the Bill contains no provisions dealing with illegal imports or substandard legal imports, and I sincerely hope that other legislation will be introduced as quickly as possible in that respect.

Farmers in my constituency said that other animals may have contributed to the spread of the disease. During the outbreak in the Cross Ash area, they said that deer and birds contributed to its spread. If there is evidence to show that, I will accept the need to have the powers to cull those species.

At meeting after meeting, I have heard frustration expressed at delays in confirming cases of foot and mouth disease, in slaughtering and in paying compensation. This is a slightly different issue, but I tried to get through to the Intervention Board by phone. What a curious body it is—and with a curious name. I could never find out who the official relating to Monmouthshire or even Wales was, although there were serious welfare problems and serious delays. I understand that the Minister with responsibility for agriculture in Wales is to rename the Intervention Board as it affects Wales, and I am glad that he is introducing such measures.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have recognised that the provisions on scrapie are welcome, but we have heard reservations about the compensation system and the 25 per cent. penalty. I can understand that there might be difficulties in implementing that system and in maintaining consistency in making judgments about whether farmers had taken the right biosecurity measures.

I note from the representations that we have received that organisations such as the RSPCA and the Country Landowners Association have expressed support for the Bill's general principle, as well as some concerns about the details. They have asked us to consider the Bill in detail in Committee and to consult at the same time.

In all the meetings that I have had with farmers they have expressed concerns about illegal and substandard legal meat imports—the point that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) made a moment ago. That is the one factor in the spread of foot and mouth disease that they repeatedly mention.

I hope that the Government will consider more search powers and more punishments for offenders. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham referred to the procedures on the carrying of foodstuffs into the United States and other countries. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) has told me personally that Ireland has much stronger laws on meat imports. Jim Scudamore, the chief veterinary officer, has recently stated that illegal meat imports are seriously threatening animal and public health.

According to the Farmers Union of Wales, it was recently discovered that travellers had brought in 5.76 tonnes of illegal meat on 14 flights at Heathrow. Farmers in my constituency are absolutely appalled by that, and they want measures to be introduced to stop it happening.

The problems of long-distance livestock movements has been mentioned. Hon. Members have referred to the role of certain unscrupulous dealers who have moved livestock around considerably more than was generally known. That also reveals a lack of infrastructure such as local abattoirs. There is no large-scale abattoir in my constituency. If we had resources to invest in abattoir capacity, the number of long-distance livestock movements could be greatly reduced.

It is a great pity that my constituency is outside the objective 1 area. If it was in the objective 1 area, we could get some of the investment that we need. In a strong farming community such as Monmouthshire, there is no doubt that we could have more infrastructure—for example, better livestock markets, meat processing facilities and abattoirs. Those facilities could serve not only Monmouthshire, but south-east Wales and the border areas of England.

Farmers have raised with me the issue of inconsistencies in the payment of the slaughter premium. I recently met a group of farmers who had had their livestock culled and who had been led to believe that they would be entitled to the slaughter premium. I have been

advised by auctioneers that whereas at one stage veterinary officers were handing out forms suggesting that the slaughter premium would be paid, they were later giving out forms that did not state that it would. Auctioneers believe that the premium should have been paid. I hope that as a result of the representations that I am making in the form of written questions to the Minister, the rules and regulations that relate to the premium will be examined. If it should have been paid, it should be paid as soon as possible.

I think that we recognise the need for emergency legislation that is based on the precautionary principle to deal with the anomalies that have been exposed in the foot and mouth outbreak. It is important that the Bill should be subject to serious scrutiny in Committee and that the relevant bodies with an interest in the industry should be widely consulted on its provisions.

7.21 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Bill has the feeling of a pre-emptive strike about it. From what we have heard from Ministers, the Bill is based on unproven assumptions about the the recent foot and mouth outbreak. Had these proposals come forward as emergency legislation during the outbreak, they would have been more acceptable. There would have been questions to ask about detail, but the broad principle of expanding Ministers' powers in terms of slaughter policy and its definition would perhaps have been accepted. It is not only the timing of the Bill's introduction that we have to consider: if we are looking to the future rather than simply considering a Bill that is too late for the past, it is to be hoped that the measure is part of a clear strategy.

Mr. Morley *rose—*

Mrs. Browning: I shall say something nice about the Minister in a moment. That being so, I hope that he will ask me a nice question.

Mr. Morley: That is what I call a pre-emptive strike.

I am sure that the hon. Lady will understand that ideally it would have been better to have the Bill on the statute book at the early stages of the epidemic. Some of the justification that has been requested in relation to the contiguous cull and poor biosecurity has become much more evident as the outbreak has progressed. More information has been collected. In those respects the defence case is much stronger now than it was at the beginning of the outbreak.

Mrs. Browning: I am sure that that is true in broad principle. However, in terms of the contiguous cull—I am about to say something very nice about the Minister—I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the role that he played in allowing me to see him to refer to three farms in my constituency. He examined the issues and he intervened. I am pleased to tell him that the farms are still running, with the animals on them. They did not get foot and mouth disease and the hon. Gentleman's intervention was extremely helpful. It was also extremely sensible. It was not until 19 days after an outbreak that the farms, which were deemed to be contiguous, were approached on the basis that the animals were to be slaughtered. It is clear that such an approach 19 days after an outbreak defeats the object of a contiguous cull.

There are problems, and that is why I am concerned that the Bill is being introduced now. The Devon county council inquiry has recently published its preliminary findings under the chairmanship of Professor Mercer. It shows clearly that there are still many questions to be answered about the disease and its spread which should be influencing changes in policy and legislation. I am sure the Minister is fully familiar with these findings.

Paragraph 1.26 states:

"We find that more research is needed on the transport of the Foot and Mouth virus by boots, clothing, tyres, hooves and any other passive agent so that the degree of selection which might be applied to the closure of rights of way and the type of access may be determined."

That is important if we are to start penalising people, which I do not agree with, for biosecurity breaches. Paragraph 1.20 states:

"Any future cull adopted to contain the spread of disease must be applied by experienced operators trained to assess the risk according to the physical conditions."

The Minister will be familiar with the assessment of risk. He and I pored over a large map on his desk trying to identify where the farms that we were discussing were. Every farm has a holding number. The Department has masses of information relating to the integrated administration and control system, for example, but it is not possible to draw a line on the map and say, "Cull here." One may be talking about anything within a 3 km zone. A relevant factor is the topography of the area. That point was picked up in Professor Mercer's preliminary conclusions.

Surely these are the matters that we should be considering before we introduce new legislation that contains extended powers. Such legislation should be based on what is practical and on the experience of those who have had to manage the crisis. That is why I described the Bill as a pre-emptive strike.

I do not feel that the Bill is merely premature. I do not think that it fully takes into account information which I am sure is available and will come forward. Certainly it is not the result of the Devon county council's inquiry alone. I have in mind some of the Government's inquiries, when they are concluded. Like many other colleagues, I deplore the fact that we are not having a full independent public inquiry. However, the Minister is right to say that useful information has already come forward. I am sure that more information will become available as the inquiries continue.

It seems extraordinary—I say this as a former Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—that the details of farms and their topography are not available in map form or on a computerised mapping system. That information would allow for much more practicality in determining the way in which decisions about culling are made.

Most of us have supported the need to act quickly and to create a cordon sanitaire by means of contiguous culls. We all understand that if that action is taken promptly we can contain the spread of the disease. I am not opposed to the principle of the contiguous cull, unpleasant as it is. However, if we are to go down the same route again, either if the existing outbreak flares up or if there is another one in the foreseeable future, we should at least be able to take a different approach to managing the situation from that which has been adopted in the past few months.

[Mrs. Browning]

I urge the Minister to try to be as flexible as possible. He said last week in the evidence that he gave to the Select Committee, and in answers to questions, that he wanted flexibility. If he is to maintain flexibility, which many of us have found useful, it is important that when the Bill becomes an Act the hon. Gentleman's hands should not be tied. Flexibility, pragmatism and practical on-the-ground knowledge should be available and ready to be interpreted if any future culling is needed.

I had hoped by now to have seen more information and more specific advice from the Government about a potential vaccination policy. Built into the background to the Bill is the assumption that we may have a vaccination policy in place in future. In an Adjournment debate initiated by the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) on 5 July, I asked whether it was the Government's intention through the summer months to collate all the up-to-date information about vaccination policy, not only from scientists in the UK but from valuable information that can be obtained from other countries that have foot and mouth disease and have operated such a policy. I asked that question in July because we all lived in fear of another outbreak flaring up as the weather changed and as we went into autumn, into October and November. Although I wrote to the Minister for Rural Affairs after the Adjournment debate, I have not had a reply to my letter, and it is now November. The subject of my proposal was put to me by local branches of the National Farmers Union in Devon. I had hoped that by now the Government would feel that they had sufficiently researched information on vaccination, especially as they are now giving it recognition in the Bill, and would be in a firmer position to say that they would propose using it if an outbreak flared up on any scale in the near future. I am sure that the decision has been complicated for Ministers. The NFU opposed vaccination, but the Under-Secretary will be aware that its south-west branch was not solidly against it.

Mr. Morley: It was not actually for it.

Mrs. Browning: No, but it felt what a lot of us feel—that we do not have that information in the public domain. I raised that in the debate on 5 July because it is incumbent on the Government to collate information and put it in the public domain; people will then feel better informed. If the Government said, as they might well have done, that they had to vaccinate, people would have understood the basis for their proposal. I have not been an Agriculture Minister for many years and I am out of date on the latest thinking and science on vaccination; it is not for me to say yes or no on behalf of my farmers. All that I know is that the information is out there, and it is the Government's job to put it into the public domain.

Mr. Morley: I can certainly confirm that vaccination was considered several times throughout the outbreak and, as the hon. Lady knows, it has always been an option available to us. Of course, there are detailed questions about it to which people want answers. There are also people who need to be convinced, but it is difficult to do that in the middle of an epidemic. At moment, at the tail end of the epidemic, it is not likely that vaccination will play a role, although the door is still open. We have sponsored a conference next month to examine issues surrounding vaccination, and there will be a detailed examination of it in the Royal Society inquiry. Issues arising from that may influence thinking for the future, as well as developments such as new tests which have not yet been validated.

Mrs. Browning: I welcome that. I hope that, when the Minister for Rural Affairs returns to the Chamber, the Under-Secretary will prod him to send me a reply, which is almost four months overdue.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have huge reservations about the additional powers and the fact that the Under-Secretary is introducing the Bill at this particular time. In an emergency, Ministers can call on emergency powers to deal with just about any situation. They may have to get legal advice and a second opinion on that advice, but when it comes to a genuine emergency, Ministers are not usually constrained by lack of powers and can do whatever has to be done, regardless of difficulty. Clearly, we are not in that situation; the Bill is not an emergency measure to deal with a current emergency. As the Under-Secretary acknowledged, it deals with the tail end of the disease—or what we hope is the tail end. I am not suggesting that new powers are not needed to deal with a future emergency, but the required package, of which the Bill may be a part, does not seem to have been thought through and has not been informed by the various inquiries that are being conducted.

I should like to put a hypothetical question to the Under-Secretary. If all the Department's decisions are based on science—this is why I questioned unproven assumptions at the beginning—and if it is still basing its recommendations and legislation on science and scientific advice, why, in the middle of what was a crisis, was there a clear breach of the rules on severe animal health risk, when Phoenix the calf was saved by an overnight change in the rules?

Mr. Morley: It was a coincidence.

Mrs. Browning: That will not do. I will get really cross with the Under-Secretary if he takes that line. It was clear, however heart-rending that little face was on the front page of the tabloids and however many crocodile tears the Prime Minister felt he had to shed over Phoenix the calf, that it was a matter of animal health in the middle of a genuine crisis and the rules were changed overnight to deal with it.

Mr. Morley: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: All right, as I am generous.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who has been very generous. In all seriousness, I followed the discussions about exemptions to the contiguous cull. I did not have responsibilities for animal health until this June, but I have always been interested in the issue and, of course, I followed it. Exemptions to the contiguous cull for cattle under certain conditions were changing just before Phoenix the calf was affected. I urge the hon. Lady not to think that it was a sudden decision because it looked good on the television and in the papers, although, indeed, it did.

Mrs. Browning: Ever the masters of spin! The matter is serious; I understood that Phoenix the calf was, by some

miraculous event, lying by its dead mother's body, she and the other cattle having been culled. As a result, Phoenix was saved. Other people may or may not judge that an animal health risk; I am sorry, but I think that Phoenix the calf was an animal health risk. However, in stark contrast, throughout the country, people were having to go to law, often in distress, to save animals whose cull under the contiguous cull rules could not be justified, given anomalies in the way in which officials expedited the contiguous cull.

A culling policy is serious, as the Minister knows, and is not easy to introduce or implement; we know that it causes a lot of hardship. However, one has to stick to proper, proven advice, ideally scientific, particularly in relation to animal disease. That is why there was cynicism and a lack of confidence in the policies associated with foot and mouth. In the midst of chaos and despair, there were examples of policy which, frankly, made people wonder about the motivation or organisation behind the Government's management of more serious issues. I hope that the Under-Secretary will assure us in his winding-up speech that the Department, despite its new title, is basing legislation and decision making on good, sound scientific advice, not on what happens to be on the front of tabloid newspapers. It would be wicked to take decisions on any ground other than good scientific advice, despite—and I am used to this—the cynicism of the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) about the advice of officials from DEFRA or the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He has been getting that off his chest for a long time.

I turn briefly to BSE in sheep, which is another important issue. I was extremely surprised that the Secretary of State suggested that I should turn to the Food Standards Agency to get an answer to a serious statement by Professor Krebs. In an FSA press release of 22 October, he said that if BSE was found in sheep, it was

"likely that the Agency would have to advise against consumption of goat meats . . . and sheep and goat milk and dairy products."

I asked the Secretary of State about that; I want an answer from Ministers, and do not want to be batted away to somebody who does not have to stand at the Dispatch Box. On what scientific basis does the FSA believe that milk and dairy products from any species with BSE are unfit for human consumption? If that is true, that has a huge read-cross to the dairy industry. I am sure that the Under-Secretary does not need me to spell out the implications of Professor Krebs's statement, which requires speedy clarification.

However difficult it is to deal with those matters, and despite the fact that the FSA is independent, when Members of Parliament raise such issues on the Floor of the House, we deserve a proper answer from the Minister at the Dispatch Box, whatever their seniority. We do not deserve a Secretary of State who shrugs her shoulders and says that she did not know; if she did not, I hope her officials are briefing her tonight. That was a very serious statement from Professor Krebs, and I hope that before the evening is out—

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I do not like to act as an apologist for the Secretary of State, but one of the difficulties that she may have—this goes to the heart of many of the Department's problems—is that the Food Standards Agency is responsible to an entirely different Secretary of State.

Mrs. Browning: That may be so, but we are discussing the contingency plan for the possibility of BSE in sheep, which is clearly part of the Bill, for which DEFRA has ministerial responsibility. We can legitimately expect such matters to be raised in Standing Committee. I know that the Under-Secretary has taken on board the serious point that I am making. Whether or not it is technically a matter for the Department of Health, we deserve an answer, and I should like an answer later tonight.

7.41 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I support the Bill. That is probably the only part of my speech that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will accept. Coming from Cumbria and representing Carlisle, I can tell the House that we were in the thick of foot and mouth, and I do not believe that we are out of the woods yet. As I said in an intervention, this weekend we killed a large number of sheep in the south of the county, just on suspicion.

People who oppose the Bill probably think that foot and mouth occurs every 30-odd years. We had it in 1967 and in 2001, so they think that it will not recur for some time and that there is therefore no need to rush legislation through Parliament. Anyone who examines the history of foot and mouth will realise that it occurred regularly before 1967—almost every year—so there is a good chance that it will come to us again fairly soon. We need legislation in place to deal with that.

The lessons have been learned. We found that the Animal Health Act 1981 was defective. The Minister who put it through is probably in the other place. We found out, for example, that a farmer could deliberately infect a flock and get 100 per cent. compensation. Obviously, that was never considered at the time.

In north Cumbria, one option was that we should have a fire break—that we should cull the sheep in the north of the county to stop the infection getting on to the fells. That policy would have been illegal, as the Government did not have the powers to implement it. It was ultimately carried out by other means, but if it had been challenged, we would have had serious problems.

The purpose of the Bill is to allow us to get on top of the disease before it gets out of control. We have learned the lessons. I am sad to say that MAFF was not prepared to deal with the disease in March when it struck us in Cumbria. The right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) presented a catalogue of mistakes made in his constituency. I could have multiplied them by 10 in the case of Cumbria.

The outbreak was dealt with very badly in the early stages, but I do not believe that at that time any Government would have dealt with it any better. I was coming down to the House of Commons and telling Ministers one thing, and they were telling me that their officials were telling them something else, and that no problem existed. It was only when my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin), the then Minister of State, came to Cumbria and talked to the farmers one Sunday, having previously spoken to MAFF officials, that she realised the problem that we had.

[Mr. Eric Martlew]

The disease was out of control. I live right in the centre of my constituency in an urban area. All round the city, one could smell the burning three or four miles away. On the edge of my constituency, a mass grave contains the remains of 400,000 culled sheep. They were taken through the narrow roads, past the local school, and slaughtered on site. It was a mess. The Government learned the lessons.

Reference has been made to the Prime Minister. Progress began to be made in Cumbria when the Prime Minister came up in March. He listened to the farmers, asked searching questions and gave instructions. The Army arrived, the famous brigadier was there and carried out those instructions, and that is when we started to get on top of the situation. The Prime Minister came on two occasions after that. Without his direct support and help, we would no doubt still have a problem.

We cannot pursue a policy of mass slaughter again. The hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said that he did not believe that the policy could be carried out in Scotland again; it had got out of hand. It could not be done in Cumbria again. We were fed up with the wanton destruction and death. We felt sick about the total devastation.

That is why I support the Bill, which gives the Government the option of introducing compulsory vaccination and paying compensation. Without it, we would not have that option for the future. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) has left the Chamber. Voting for the Bill could mean saving the lives of millions of animals.

I was the first Member of Parliament to ask for a public inquiry. However, I am prepared to allow the Government to have separate inquiries, as long as they are open. I spoke to those undertaking the scientific inquiry when they came up to Cumbria, and others are coming too. If we get the right answers from those inquiries, a new precedent will have been set for dealing with such issues. There must be an advance on the procedure followed in the Phillips inquiry, whereby we take over a set of dusty rooms in south London, hear evidence for three years and produce a report that hardly anybody reads, all at a cost of £30 million. However, I warn the Government that if they try to hide the facts about the foot and mouth outbreak, I will be the first Member to ask for a full inquiry.

We have heard about the problem of contaminated meat coming into the country. Everyone seems to think that it is easy to stop it. If it were so easy, we would have no illegal immigrants and no drugs problem. It is extremely difficult to stop such things.

There is another factor that has been overlooked. We know about the chaos caused by the recent outbreak of foot and mouth. Whatever our views, no one thinks that it was caused deliberately, but an enemy of the country who wanted to create chaos could deliberately introduce the disease. The virus is not difficult to get in the third world. The only way to deal with that will be vaccination.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's comments. He seemed to think that it was impossible to do anything about illegal imports of meat, drugs or whatever. One cannot guarantee anything in life, but if measures can be implemented in America and New Zealand—which I know that he has visited—to protect their populations from the importing of animal and plant disease, surely we can take a stab at it. At present, we have wide open doors.

Mr. Martlew: If the hon. Lady had been a Minister four years ago, she would have said that our policy obviously works, as we have not had an outbreak. Of course we must consider measures to tighten up on imports, but there is no panacea to stop illegal asylum seekers or drugs coming in, so we must always assume that imported meat will come in illegally.

I come now to a problem that was mentioned by several hon. Members, although I do not think that any of them offered a solution. At the beginning of the outbreak we were hampered in Cumbria and everywhere else by the small number of vets. We all know that the size of the veterinary investigation service was reduced by the previous Government. There may have been a good reason for that. The changes that had occurred may have meant that the vets did not have much work, and they would not have stayed if that was the case. Perhaps we should consider introducing the equivalent of the Territorial Army for veterinaries and the possibility of establishing a reserve on which we can call when a crisis occurs.

Mr. Wiggin: We had enough trouble persuading the Government to bring in the Army, let alone the Territorial Army. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman's suggestion is practical.

Mr. Martlew: I am sorry that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. I was trying to make a serious point. If he wants to make party political points, that is fine, but when he has been in the House longer, he will learn when to intervene and when not to.

I have sought an Adjournment debate on Lord Haskins's report. It is a very good report and I have a lot more to say about it, but I point out now that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary must deal with pet animals. There is no doubt that much of the anguish that was caused to individuals in the crisis related to pets. In my constituency, someone rang me anonymously, in case I contacted MAFF, to say that he was concerned about two pet goats. He asked me what to do. I said, "Hide them." Of course, I also told him to have good biosecurity. He never got back in touch. I hope that he took my advice.

The situation was a real problem and a public relations disaster for the Government. That is where I disagree with the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). We should not run our approach on scientific grounds alone. If we had culled Phoenix the calf—I am sure that it would have been done only for scientific reasons—public support for Government policy on culling would have disappeared. That would have had more effect on getting on top of the disease than saving one calf.

Mrs. Browning: Constituents of mine also owned two goats that were saved. Much as I sympathised with the fact that they were pets and lovely animals, I believed that it was right for them to be subjected to a blood test. If they had tested positive, they would have been just as

much a risk to the farming community as any other animals, pets or not. Difficulties arose only when blood tests were refused. I could not understand why that happened in some cases.

Mr. Martlew: I would not disagree with the hon. Lady on that point.

I shall support the Bill's Second Reading, as the alternative is not to give the Government powers to vaccinate compulsorily and to grant compensation. That will be the way forward in any future outbreak.

7.53 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I am pleased to speak to the reasoned amendment that I and my hon. Friends tabled, which invites the House to decline to give the Bill a Second Reading.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), who made by far the best speech in favour of the Bill that we have heard tonight, although I am sure that the Under-Secretary will make up for that. He was right to point out that the Bill gives powers for vaccination that the Minister does not currently have, and powers for a cull following vaccination that are not currently in place. The scenario might, therefore, be less optimistic than he and the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) hope.

My party and I oppose the Bill not on principle, because we have much sympathy with what the Government are trying to do, but on the practicalities of the way in which it was put together. It is poorly drafted and badly thought out. A lack of consultation with the farming industry and the devolved Assemblies and Parliament in the United Kingdom is obvious. The Secretary of State's attempts to spin the matter and say that there would be plenty of consultation on the secondary legislation have been undermined by the fact that the Government are seeking to impose a guillotine on consideration of the Bill. Not only is it being rushed through Second Reading, but we are also to have a programme motion on the rest of its passage. If the Government were serious about the process of consultation, we would not impose such a motion on the Committee stage, Report and Third Reading, but allow the Bill a natural progression through the House with plenty of time for the debate that the Government say they want.

Another matter is relevant in questioning why the Bill has been introduced so quickly. In the past, the House has been told many times about contingency plans for foot and mouth. We were told about the buying up of supplies, including wood, railway sleepers and so on. The Government said, "Of course these things happen, because they are contingency plans." We were told that regular contingency planning occurred. We accepted it, as it was the right way forward: such planning should occur. However, why has that planning, which has occurred under Labour and Conservative Governments since 1981, failed to identify any weakness in legislation? If the contingency planning was proper and thorough—some speakers have suggested that it may not have been—any weaknesses in legislation would have been revealed and we could have dealt with the matter at our leisure.

Mr. Morley: The answer is simple. There has never been an outbreak on this scale in this country. Indeed, there has probably never been an outbreak on such a scale anywhere in the world. The contiguous cull policy, for example, was introduced as part of the lessons that were learned in handling the outbreak. I agree that it is necessary to think ahead and to try to envisage all contingencies, but I believe that it is hard to make contingency plans for a type of epidemic that has never been experienced or even considered in this country.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to the Minister for making that point. I partly accept it, but surely it reinforces the view that there was a need at least to consider the results of his own three inquiries before introducing the legislation. Perhaps a full public inquiry would take too much time, but his inquiry on the lessons to be learned should have been reported first and foremost, before such legislation was introduced.

In that context, it has been very disappointing not to have the opportunity fully to consult the National Assembly for Wales, which was partially responsible for dealing with the outbreak in Wales, or the other devolved institutions. The farming unions have not yet been consulted fully on the matter. The handling of foot and mouth in Wales revealed defects in the way in which animal health was dealt with there and a need to tighten up the regime. I regret to say, however, that the Bill does not remedy those defects. The handling of foot and mouth in Wales was characterised by confusion. The National Assembly for Wales is, of course, responsible for agriculture in Wales, but DEFRA has responsibility for animal health, as MAFF did previously. However, the matter is still not clear, as some sections of the Animal Health Act 1981—especially section 86—are devolved to the National Assembly for Wales, which looks after animal health in relation to brucellosis and tuberculosis.

We therefore have a mismatch and must deal with the confusion that arises from it. Some of the problems mentioned by the hon. Member for Carlisle and the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) with regard to the lack of local decision making were exacerbated in Wales by the fact that there were two decision-making processes—one in the National Assembly for Wales and one in the Ministry. Very often, neither knew what the other was doing and there was disagreement about how the process should be conducted in Wales. Hon. Members who represent Welsh constituencies will know that that is the case from having received phone calls about confusion in the farming community and a lack of clear planning on how to take the matter forward.

It is also wrong to introduce the Bill without the House having had the full benefit at least of the three separate strands that the Government have established, even if not of a public inquiry. I and my party remain convinced that we need an independent public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak and into how we can learn from it. The Under-Secretary's statement in his intervention that the outbreak was probably the worst in the world underlined the need for such an inquiry; nevertheless, in the meantime, we certainly need to see what the Government themselves have to say.

Before we consider introducing any further legislation, we need to consider the real lessons of foot and mouth disease, such as those that are known to us already without the benefit of a public inquiry, and, indeed, without any other inquiry having reported.

[Mr. Thomas]

First, it has been stated forcefully, especially by Professor Mark Woolhouse in his evidence to the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, that if the Government had acted more quickly and there had been no three-day delay in banning animal movements, the scale of the epidemic would have been lessened by between a third and a half. He estimates that we could have saved £1 billion, and 3 million animals would not have been slaughtered. I accept that that is only one person's scientific view, but it is interesting to note that the need to ban animal movements immediately is the first or second recommendation of the Devon inquiry.

The Government are not necessarily to blame for the delay because there was confusion on all sides at the time of the outbreak. However, if they want more powers to enforce biosecurity, it is right for us and the farming community to ask them to take further administrative steps to ensure that they do not repeat their mistakes. The question of whether to pay farmers' compensation in the light of poor biosecurity can be turned on its head: what would the Government do if they dithered in the unfortunate case of any future outbreak of foot and mouth?

The buck cannot be passed to the farming community. There is blame on all sides. The Bill covers the few farmers whose biosecurity may have been poor and the few who may even have flouted the regulations. A series of draconian measures are based on that. I am unconvinced about whether we need them. We can make a similar link with imports, which many hon. Members have mentioned. I shall not reiterate their points.

Secondly, let us consider vaccination and the cull policy. We were told again tonight that the Government always had an open mind on vaccination—but they never acted. When the chief veterinary officer, Jim Scudamore, gave evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee earlier this week, he said that the policy on vaccination was "certainly not a success". He also pointed out that the Dutch had used vaccination.

Has culling worked? The Under-Secretary revealed that of the 103 farms that legally challenged the cull, foot and mouth had developed on only eight. I am sure that that is eight more than the Under-Secretary wants, but the figures show that many farmers had a genuine reason for challenging the cull on their farms. More than 90 farmers were right to do that, yet the Bill will remove the right to challenge.

In a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on 7 November at column 299 of *Hansard*, the number of infected premises in Wales was given as 107. We were told that 94 premises were tested, of which 54 tested positive. That suggests that approximately half did not carry foot and mouth disease. Yet, 304,847 sheep were slaughtered in Wales. We must therefore ask whether culling worked and whether enough consideration was given to vaccination.

A convincing case has been made that, economically, vaccination would have been more effective for farming: whether it would have been more effective against foot and mouth remains an open question, which I hope the Under-Secretary will answer, if not later tonight, then after the conference that he mentioned.

Mr. Drew: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price), who suggested that sheep could have been quarantined until the results of blood tests were known. How can thousands of sheep be placed in quarantine?

Mr. Thomas: I believe that my hon. Friend's point was reiterated by a Labour Member. The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) may not have been in the Chamber to hear it. Putting animals into quarantine has been discussed. I have not considered that, but I have examined vaccination. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the report that the Elm Farm research centre published. I acknowledge that it has an axe to grind on specific issues, but the report is useful. Peter Midmore of the University of Wales in Aberystwyth wrote it, and it sets out the economic case for vaccination. We should discuss the scientific case for vaccination's ability to deal with foot and mouth if it ever reappears in this country.

The lack of vets has been discussed. The chief vet has admitted that we ran out of vets and reached the position of paying £250 a day to attract sufficient vets to deal with the outbreak.

Lack of rendering capacity caused increasing problems. That was the reason for so many pyres, which constitute a human as well as an animal health issue. There is not one rendering plant in Wales. If foot and mouth broke out again, we could not render animals there. The single rendering plant that existed in Wales was in Tan-y-groes in my constituency, and has been closed owing to a private legal action. It is important that the Government consider a rendering strategy as part of their plans for future action against foot and mouth.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Does the hon. Gentleman support the idea that is currently being investigated by Blue Circle, whereby it could take animal carcases to use as an alternative fuel in the cement industry?

Mr. Thomas: I would take a lot of convincing that incineration for fuel was the way forward. I am deeply dissatisfied with the use of incineration to deal with our municipal waste. That also applies to animal waste.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I was interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments about the need for more rendering plants. Does he believe that it is right to bring infected carcases to a rendering plant in an area where there is no foot and mouth? It is believed that some outbreaks of foot and mouth in Cheshire could be directly connected to infected carcases being brought into the county. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on that?

Mr. Thomas: I suspect that I would have similar anxieties if the rendering plant in my constituency, which remains free of foot and mouth, had been opened. However, if that was the best scientific method of disposing of carcases, we would have to go for it. The mass burial of carcases in Wales, especially on the Epynt mountain, was a travesty of animal and human welfare. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman supports on-farm burials, but we need the best scientific evidence.

Mr. Winterton: The hon. Gentleman is dealing with the matter seriously and positively, but if infected carcases

are being taken to rendering plants in areas where there is no infection, is not it important that the vehicles should be airtight and liquid tight and should be inspected?

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman makes the point well. I agree that the tightest biosecurity must apply to the transport of carcases or infected animals to rendering plants, slaughterhouses and so on.

I oppose the Bill because it gives DEFRA Ministers such wide powers, without proof that they would have made a blind bit of difference to the handling of the current outbreak.

Let us consider scrapie. I believe that it is included in the Bill to deal with possible BSE outbreaks in future. To date, there is not a scrap of evidence of BSE in the sheep flock. We may require further powers to eradicate scrapie, but the Bill does not fulfil that need. The Department that does not know the difference between sheep brains and cow brains should not have powers over the future of our sheep flock. A Department that cannot run a research project without elementary safeguards for checking and counter-checking its results demands more power. I am reluctant to grant it.

The Department's skin was saved by a National Assembly for Wales official, Mr. Mike Simmons, who represents the Assembly on the Whitehall working party on testing sheep brains. He insisted that the material should be sent for DNA testing in July. The Government came within 36 hours of destroying the sheep industry in Wales and the United Kingdom. Mr. Simmons' insistence saved

"not only the Welsh agricultural industry but the European agricultural industry."

Mr. Morley: Mr. Simmons has played an important role in the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, and we very much value his input. However, I am sure that he does not claim to be personally responsible for that, especially as he will be aware that the former MAFF chief scientist asked for the DNA testing to be carried out before he made the submission.

Mr. Thomas: I have to tell the Minister that the words that I just read out were not mine but those of Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister in Wales. He believes very strongly that Mr. Simmons saved his backside.

Let us imagine what would have happened to the sheep industry if the Bill had been in the Minister's hands and that report had gone to SEAC without being discovered. The Minister would have had the power immediately to authorise the mass slaughter of the sheep flock. We came very close to that, and the Minister's embarrassment was saved by a small but very important official in Wales. That is the truth. I believe the Labour party's propaganda, because it was Rhodri Morgan who sought to put that on the front page of the *Western Mail* to reflect well on himself.

This is why we have included in our amendment to the Bill the need to devolve powers to the National Assembly. The present Department, whether it be in the form of the Minister himself—I am sure that it is not—or the officials to whom the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) referred, is not prepared or able to take these issues properly or effectively into account. The issues need to be devolved to the National Assembly. Is it any wonder that most farmers in my constituency think that there is some sort of agenda behind the Bill? I am trying to negotiate with them, but they think that the Government are trying to take powers to cut the sheep flock and the cattle herd in the United Kingdom.

There are also real concerns among the supporters of animal refuges in my constituency. The refuges are next to farmland and people are concerned that the Minister might apply these powers to other animals in a refuge that can carry foot and mouth.

The plans for compensation are crude, although I accept that we need them and that the Minister will do more work on them. If the Government really wanted to improve animal health, they should have examined issues such as the transportation of live animals over long distances. They could also have examined the difficulties that local abattoirs are experiencing in reopening, which was dealt with in the third recommendation of the Devon inquiry. An example is the case of my constituent, Oswyn Jones, who is trying to reopen Llanwnnen abattoir in the face of every bit of red tape, and who is facing huge veterinary bills.

The way in which foot and mouth has been dealt with in Wales, and the way in which the Government's skin was saved over BSE in sheep, have made it clear that the National Assembly for Wales would be a more able and effective promoter of animal health, a more able and effective defender of the public interest, and a more able and effective developer of sustainable farming in Wales. No doubt the Minister for Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael), would agree with that if he were in the National Assembly.

The Bill gives Ministers the wrong powers for the wrong purposes and on false premises. I hope that the House will decline to give it a Second Reading.

8.14 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) and to contribute to this debate. I have some concerns, as have some of my hon. Friends, about the speed of introduction of the Bill, but I feel that those issues can be settled in Committee and I shall support the Bill tonight in the Lobby.

I want to concentrate on the slaughter policy pertaining to foot and mouth. The policy of establishing a firebreak prevented the disease from spreading in my constituency. My constituency of Ynys Môn—better known by its English name, Anglesey—was one of the first areas in the United Kingdom to suffer from foot and mouth, and had the first reported cases in Wales. The action that followed was decisive, if somewhat brutal, after an initial muddle at the start of the handling of the outbreak.

To date, just 13 cases of foot and mouth have been reported on Anglesey. I say "just", because they were reported very early on in the outbreak. Yet an estimated 50,000 animals were slaughtered in the compulsory cull in south Anglesey. The National Assembly for Wales, with the full co-operation of the farming unions in Wales, authorised the cull and gave it its blessing. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the then Minister of Agriculture for adopting that policy and for taking those tough decisions at that time. I also support how the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food worked with

[Albert Owen]

the National Assembly, although, like the hon. Member for Ceredigion, I have some reservations about that arrangement.

Establishing the firebreak had its problems, not least that of disposing of so many animals, but it worked and we must learn from that experience. It prevented the spread of the disease and allowed the vast majority of the isle of Anglesey to remain disease-free. It allowed open access to the countryside to be restored much earlier than in many other parts of the United Kingdom and Wales, thereby allowing the tourism industry on which my constituency relies so much, and which is vital to the economy of the island, to recoup some lost time and money. It was because that policy was adopted that the National Assembly and the appropriate authorities were able to announce that the disease was under control, and to send out positive messages sooner than in other areas of the United Kingdom.

Movement restrictions remained in place, however, and farmers in the local community had to conform to tight restrictions. I have no doubt that failure to institute those measures at that time would have compounded the problems still further. The initial confused situation marked by the localised burning of animals in huge pyres sent out a terrible signal, and those graphic images did untold damage to the tourism sector in my local community. The confusion over which animals were at greatest risk, which should be killed, and how many should be buried, where and when, created chaos. The Bill can help to alleviate that chaos, which is one of the reasons why I support it.

Although I support many of the measures in the Bill, I ask for some assurances from the Minister; for example, that the Bill will not preclude the use of vaccination without the need to slaughter later, for animals not destined for the food chain. I am particularly concerned by the allegation that so-called hobby farmers are a nuisance. I do not share that opinion; they are farmers who look after animals in the same way as others, even though those animals are not destined for the food chain. I believe that it would be possible to exempt such animals from a mass cull in a designated area, and that a vaccine could be used in such cases. I am not as colourful as my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) when he talks passionately about preventing the killing of pets and other animals owned by hobby farmers. We should seriously consider that issue, and send out the right messages to those people.

I understand the logistical problems posed by mass vaccination. However, we must not abandon the research into and the application of vaccination in forming policy for future outbreaks. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made some movement on that in her opening speech. I further understand the cost implications of mass vaccination, but we must acknowledge that any policy to contain and eradicate diseases such as foot and mouth will be costly.

On costs, I draw the House's attention to the evidence given to the Select Committee by Professor Roy Anderson, who claimed that an estimated £1 billion of taxpayers' money could have been saved if time had not been wasted when implementing the ban on animal movements in the crucial first few days of the outbreak. Indeed, it is alleged that the first reported case in my constituency can be traced back to an abattoir in Essex. More must be done to stop the movement of animals across such great distances.

I suggest that the House take note of the Devon inquiry, which called for an immediate ban on animal movements from day one of an outbreak. This is simply a question of prevention being better than cure. The same inquiry called for a study to support the re-establishment of small, local abattoirs to be supported by grants. That should be looked at, as it would help to stop the spread of the disease.

I do not support the calls for a public inquiry, although I did have leanings towards that at one time. We should not have such an inquiry until we have heard the results of the Government inquiry. However, there should be a firm commitment to a national contingency plan that clearly identifies the role of each of the constituent parts, including the local authorities and DEFRA. The pressures and burdens placed on local authorities, DEFRA, vets, administrators and farmers during the mass slaughter campaign were immense in my constituency. Emergency planning is required, in line with what has happened in terms of the maritime disasters that have occurred off the Welsh coastline.

It is right to widen the powers of slaughter to limit the spread of the disease. Enforcement during the first months of the crisis was patchy, as hon. Members have revealed. I believe that this Bill will clarify and eliminate unnecessary and complex legal injunctions without removing the right to appeal. The Bill needs greater scrutiny in Committee. However, I repeat that, only this year, the farming unions in Wales supported the slaughter policy in my area and upheld the right to appeal. It is fundamental, especially with the adjusted compensation proposed by the Bill, that a fair and concise appeals procedure be available. Again this needs to be looked at in Committee.

I wish to refer to the implications of the Bill and the relationship between the National Assembly for Wales and DEFRA. The Bill covers England and Wales, but I have concerns about the confusion that might occur between the devolved Administration and DEFRA. We need clarity, and I hope that the Minister will deal with that.

In conclusion, I wish to consider consumer confidence, which is mentioned in the Bill. Too often the consumer is overlooked in favour of powerful interest groups, such as landowners and farmers—consumers are important stakeholders and their opinions should be sought. During the recent general election campaign, I paid great attention to the ordinary consumers in my predominantly rural constituency. They told me of the need for the Government to take decisive action to recognise and prevent a future outbreak. Their views were echoed by the many small businesses in the tourism and agriculture-related sectors. I support the desire to enact policies that provide decisions and reduce the chances of prolonged crises of the sort that destroy our rural and urban communities.

My constituents want their Member of Parliament not only to voice their concerns, but to take decisive action to support legislation that is resolute and has the long-term prosperity of the countryside in mind. That is why I am pleased to support the Bill tonight. I hope that the Minister will take on board my concerns.

8.23 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South–East Cornwall): There have been some tremendously good, informed and experienced speeches in this debate because so many hon. Members have had direct experience in their constituencies of the problems during the foot and mouth crisis. There has been a large measure of agreement on the aims of the Bill, but—perhaps this is a problem for the Government—there has been considerable agreement across the House that these measures have not been well thought out and are not the best way of proceeding.

We have heard it suggested in the House and in the Select Committee that speed is of the essence, but one must wonder whether, this time, it is a matter of more haste, less speed. We have not had the benefit of the inquiries set up by the Government; in fact, these have only just started to take evidence. We are told that the foot and mouth disease outbreak is not actually over. Originally we were told that no inquiry was to start until the crisis was over; yet here we are proposing legislation before the crisis has finished, although I very much hope that we are at its tail end.

There has been no public inquiry, however much one has been demanded. Because of that, one might have expected a significant period of pre-legislative scrutiny. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) for securing one evidence session last week for the Select Committee—at rather short notice—but no one believes that that was the real consultation that would be necessary to give proper consideration to the proposals and to ensure that all stakeholders have had their opportunity to be consulted prior to the Bill coming to this House.

The Bill proposes extremely wide-ranging powers, and it surprises me and others that, in the Minister's view, the Bill does not breach the European convention on human rights. If the proposals were enacted and we had another foot and mouth crisis, one wonders how long it would be before the proposals were challenged and ultimately tested in the courts. The right to submit evidence in a court of law appears to have been taken away. Any system that looks at the evidence on one side only must be undemocratic and not in the best interests of justice in this country. All persons affected by the Bill's provisions, and not just the Minister, must have the right to contribute to the appeal process. The right of a post-slaughter judicial review is not sufficient to protect animal owners. I do not think that farmers, or other fair-minded people in this country, would consider that to be so either.

Mention has been made of pet owners. That reminds me of an incident involving a pet owner in my constituency, who was a long way from an outbreak and had a family pet—a pot-bellied Vietnamese pig. She had to move house and, quite properly, she telephoned to make certain what the arrangements were. She could not get any real indication and enlisted my support. The advice that I was given was perhaps not entirely helpful: it was suggested that my constituent have a farewell barbecue. In the end, a licence was granted. The initial response may have been given in the heat of battle, but that is not how we should treat what are very serious situations.

The Bill paves the way to enshrining contiguous culling as the principal weapon against any foot and mouth outbreak. The Minister is shaking his head. I understand why, and I know that there will be other alternatives, but as things stand now, regardless of any future proposals, that is what the Bill does.

Mr. Morley: There is nothing in the Bill that pre-empts future responses to any epidemic of whatever kind. It does not enshrine culling as the principal weapon but says that if culling is to be done, it must be done quickly and effectively.

Mr. Breed: Precisely. At present, that is all we have to go on. Should other proposals be made following the current inquiries, will the Bill be revisited and the provisions amended or improved accordingly?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the contiguous cull. Did the Minister's response mean that there would be a contiguous cull where an outbreak of foot and mouth has been identified and proven, or where there is a suspected contact and the Department wants to slaughter the animals on all the adjacent farms? If the latter is the case, it is absolutely outrageous. I stopped one such cull in my constituency, when there was a suspected contact in Rainow. Unfortunately, I missed the immediately adjoining farm, where people slipped in and slaughtered, but I managed to stop them doing it on the next farm. I believe that a contiguous cull must happen only with a proven case.

Mr. Breed *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has used his considerable experience to get in a question to the Minister. I suggest to the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) that he reclaim ownership of his speech.

Mr. Breed: I will, Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite my considerable sympathy for the hon. Gentleman's inquiry. I think that the powers in the Bill will mean that his latter alternative is the case. It will provide for indiscriminate culling on the flimsiest of justifications. There will be a "just in case, shoot first and answer questions later" policy, which I think is unacceptable.

The compensation provisions are being used as a weapon to beat the recalcitrant farmer into submission. The proposed sliding scale of penalties, based on the whim of a DEFRA inspector, is unsatisfactory. There should be a proper independent assessment of the risks that the farmer might have caused. Why do we need a system of penalties and compensation? Surely we should leave the compensation as it is and invoke fines for those who transgress. After all, we are to fine people who walk their dogs on footpaths and beaches, so why can we not fine the farmers who breach the biosecurity provisions, rather than tinkering with a compensation system?

I agree with most of what has been said about the control of imports. Last year I visited Felixstowe, a huge port through which there is significant trade. We inspected some of the ways in which imports were being handled. There were between 40 and 60 cases a week of illegal imports—of potatoes, meat, anything. We asked how many prosecutions there had been in, say, the past five years. We were told that that was very simple to answer, because there had been none.

[Mr. Breed]

When we asked why, we were told that the sheer time spent in prosecuting a case would impinge on the ability to conduct investigations; that the burden of proof needed and the hurdles that had to be jumped in order to get a case to court were extremely high; and that, even if all that had been done and the case won, the fine that can be imposed is so insignificant that the offender would probably hand over a cheque and run laughing from the court. The legislation is in place but we need to try to make it a little more effective.

The proposals for eliminating scrapie are quite sensible. Arguably, they could have been introduced some years ago, when other countries were clearly trying to eradicate scrapie from their flocks. Eliminating the disease will take time, so perhaps we need a timetable with annual targets so that we can be sure that we are bearing down on it over a reasonable period.

Consideration must also be given to the value of genetic diversity. We should not eradicate one disease from our national sheep flock only to reduce genetic diversity to such an extent that it causes other problems. We need vital sheep production in the future, giving us the necessary biodiversity, and we should remove scrapie if possible. Current scientific evidence suggests that we cannot achieve both, and we should weigh up the value of genetic diversity of our stock against the problems caused by scrapie.

The greatest omission from the Bill is also significant. The Government's advisers have said that if the animal movements ban had been introduced on day one instead of day three, the outbreak would have been significantly reduced. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and we should remember that the first outbreak was in pigs in Essex, but I am sure that, next time, animal movements will be stopped on day one. The Bill should address the issue of animal movements, especially as they are such a significant part of the way in which FMD, and possibly other diseases, are spread.

Animal movement restrictions, or the standstill proposals, should have been part of the Bill, in advance of the draconian provisions that we are now considering. I know that there would be practical difficulties and that farmers have well founded concerns about how they can run their businesses if all animals are subject to a 21-day standstill. However, we need some proper solutions, because animal movement is as important a factor as import restrictions. Before we address how we manage the disease when it has become endemic, we need to consider proposals that could prevent that from happening. The NFU and most farmers recognise that the status quo is not acceptable.

Another important factor is traceability. We need a technically and economically feasible identification system. Several commercial operations are considering methods of traceability through electronic identification, and they should be given assistance with that. Traceability, in its widest sense, is an area in which this country could lead Europe. We are already way ahead of the others and if we have a system that requires full traceability, we will need a good identification system.

All those factors would achieve more than this sledgehammer of a Bill. In some respects, the Bill is a knee-jerk response. It fails to wait for the inquiry proposals, and some aspects of it are against natural justice. If implemented, it will produce much confrontation at a time when we need co-operation. It will involve the unnecessary slaughter of many animals and cost millions of pounds. It must be resisted. The Minister should go back to the drawing board and produce a coherent, sensible contingency plan, perhaps with some legal backing if necessary, to deal more effectively with any future disease outbreak.

My colleagues and I will vote against Second Reading, and if the programme motion goes to a Division, we will also vote against that. That is not because we are against programme motions or, indeed, the aims of the Bill, but because of the speed with which the Bill has been introduced, the haste with which it is passing through the House and the implications it carries. If we take the measure of the debate we have had tonight, the clear implication for the Minister is that he may have the votes of his hon. Friends but he has not won their hearts and minds.

8.40 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): It is obvious that the Bill is in need of some friends, and I shall try to be one, but I make no apology for criticising some aspects of it, as it is our duty as Members of Parliament to scrutinise and recommend. My hon. Friend the Minister also seems to be in need of some friends; he will be pleased to know that my regional newspaper has referred to him as "Stalin". I am sure that all hon. Members share my feeling that I cannot think of anyone less like Stalin than him—the only similarity is that he once had whiskers.

The exaggerated comment on the subject that we are discussing sometimes misses the point about what we need to do. The Bill could be referred to as the Benefit of Hindsight Bill; as the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) said, we could all do with 20:20 hindsight, but now we need to learn and to take things forward.

I support the need for legislation, but I hope that when the Bill reaches the Standing Committee, it will not be only the animals that are slaughtered, because some changes and improvements are needed. If I am selected for the Committee, I hope to make some suggestions.

It is not only the Government who have lived in denial; some of the stories about foot and mouth are, in essence, about the fact that all concerned have lived in denial. The outbreak has taught us about two key factors. First, we learned how many animals were kept on holdings with insufficient biosecurity, which meant that the outbreak would be far worse than that in 1967, and worse than other outbreaks of disease, notwithstanding the existence of BSE, which is a rather different type of disease.

Secondly, some 30 years on, we know that the significant difference between now and the previous outbreak is the unacceptable speed and frequency with which animals are moved round the country. Whatever we think about some of the details in the Bill, it is a matter of simple necessity that we introduce some movement controls now. That idea was first discussed at the height of the outbreak, and it was not well received by many farmers, but if one talks to them quietly now, they accept the need for controls.

I have raised this subject so often that people will be sick of hearing me talk about it, but I make no apology for repeating my opinion that the role of dealers in the

market place, and the way in which they can determine how animal movements take place, is unjustified. We have learned, to our cost, about the role that dealers play in our methods of buying and selling animals—and we must do something about it. I am not sure whether the Bill quite does that, and that is one of the improvements that I hope to see.

There are many myths about vaccination. At the outset, I was favourably disposed to vaccination, and to firebreak vaccination; I still am. The Government, through my hon. Friend the Minister, have said candidly several times that they can see its benefits. Again with the benefit of hindsight, we can now say that, with co-operation from some elements in the farming community, vaccination could have been used.

The problem is that vaccination is not a cure. It is useful in some respects, but there is no evidence that prophylactic vaccination works. The simple fact is that the economics do not stack up. I know that we are talking not about economics but animal welfare and consumer perceptions. However, we cannot continue to vaccinate animals if it effectively costs more than they are worth in the marketplace. There are many examples of vaccines not being available, not working or not being detectable in animals that have been vaccinated or that carry antibodies. I always bow to the superior knowledge of the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who made those points. All the evidence that we took in the Select Committee tended to clarify—to the disappointment of those who want simple solutions—the fact that vaccination is not the answer to all the problems, at least not for the moment. Perhaps it will be in years to come, when smart vaccines are available.

Like my right hon. and hon. Friends, I support a public inquiry, but not a full judicial tribunal of evidence inquiry. As I tried to say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State some weeks ago at Question Time, the BSE inquiry, which was long in evidence, was fine for paying lawyers' wages but taught us next to nothing. We already knew most of what came out of the inquiry, which was sad, because I should have thought that there was something to be learned. There is always something to be learned from the minutiae, but we are still looking for scientific evidence on overall causation and transmission. As many Members have said, if we do not obtain sufficient evidence from the mini-inquiries, we can still call for a public inquiry. But we need the right sort of public inquiry: the evidence must be considered quickly and the results made known as soon as possible.

If we ask the right questions, we might get the right answers. It worries me that people are trying to fit up the Government; they say, "The Government are guilty and here is the evidence." Let us not beat around the bush—the Government made mistakes. But this was a huge outbreak, against which every other outbreak pales into insignificance. It was different from the one in 1967, affecting different types of animal. Contrary to what many Conservative Members said, the Army did not come to the rescue then in the same way as it did this time. We approached this outbreak differently, because we had to. Epidemiologists were much more prominent than vets. There are arguments in the scientific community about who did what and why, but we must face up to the fact that things have been different in this outbreak.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Why was the epidemic so quickly contained in the four counties of Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire in the 1967–68 outbreak? Are there not lessons to be learned?

Mr. Drew: I take that to be a rhetorical question because that is my point. The outbreak was different this time because of different features in various parts of the country. We were able to localise the problem in the 1967-68 outbreak which meant that we could pour resources into those areas. My county was not the worst affected this time. Even so, significant resources were poured into it to cope with the outbreak.

I hope that we can take several of those points on board, not necessarily in the Bill but through the change in mindset that must follow it. It is not just a question of what we do but of how we do it. We must look at the checks and balances provided by different organisations. I have made great play of the role of local government and central Government. In Gloucestershire, after some initial hiccups, both functioned amazingly well. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said, we must give credit where it is due—in this case, to the officials, who worked very hard. We must learn from what they did well and apply that knowledge in the Bill. I fear that rather than spreading good practice and tightening legislation, we are focusing on the negative. However, despite the criticism that I have voiced and will continue to voice, I believe that there is a need for legislation. Although I do not believe that the Government acted illegally, they were hamstrung.

We have talked about the dilemma faced by farmers who did not want their animals killed. Those who earn their bread and butter from farming made it absolutely clear that they understood from the outset why their animals had to be culled, and quickly. Opposition to the cull came mostly from those who are not completely dependent on farming. That is a harsh judgment, and Conservative Members may look askance, but that was the case in my constituency, and it was probably replicated in many others. Those whose animals were slaughtered made that sacrifice because they wanted the disease to be eradicated. They felt that it was wrong for others to suffer and they knew that the sooner the disease was brought under control, the earlier they could begin to participate again, with dignity, in an industry that would sustain them.

Mr. Breed: Farmers felt that they were participating voluntarily, along with their neighbours. Might not their attitude have been different if Stalin and his jackbooted crew had forced them to participate?

Mr. Drew: There is some validity in the hon. Gentleman's argument. As he knows, notwithstanding the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister, the Stalin of the Front Bench, is muttering away, the evidence from the Select Committee and the pre-legislative scrutiny is that the success of the 24-hour and 48-hour contiguous culls relied on taking out animals quickly. We cannot have it both ways. The evidence shows that if we had waited, the disease would have gathered momentum. We have to

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persuade people to comply, but we must have power to back us up. Sometimes individuals make sacrifices because they see that it is right to do so. I wish that people would not claim that science can prove things that are unprovable; we all know that science is imprecise, and in these matters we are pushing back the boundaries of knowledge.

I want to make a couple of observations to which I hope the Minister will respond. Like other hon. Members, I think that there is a lacuna in the Bill because it lacks a strategy for controlling imports. Such a strategy must be linked to the measures in the Food Labelling Bill. I make no apology for the fact that I am a supporter of that Bill, which is promoted by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). I know that these matters are ones in which we must relate to Europe, and I shall say no more about that, but we need to tighten controls. Anything that can be done in Committee can only be of benefit.

I turn now to the carrot and stick approach represented by the 75-25 per cent. arrangement. I am not sure whether the figures are right, and I am not sure whether it is the most appropriate way to handle the issue. The Government must come up with a more rigorous defence of that scheme.

I have already mentioned dealers, and we need to tackle their part in the operation of the livestock markets; otherwise, the biggest losers will be the auction marts to which the dealers are seeking to return. We will be doomed unless we prevent the problems that occurred in the past.

My hon. Friend the Minister will not be surprised to hear me say that the problems of BSE, foot and mouth and classical swine fever notwithstanding, some of us who represent certain parts of the country experience the continual crisis of bovine TB. What will be the impact on that disease when slaughter policies come into play? I am sure that on one side of that battle people will say, "Jolly good. Now we can take out all the badgers, because the Government have finally cottoned on to the fact that they need to be dealt with." On the other side, people will oppose doing anything of the sort.

Earlier, the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said that Labour Members were treading on egg shells, but my hon. Friend the Minister will be walking in a minefield on the issue of bovine TB. I leave him with those helpful remarks and look forward—hopefully—to serving on the Committee.

8.56 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I am grateful to be able to follow the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), before he leaves for the gulag. I am also grateful for the opportunity to speak on this serious Bill, as the subject affects a great number of my constituents.

The Bill could have provided additional powers by order to tackle foot and mouth and other animal diseases. Secondly, it could have provided additional powers to deal with transmissible spongiform encephalopathy in sheep.

In principle, the opportunity to legislate on those matters is most welcome. Such legislation could try to improve the speed at which the Government control the outbreak of those diseases. However, despite such obvious benefits, the wording of the Bill is such that in practice many of them have been lost.

The Bill comes at a time when the entire countryside is crying out for a full public and independent investigation into the handling of the foot and mouth crisis. The Government said repeatedly that that would be too expensive and too slow, so they opted for three separate sub-inquiries. However, now that we have seen the size of the death toll of farm animals, the size of the compensation bill and the damage done to people's livelihoods both in tourism and in farming, there is no justification for preventing a full independent and public inquiry, such as the one held by the Government into BSE—albeit covering only, conveniently, the period up to 1997. I reject the Government's excuse for further avoidance of an inquiry and urge the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to reconsider.

Part 1 of the Bill deals with the power to slaughter. To what extent does the Minister need extra power to slaughter any animal that he thinks should be slaughtered in order to prevent the spread of foot and mouth? Since the last confirmed outbreak was reported on 30 September, 2,030 cases have been notified. Since 3 February, 3.9 million animals have been slaughtered for disease eradication purposes; 1.9 million animals have been slaughtered under the livestock welfare disposal scheme; *Farmers Weekly* estimates that as many as 2 million dead animals may have been left out of the Government's statistics; hundreds of thousands of young livestock have been excluded from the official figures; and the direct cost of foot and mouth may have amounted to almost £2 billion. It is hardly surprising that my spellcheck rejected DEFRA and offered me "death row" instead.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman made that up.

Mr. Wiggin: No, it is entirely true.

On a slightly light hearted note, not only animals that carry foot and mouth—we saw the effects of the disease on the horse racing industry—are affected by the Bill. I have written to the Minister about my constituent who farms worms but is unable to sell them because he fears that the virus may be in the soil. I hope that the Minister will reply to my letter of about three months ago.

Will the Minister also clarify whether the measure will affect cats and dogs that stray across restricted ground? Will they be subject to the slaughter policy?

Mr. Morley: Scurrilous comments appeared in some of the Sunday papers to the effect that the Bill would give us powers to slaughter cats, dogs, horses, gerbils, goldfish, rabbits and just about anything. The Bill applies only to farm animals that are susceptible to the disease.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful to the Minister for that clarification.

The Bill will also enable the Minister to pursue the other group likely to commit infringements—ramblers and those who ignore "footpath closed" signs. It provides severe penalties for people who deliberately bring about the spread of the disease. Not only might they face six months in prison, but they could also find that their pets are confiscated and that they are no longer allowed to own animals.

Such provisions are draconian and the burden of proving deliberate infection may well lie with the Government, who, in the case of many farmers, may rely on hearsay or very thin evidence. Banning the ownership of livestock will destroy not only farmers' businesses, but their way of life. The Minister will be aware that it is simply not possible for a Welsh hill farmer to grow wheat on the side of a mountain.

On vaccination, I recognise that the Minister has every reason to cause to be slaughtered any animal that has been treated with a vaccine for the purpose of preventing the spread of disease. I originally thought that that was possibly one of the more necessary provisions in the Bill, but clause 4(4) deals with the compensation payable to farmers after their animals have been slaughtered. There seems to be no reason why vaccinated animals should be considered inferior in terms of value simply because they have been vaccinated to prevent the spread of the disease. If they are so considered, farmers will have no incentive to assist officials and it will immediately lead the farmer to oppose the Government instead of encouraging co-operation. Farmers who vaccinate voluntarily to save their stock because of its rarity or genetic value will also be put at a disadvantage. How else can farmers save their stock while contributing to the firebreak effort to end the epidemic?

Part 3 deals with enforcement powers. I wonder how necessary such powers are, because it appears that the Government are trying to close the door long after the horse has bolted. Newspapers take particular delight in reporting any case in which farmers or smallholders resist the Government's slaughter policy, but I am not aware of any case in which it was suggested that people had harboured an infected animal. I am happy to give way if my understanding is not correct.

Mr. Morley: In some cases tests showed animals to be positive, yet officials were refused access and court injunctions had to be sought. I want to be careful about giving particular examples, because they can be subjective. We must consider the Bill's overall objective, which is to speed up culling if it is used as an option. The Bill does not presuppose that culling will be the option chosen but, if it is, it must be carried out quickly and efficiently.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply.

In most of the cases that we have discussed, farmers exercised the highest standards of biosecurity. The only animal to escape the contiguous cull was Phoenix the calf, which was spared and given Government protection for emotional reasons. I suspect that the decision owed more to electoral opportunity than to a determined attempt by the Government to eradicate the disease. However, that example would not be possible under the Bill, so does the Minister deeply regret the sparing of that small calf?

Clause 6 amends the Animal Health Act 1981, new section 16(4) of which refers to a justice of the peace—not necessarily in court—issuing a warrant to an inspector. I have grave misgivings about this provision. Are the usual checks and balances in place, because the inspector need invent only a minor excuse for the farmer in question to lose 25 per cent. of the value of his stock? Under new subsection (9), the inspector also has the power to request or demand

"such assistance as he reasonably needs for the purposes mentioned".

However, that will not leave the farmer with much opportunity to appeal if he deems the inspector's request to be unreasonable.

Many farmers may for legitimate reasons have problems providing "such assistance" as the inspector "reasonably needs". Perhaps it would have been better if the wording had referred to the farmer providing "any possible assistance" that he could provide. For example, it is no good asking him for something that he does not possess unless that is part of a Government strategy to cut payments for compensation.

Given the stories of horrendous abuse of my constituents by Department officials and given the fact that no qualifications are specified for inspectors, the provisions relating to refusal to be obedient to any whim of any inspector are wrong. Once again, the Bill is over-draconian.

Under proposed section 65, an inspector may examine any vehicle to ascertain whether the provisions of the Act are being complied with. There is no mention of time scale. Can we envisage people's vehicles being impounded for long periods? Conversely, vehicles such as those shown on television dripping with blood and other liquid could be impounded in an area that was not previously infected. I hope that the images that we saw will not be repeated when or if the disease recurs.

Under the Bill, the Minister may by order amend the Act to allow for the adjustment of compensation. That is worrying because it creates an area of political judgment and subjectivity instead of objective, fair and well-understood compensation. Under proposed schedule 3A, the Government have split compensation into three sections. Only 75 per cent. of the value of the animal prior to slaughter will be payable, and in all cases the Minister must decide, after considering an inspector's assessment, whether to pay all or part of the remaining 25 per cent.

Although I recognise that in some cases the Government might want to penalise farmers who do not practise biosecurity, surely we should start from full compensation rather than build up to it. The Bill approaches the matter from the wrong direction. Will farmers be fully aware of which biosecurity measures they are expected to implement before inspectors come to slaughter their flocks?

People are being put in a virtually impossible position. The inspector must decide whether the occupier of the premises created a significant risk of the spread of foot and mouth during the previous 21 days, but how on earth will the inspector know what has been going on during the previous three weeks? The answer is that inspectors will not know and will therefore generalise. Farmers will be forced to go to court to claim 25 per cent. of the value of their stock because they will not agree with the wording of the inspector's report.

Surely it would be useful to retain local vets, who are sensitive to local conditions, to advise all their clients on appropriate measures. That advice would then be the benchmark against which compliance could be judged. That would of course take into consideration all local difficulties and conditions.

A fee is due for appeals. Although I recognise that the intention is to prevent nit-picking, it shifts the burden from the Government to the farmer. The intention cannot be just to hold back the farmer's money and then to make him pay to try to reclaim it. That is compounded by the

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Government's record on paying their bills. Surely a bad payer should not be able to legislate on paying interest on sums that they have held back. That is wrong. The National Pig Association described the Government's attitude to farmers during the crisis as inhumane. Desperate farmers complained that the Government have turned out to be the country's No. 1 bad payer. Jean Turnbull of the NPA said that that was maladministration of the most vicious kind.

The lateness of compensation payments is due to civil service bungling. When people telephoned asking when compensation would be paid, officials refused to give their names. I have had many complaints from my constituents that they could never get hold of the same person, so were forced every time they telephoned the DEFRA office to begin from scratch. It is very difficult for farmers at the best of times; such problems make things worse.

On scrapie, the Minister may by order specify sheep genotypes that are susceptible to transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. That is a laudable approach to cutting the time frame for the eradication of scrapie and the introduction of genetically superior sheep in the British flock. I hope that full compensation will be payable because, as the Minister will be aware, the price of sheep is not high at the moment. Perhaps he has chosen a particularly bad time to introduce that positive step.

A person who receives a restriction notice may not appeal until the end of a 21-day period. The Ministry does not have a very good record of dealing with any problem in 21 days, and it therefore seems unfair that it should insist on farmers reacting quite so speedily. Given that the Government took more than four years to decide that the sheep brains that they had been looking at were in fact cow brains, the Ministry is painting itself into a very small and potentially expensive corner. Given the enormous power of enforcement, perhaps a slightly longer notice period would have been valuable.

There are elements of good news. Miles Blackwell left £10 million to the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, but he did so without the knowledge that the Government were planning to slaughter many rare breeds because of their lack of resistance to scrapie. That funding could not have come at a better time and is desperately needed.

The Bill is about shifting the blame for the gross mishandling of foot and mouth disease from the former Ministry to the farmer. It is designed to subordinate the farmer to the Minister and his inspectors. It will put the farmer in a position of dependency, yet Professor Mark Woolhouse told Members of Parliament that if the Government had simply imposed a ban on livestock movement 72 hours earlier than they did, the spread of the disease would have been halved.

The Countryside Alliance criticised the Government—*[Interruption.]* It did so for the very good reason that the system for identifying, slaughtering and disposing of infected animals is cumbersome and substantially increases the risk of spreading the disease. The gap between diagnosis and disposal should be hours, not days. The Government should prioritise the disposal of animals, not the slaughter of uninfected animals. Indeed, animals lay dead for nine days at Winforton in my constituency.

One question that an inquiry should answer is whether animals were killed in greater numbers and more quickly because the Prime Minister wanted to call an election. Newspapers have also reported that DEFRA employees could have helped to spread the disease. Indeed, in my constituency, I found that vets who lived in Worcestershire were travelling across Herefordshire to cull in Brecon. I wrote to the Minister asking about that very serious risk, but, again, I have not yet had a reply.

The importation of meat from abroad is the most important threat to British farming. It would cost the Government about £8 million to provide bio x-rays and staff to prevent the importation of bush meat at Heathrow airport. The cost to the Government would be passed on to the passengers. In the 14 checks carried out at Heathrow last year, 5 tonnes of meat were found. A single body would need to be responsible for the prevention of the importation of infected meat, and the cost would work out at less than 10p per passenger. That would also help animals in the wild by reducing the poachers' markets.

The early introduction of the Bill has greatly surprised the NFU, and we would all have welcomed a longer consultation period, involving the farming industry.

Parts 1 and 3 contain the slaughter and enforcement provisions. Although discussions have been held on the prevention of scrapie, genotype research is still in its infancy, and there does not seem to be a great deal of explanation of how the Government will enforce the cull or control.

The Food Standards Agency has always maintained that there is no danger in eating lamb, yet the Bill contains measures to tackle BSE in sheep, although we are no nearer knowing whether BSE can infect sheep.

The lot of farmers and their stock would be significantly improved if the Government were to take steps to stop the European Parliament amending the directive on veterinary medicinal products. Farmers are currently free to purchase non-prescription medicines—such as wormers, vaccines and sheep dip—from tightly regulated distributors who employ qualified staff, trained to industry standards and controlled by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and its inspectorate.

New proposals would force farmers to buy such products from vets or pharmacies—and then only by prescription. That proposal will introduce further impracticality and higher costs, and it will finish the jobs of 3,500 people. Without doubt, all that would have a direct, negative impact on animal welfare standards. There is no evidence to show that any improvement in food safety standards or animal welfare standards would result from implementing that change; instead a whole legion of qualified people would be removed from the food production process, damaging the businesses of my constituents David Pryce of Medicrop, John Hancock of Hanco National Pig Supplies, Mrs. Dickson of Westhope Livestock Supplies, as well as Mr. Davies and Margaret Edwards. What we need is legislation to protect us and to maintain the standards of animal welfare, while keeping the cost to farmers competitive.

At a time when farmers' incomes average £5,200, any step to help them would be welcome. It is a shame that the Government are not doing more to cut red tape at this difficult time. Indeed, they did not even manage to claim the full agrimonetary compensation.

The Bill will require detailed scrutiny if we are to capitalise on the lessons learned from the crisis. We must ask about the position of the National Assembly for Wales in the light of clause 14. Has the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had discussions with the Scottish Assembly about the Bill so that we might have co-ordinated legislation for cross-border outbreaks? I see the Minister nodding, and I am grateful.

We should question whether the power to slaughter is compatible with the European convention on human rights. Will the Government publish their legal advice on that as well?

It is clear that to introduce the Bill before any of the three inquiries have concluded their findings is premature. The timing of the Bill is curious and its drafting looks like a rush job. From the huge numbers of dead animals to the vast cost to the tourist industry and to farmers, it is clear that the Bill covers only the tip of the iceberg.

The Government cannot consider that the Bill represents a positive step until all the facts are known. Separate experiences of both farmers and people working for the Ministry throughout the country need to be heard. Introducing legislation is no substitute for equipping people with the facts. That is why we should not support the Bill until the need for it is brought out by a full and independent public inquiry. Nor should we support the Bill until the Government take real steps to prevent the importation of diseases.

9.16 pm

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I believe that the increased powers that are sought by Ministers are justified, as long as they are balanced by responsibilities that are taken on by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State confirmed that DEFRA hopes to pay all compensation within three weeks. That is one of the responsibilities that the Department should be taking on if it is expecting to have increased powers.

I dealt with the case of a farmer who had to wait many weeks for his compensation merely because of a computer fault. In the event, I managed to get the problem sorted out in 24 hours. However, that sort of thing should not be happening.

In Staffordshire, the National Farmers Union, trading standards officers, vets and other officers worked well together during the outbreak. Inevitably, however, there were delays and huge frustrations for farmers. I believe that the proposed wider powers will help to speed up the process. The disease would have been slowed if the cull had been conducted with more rigour, so those powers are justified if they hasten the ending of future diseases.

Farmers were quick to criticise, but they cannot have it both ways. If they want things sorted out quickly for their benefit, they cannot hold out and introduce unnecessary delays either to maximise the money that they receive following negotiations about compensation or for other reasons.

Many Members have told the House about cases where the preventive culling of animals was not justified. In Dilhorne, in my constituency, apparently healthy sheep were moved on the authority of a private vet, and then found to be infected. That caused the unnecessary further loss of animals and of local livelihoods. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) that we must examine animal movements, especially of sheep, and control the scale of them, for welfare reasons and because of concerns about the threat of disease being spread.

Farmers have a basis for complaint about illegal imports. I have raised the issue before on the Floor of the House. We must do more to control illegal imports, whether they come in on the back of a lorry or are brought in personally. There are anecdotes about Customs officers following a trail of blood from suitcases. I do not know whether they are true. However, it is ludicrous to allow people to import in that way. When a school party from my constituency went to France, its members could not even take a bag of beef-flavoured crisps into the country. We must make sure that our standards match those of other countries and stop those imports.

I do not see why farmers should not receive compensation as an incentive to comply with biosecurity measures.

Mr. Russell Brown: Schedule 1 refers to adjusted compensation. During the foot and mouth outbreak, did my hon. Friend, like me, receive phone calls from people who were doing their utmost to ensure that they did everything correctly and had full biosecurity, although neighbouring farms were doing very little—in fact, some people did nothing to prevent the spread of the disease to their farms?

Charlotte Atkins: I certainly did; that caused a good deal of anger in my constituency and along its borders.

We must ensure that biosecurity measures are clearly defined so that farmers can easily comply with them. The Government have a proud record on compensation. After all, they introduced 100 per cent. compensation for animals infected with bovine tuberculosis; the previous Government did not act in that way. Many farmers in my constituency, which has been seriously affected by bovine TB, have reason to be grateful to the Government for conceding that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) spoke movingly of the impact of foot and mouth and the scale of the devastation in Cumbria. Staffordshire was not the centre of the outbreak this time round, although it was in 1967. Even though it became officially free of foot and mouth at the beginning of October, there is still great concern about the impact of the disease on the county. For instance, we still have no open livestock markets, six months after the last case, which has had a huge impact on places like Leek in my constituency, as markets obviously set the market price for animals. It is ludicrous that farmers get one stock price for all their animals, whether the poorest or the best lambs are on offer. The area surrounding Leek is farmed by hill farmers, and the market also plays an important role in breaking down the isolation that many of them suffer. Many of those farmers earn less than £5,000 a year, so they are not wealthy by any stretch of the imagination. Indeed, Staffordshire Moorlands district council has paid out nearly £100,000 to help agricultural workers who have lost their jobs in the Moorlands. However, those housing benefits could be the tip of the iceberg, because the knock-on effects on the rural economy could have a much a greater impact, which we have yet to experience.

A lot of participants in our debate have acknowledged that foot and mouth did not just affect farmers. That is why the Bill is important; we must not focus just on the

[Charlotte Atkins]

impact on farmers, who have a responsibility to recognise the knock-on effect of the disease on the rest of the economy. I was delighted that the Government recognised the impact on tourism and local businesses. I was particularly pleased that the Treasury and Advantage West Midlands finally agreed that Staffordshire should benefit from the rural recovery fund grant scheme. So far, £700,000 has been awarded in grant aid since June. One firm in my constituency that benefited was the Peak School of Hang Gliding in Wetton. It was decimated by the foot and mouth outbreak and although the grant will not help the firm to recover the money that it has lost, it will see it through to the future. It will ensure that the firm can invest in computer equipment, regenerate its business with a web page to attract further trade, produce its own publicity leaflets and buy new equipment.

Although Staffordshire has not been at the centre, the outbreak has had devastating effects. We must allow the Government to take on increased powers. Of course, the powers must be properly scrutinised in Committee—that is the role of a Committee during the passage of a Bill—and we should support Second Reading tonight.

9.25 pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I shall be brief. I apologise to the House for not being present all afternoon—I was in the Chamber for the opening speeches, but afterwards I had to attend the Public Accounts Committee hearing. I look forward to the National Audit Office inquiry into foot and mouth next year and the PAC hearing that will follow. I hope that we may see the Minister at that time next year.

The Bill shows all the signs of being hurried. I cannot support it on Second Reading because of the wide-ranging and sweeping powers that it confers on Ministers. The Bill states that it is immaterial whether animals are affected with foot and mouth; it is immaterial whether they have been in contact with animals so affected; it is immaterial whether they have been exposed to the infection of foot and mouth; and it is immaterial whether they have been treated with vaccine.

If we were giving the powers to a Department that had the confidence of farmers, I might consider supporting the Bill, but the farmers in my constituency, South Norfolk, have very little confidence in the Department. That is a result of the way in which classical swine fever was handled—I am pleased to say that we were able to avoid foot and mouth directly, although we suffered from the indirect effects—the way in which the re-establishment of pig movements was handled, a range of issues relating to pig farrowing, the new regulations being introduced for laying hens, and the mix-up over sheep's brains and cows' brains. My constituents do not have confidence in the Department, so I cannot support the wide-ranging powers.

Furthermore, I cannot support the compensation regime. I know that the Bill is designed to provide additional powers to tackle foot and mouth, but from reading the clause headings, such as "Extension of power to slaughter", "Adjusted compensation"—downwards, of course—"Treatment: power of entry", "Slaughter: power of entry", "Slaughter: warrants", "Refusal and obstruction of inspector" and "Deliberate infection of animals", one could be forgiven for coming to the conclusion that the outbreak was entirely the farmers' fault. There may be some farmers who behaved improperly, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) that the assumption should be 100 per cent. compensation in the first instance. There should be a prima facie assumption that farmers are entitled to that.

The final reason why I cannot support the Bill is that it ignores the most important issue—it has been mentioned by so many other speakers that I hope the Minister has heard it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), the hon. Members for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) and for West Ham (Mr. Banks), who is no longer in his place, and many others spoke about illegal imports. The Minister should speak to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and to Mr. Richard Broadbent, the chairman of Customs and Excise, and get that issue sorted out. We have rats, bats, gorillas, monkeys, porcupines and anteaters coming into Heathrow unchecked, and the Government are doing practically nothing about it. It is about time that they did.

The Bill gives far too much power to the Minister, more or less unchecked, the compensation regime is wrong-headed, and the Bill makes no mention of the central problem—illegal imports.

9.29 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I cannot imagine many Second Reading debates in which the House has had the privilege of hearing speeches by the former Leader of the Opposition, who spoke after eight years away from the Back Benches, the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, himself a former Agriculture Minister, and two previous distinguished Agriculture Ministers. It has been a very wide-ranging and interesting debate.

I must mention first my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). The reference to Richmond, Yorks always amuses me somewhat. I am aware that there are two Richmonds in the United Kingdom, but there is no doubt that my right hon. Friend represents the Yorkshire one. Not only is he a Yorkshireman, but he is proud of Yorkshire, and I have no doubt that Yorkshire is 100 per cent. proud of him. He and his neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), spoke from personal experience of the foot and mouth epidemic in Yorkshire and about the fact that there had been so much bungling and incompetence in the exercise of powers by officials. They expressed support for a truly public and open inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks said that the onus on farmers that is apparent in the Bill should be placed on the Government themselves. He also supported import control and gave a vivid description of some of the imports into this country that could have an adverse effect on plant and animal health.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) made a very interesting speech. She has much experience in these matters and I very much hope that she will serve on the Committee that considers the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), who apologises for being unable to be present for the winding-up speech, also gave of his long experience of ministerial office.

On the Labour Benches, we were very fortunate once again in hearing from the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), who was loquacious, as always, but put in a

splendid performance. None the less, he admitted that he, too, was uneasy about the sweeping additional powers given to the Minister by the Bill. In a very reflective and constructive speech, the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd), who serves on the Select Committee, expressed qualified support for the Bill and said that he wanted improvements to be made at the Committee stage.

The Celtic fringe was also represented. The Welsh case was put by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), although the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) also spoke and might object to my saying that. The Scottish influence came in the form of the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce). I must refer to one more hon. Member: my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), whom I mention only because, like me, he followed someone of the same name into the House of Commons.

I detected a certain lack of support for the Bill on both sides of the House. Those who said that they would vote in support of Second Reading expressed considerable and numerous reservations. As a result, much work will be ahead of us in the Committee stage.

Despite the fact that almost 6 million animals have been slaughtered at a cost to the public purse of almost £2 billion, and although rural businesses of every sort are reeling and United Kingdom farmers are still suffering from months of over-stocking with little or no income as a result of the epidemic, the Government have chosen to give themselves further draconian powers in the face of a future disease outbreak. They obviously consider the proposals in the Bill to be more important than acting positively to prevent another disease outbreak by improving border inspections to stop illegal meat imports, which threaten human as well as animal health. Moreover, they have taken no action to tackle the issue of cheap food imports that are not produced to our own high standards, which undermine our farmers' competitiveness and carry serious risks of infection with animal disease. For example, urgent action should have been taken as a precautionary measure at the outset of the epidemic to prevent the importation of meat from countries with endemic foot and mouth disease.

The proposals in the Bill do nothing to assist farmers. They are a knee-jerk and panicked reaction by the Government to the implications of their handling of the epidemic, with the dithering, delays and centralised control that resulted in hundreds and thousands of animals being unnecessarily culled.

Conservatives and every rural organisation have persistently called for a full, open and independent public inquiry into the causes and handling of the epidemic to establish the true facts. The Government are running scared and refuse to establish such an inquiry, giving the excuse that it would take too long. That is patently untrue. There is no reason for not producing a comprehensive report in a reasonable time to allow mature reflection before leaping prematurely to legislate.

The Bill makes a mockery of the inquiries that the Government have already set up. Any reform in response to the epidemic should react to the recommendations of the "lessons learned" inquiry. At a stroke, the measure detracts from the inquiry that Dr. Iain Anderson is conducting.

If the Bill is enacted—we shall resist its provisions at every stage—it will empower DEFRA vets and officials to the extent that farmers would have to stand by and watch the compulsory slaughter of their stock. They would be powerless to prevent it. Compensation would be determined by DEFRA officials, who would take into account whether the farmer had complied with departmental orders. There would be no meaningful right of appeal and no appeal before the slaughter took place.

In *The Daily Telegraph* today, Adam Nicolson sums up the position in an article entitled, "How foot and mouth is fuelled by computers and cluelessness". He writes that the new changes

"allowing the Government to kill any animal it wants to, whether the farmers wants it killed or not are yet another symptom of a political and official culture governed by a contempt for any authority but its own."

Throughout the epidemic, the Government sought to sully the names of United Kingdom farmers by accusing them of increasing the spread of the disease through allegedly poor biosecurity measures.

If Ministers had deployed appropriate resources in the early stages of the outbreak, the disease would have been eradicated in a shorter time. Scientists such as Professor Mark Woolhouse and Dr. Neil Ferguson have corroborated that view. It is incontrovertible that failure to minimise delays between suspicion of infection, slaughter and disposal of carcases at the beginning of the epidemic, especially in those vital three days in February, meant that the Government quickly and irrevocably lost control.

Anyone who has visited rural communities knows that DEFRA officials were responsible for many biosecurity lapses. There are abundant reports of such errors, whether caused during farm-to-farm blood testing or by the inadvertent introduction of the disease to a clean farm by DEFRA officials or those contracted to the Department through moving infected livestock from one farm to another, unaware of farm boundaries. It will be interesting to know the extent of the biosecurity that the Government will require of farmers before permitting their full compensation cheque to be processed. Will they be given prior, clear advice about the Government's requirements and will it be farm specific?

In this country, we have always believed that people are innocent until proven guilty. At present, the proposals are loaded towards the Government and against natural justice.

Mr. Banks: Who wants to be a millionaire?

Mrs. Winterton: As far as that is concerned, the Government have elevated many millionaires to the upper House. If they had the same work ethic as farmers, they would turn up in the other place a little more often. One millionaire who advises the Government has attended the other place only four times since he took his seat. What a record. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not shout. We do not have a debate on the House of Lords at this moment. Perhaps some other time.

Mrs. Winterton: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. I had to respond in kind.

Part 2 of the Bill seeks to reduce by about half the likely time horizon for the eradication of scrapie in the sheep flock. There are no objections in principle to that aim, although a voluntary system would have been preferred by the industry.

[Mrs. Winterton]

Many questions remain unanswered, to which we shall return in Committee. I trust that meaningful consultation with the industry will take place about details and timing, and that a willingness will be expressed to compensate fully for losses incurred as a result of the introduction of the compulsory scheme.

Since the announcement of the Animal Health Bill, it has been recognised for what it is: a dictatorial, hasty piece of legislation that seeks in a cold and calculating way to blame farmers and to absolve the Government of responsibility for the sheer scale of the foot and mouth epidemic. I invite right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to vote for the amendment this evening and to vote against the Bill.

9.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I welcome the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) to the Dispatch Box. This is the first time that she and I have debated across the House, and I am sure that we shall do so again.

I did not recognise the Bill that she was talking about. She complained about the Bill giving compulsory powers to kill farmers' animals whether they liked it or not. Those powers were introduced in the Animal Health Act 1981. This Bill is about issues such as access.

Many contributions to the debate were thoughtful and sensible, and I hope that I can respond to them in kind. My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) asked about the details of the biosecurity assessment, which is a sensible point. We shall hold detailed consultation on those assessment measures, and there is no reason why we should not use that as part of guidance to farmers in future.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) asked about the time scale of the Bill, and I shall say more about that in a moment. My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) raised the issue of vaccination. Those are important issues that we shall address and that I am sure that the lessons learned through the inquiries will address. I repeat that there is nothing in the Bill that pre-empts the conclusions of any future inquiries, or that specifies one particular way of responding to animal disease outbreaks in future.

On the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble, only a minority of farmers caused difficulties; the majority co-operated. I must point out to the hon. Member for Congleton that the majority of farming organisations welcome the Bill in principle. Of course they have concerns about the detail, and I am sure that I shall be able to address them in Committee.

I was pleased to see the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) back on the Benches making a contribution. He criticised MAFF, although, in fairness, I think that he recognises that many of the people working in the regions and for the old MAFF and the new DEFRA worked round the clock and made an enormous commitment to dealing with the outbreak. Some unfortunate aspersions were cast on those people and on their commitment, and I want to place on record how hard they worked to defeat the disease and to bring the world's worst outbreak of foot and mouth under control more quickly than the 1967 outbreak. That was no mean achievement.

The right hon. Gentleman raised a number of points. He said that no details of contingency plans had been placed in the House of Commons Library. I understand that the national contingency plan was revised and submitted to the EU Commission in June 2000. It has been made publicly available on request, and was deposited in the Library on 14 May. I understand that the contingency plan has not been made available on the DEFRA website, but I give an undertaking tonight to ensure that it is.

The right hon. Gentleman and others referred to illegal imports. As a Government, we take that issue seriously, but many measures to strengthen our procedures do not require primary legislation and there is no reason to include them in the Bill. However, that does not mean that they cannot be addressed. Since the outbreak, DEFRA has been leading interdepartmental discussions with Customs and Excise, the Home Office, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the Food Standards Agency, local authorities and health authorities to strengthen the arrangements at ports of entry.

The publicity available to travellers about import rules has been strengthened, as has the effectiveness with which evidence about illegal activities is shared among various enforcement agencies. Steps are being taken to improve the effectiveness of enforcement policy at ports by better targeting of available resources.

I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman—unlike one or two organisations and individuals, unfortunately—was not saying that illegal imports were the No. 1 issue in relation to the foot and mouth disease outbreak. It is an important issue, but the way in which the disease spread is also important.

Mr. Todd: The long list of organisations with which DEFRA is consulting highlights one of the difficulties of dealing with this subject. There are many hands involved and, in a typically English style, we do not co-ordinate them very well.

Mr. Morley: I certainly look to co-ordinate wherever possible, and the consultation will be wide.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) put the issues in perspective. When one looks at the contiguous cull, which is a disease-control measure, there must be a balance in relation to the associated risks. We took special cases into account in the contiguous cull under the present arrangements, with appeals to the district veterinary managers. There is no reason why we cannot do that in future, and no reason why we cannot strengthen the procedures and make them clearer to understand. We can consult on that.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) referred to the gap between policy and application, and identified problems of local decision making that did not fit into the national context. The Government set up the joint co-ordinating committee to bring together all the different agencies and organisations, as well as having the COBRA committee which met weekly. However, we are not saying that mistakes were not made or that improvements cannot be made for the future. Those matters will be addressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) warned me about taking advice from officials; when it comes to advice, I always listen carefully to what he has to say. Understandably, he was concerned about the culling of pet farm animals and susceptible animals such as llamas. Pet farm animals such as goats, llamas or pigs can get the disease. In that respect, we must have measures that apply to all animals that can spread the diseases. I recognise that there are sensitivities about pets and sanctuaries. We will take those into account in the guidance that we give our district veterinary managers and in drawing up potential exemptions. However, that will have to be based on veterinary advice in relation to disease control. We cannot give automatic exemptions.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) referred to the speed of response, and to the interesting idea of taking a second opinion of available vets in relation to an appeal. I am happy to look at that proposal in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) supported the Bill, but was cautious. I understand the points that he made and I am sure that they can be addressed. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) mentioned the need for flexibility and a pragmatic approach. She also mentioned vaccination—a point that will be addressed—and emphasised the need to be guided by good science. I absolutely accept that. She asked what measures would be taken about sheep's milk should BSE be detected. BSE in sheep would spread via different pathways from BSE in cattle. That is why a sub-committee of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee expressed concern. I will write to her about that in further detail.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): The Minister rightly talks about good science. Will he confirm that Sir Brian Follett's inquiry at the Royal Society will examine the possible effects of vaccination on foot and mouth disease?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I can confirm that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) raised local problems as a Cumbrian Member. I want to put on record my thanks for the major role that he played in identifying problems in the area. He brought them to the Government's attention so that action could be taken to rectify them.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) asked about the "lessons learned" inquiry. I repeat that it does not pre-empt any future inquiry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) gave a clear example of how the contiguous cull can be effective, and was so in his constituency. Of course there were practical problems, as he said. He sought an assurance that we would not rule out a "vaccinate to live" policy. I am happy to give him that. We will almost certainly consider pursuing such a policy. He, too, asked about pet farm animals and sanctuaries. I repeat that we will be sensitive about that. He asked whether such animals could be vaccinated, and of course we can consider that.

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) asked about not ruling out any particular option. Again, I am happy to give him an assurance on that. He also spoke about a scrapie timetable. That is an important point. We have had discussions with the sheep organisations. [HON. MEMBERS: "Baa."] Sheep farmers' organisations, I should have said. There are serious issues concerning time scale, genetic diversity and the need for traceability. Diversity can be dealt with in the Bill, but traceability will have to come later.

Malcolm Bruce: The Minister is being very reasonable and saying that he can deal with all the issues that have been raised, but the Bill is to go through the House in three weeks. Can he honestly say that all those issues can be dealt with in that time scale? Is that reasonable?

Mr. Morley: Our debate has gone rather wider than what is in the Bill, but I do indeed believe that the concerns that have been raised can and will be addressed in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) spoke about the many myths that have appeared during the outbreak and about the role of dealers. He also made the important point that, of course, many things went wrong—most of them have been highlighted in this debate—but that many things went right as well. We should not forget that in relation to lessons learned. He also spoke about bovine TB, which I accept is an important issue.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) was concerned about some of the details regarding bush meat. To my knowledge, we are the first Government who have arrested and jailed people for importing bush meat. We take these issues seriously.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) talked about the speed of payments to farmers. That is an important matter and we will certainly take it seriously.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) raised several issues, but I did not think that he quite understood all the measures in the Bill.

Much of the debate has been about the principle of culling. Let me make it clear that the Bill is about more than that. Ideally, nobody wants animals ever again to be culled here on the scale that has been necessary in this outbreak. That is all the more reason why, if we are to have culling, it must be done speedily and effectively.

In response to points made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham and others, of course we are all concerned about culling animals. The Government want to minimise the number of animals culled. The measures in the Bill mean that, by taking quicker and more effective action, fewer animals will be affected.

We have consulted on the scrapie proposals in some detail. I discussed the matter with a stakeholder group last Friday and we had a good response to our attempts to deal with what is a serious issue. We will consult on the biosecurity assessments and there is no reason why we cannot do so in parallel with the Bill. Many hon. Members have raised the issue of the contiguous culling procedures, and we can consult on those. We can also consult in parallel with the Bill on the details of the local appeals, how they can be made and what exemptions will exist. We also have a timetable for the scrapie plan, which we have already started to discuss with the National Sheep Association and the NFU.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Will the Minister confirm that the consultations that he has just mentioned will concern

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

secondary legislation and that in Wales those matters will be dealt with by the National Assembly and not by his Department?

Mr. Morley: We will look at how the National Assembly for Wales deals with these measures. We have worked closely and effectively with the National Assembly and it has had much autonomy in its handling of the outbreak. We will look to learn the lessons from that for all the devolution arrangements for disease control handling, and I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks.

We need to seek consensus whenever possible, and I accept that in relation to the points that hon. Members have made. However, many people who oppose the measures in the Bill actually oppose the whole principle of contiguous culling, despite the fact that two independent scientific reports demonstrate how important it is, and despite the experience of the Brecon Beacons. Until contiguous culling was started, we were just chasing the disease. The programme of taking blood samples, waiting for the results and then moving on did not work until the contiguous cull was introduced. I do not want widespread culling and we can and will look for alternatives, but I am convinced that contiguous culling worked and all the evidence supports that.

Mr. Bacon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: I am sorry, but I only have three minutes left.

There will always be a minority who refuse to co-operate because they do not accept the need for culling. There have been organised campaigns to try to resist the cull, but our vets are convinced that the disease has spread further because of the delay caused by appeals. Culling is not the only issue. On serology, we have had farmers refusing to allow staff on to farms to take blood samples so that restrictions on certain areas can be lifted. For example, there was a 14-day delay in Devon, and delays in other parts of the country happened because people refused to co-operate. The measures would mean speedier arrangements for blood testing and, should we introduce it, vaccination.

A minority of farmers were involved in poor biosecurity and subsequent spread of disease, but after all the publicity about the need for good biosecurity, I was disappointed that 400 people in the Thirsk blue box were cautioned. Speed of decision making is important in culling programmes and I accept that DEFRA has issues to address on that point as well. The problem is not only the people who resist the cull.

Hon. Members mentioned local vets who worked for DEFRA as veterinary inspectors, and we much appreciated their input and comments. However, speed of culling is essential. Some 45 per cent. of all outbreaks in the disease were within 1 to 2 km of the initial outbreak and 60 per cent. of all outbreaks were within 1 to 3 km. We want not a penalty for farmers who do not have good biosecurity but an incentive for all farmers to ensure that they concentrate on their actions in the future. I accept the need for the measures to be proportionate, reasonable, fair and transparent. I also accept the need to consider exemptions and variations according to region. Above all, however, this is an important measure that will help us to fight disease, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the Aye Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 180, Noes 308.

Division No. 53] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen

Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson and Mr. John Randall.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond

Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Sloate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 181.

Division No. 54] **[10.17 pm**

AY

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun

Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. Fraser Kemp.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

ANIMAL HEALTH BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Animal Health Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

2. All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further message from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

3.—(1) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 4th December 2001.

(2) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4.—(1) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

(2) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(3) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 178.

Division No. 55] **[10.28 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*

Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Jim Fitzpatrick.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Carmichael, Alistair
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'nhs)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson and Mrs. Cheryl Gillan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

ANIMAL HEALTH BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Animal Health Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown in consequence of the Act.—[*Mr. McNulty.*]

The House divided: Ayes 289, Noes 177.

Division No. 56] **[10.40 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*

Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. Fraser Kemp.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Osten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

European Communities

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Partnership Agreement between the Members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and the European Community and its Member States (The Cotonou Agreement)) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 15th October, be approved.

Terms and Conditions of Employment

That the draft Maternity and Parental Leave (Amendment) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 18th October, be approved.

Companies

That the draft Uncertificated Securities Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 22nd October, be approved.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

European Scrutiny

Ordered,

That Angus Robertson be added to the European Scrutiny Committee.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Administration

That Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown be discharged from the Administration Committee and Mr. John Hayes be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

That Mr. Laurence Robertson be discharged from the Education and Skills Committee and Mr. John Baron be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

That Alistair Burt be discharged from the International Development Committee and Mr. Robert Walter be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

That Mr. Parmjit Dhanda, Dr. Ian Gibson, Mr. Tom Harris, Mr. David Heath, Mr. Mark Hoban, Dr. Brian Iddon, Mr. Tony McWalter, Dr. Andrew Murrison, Geraldine Smith, Bob Spink and Dr. Desmond Turner be members of the Science and Technology Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Care Homes (Avon)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

10.53 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): As you will be aware, Mr. Speaker, there has been much discussion in recent months about the effects of the proposed care standards on elderly people, nursing homes and elderly residents in residential homes. However, a group that has, not for the first time, been paid rather less attention is people who are under pension age but also live in residential care. For brevity, I shall refer to them as young residents, although they span the age range. They can be anything up to pension age, but include younger adults and some children.

I bring that group to the House's attention because many younger people may spend many years, and possibly the rest of their lives, in care. They need security and stability, but I fear that they do not have that. I seek assurances from the Minister that she will consider the Government's proposals and ascertain whether that insecurity is justified and whether the anxieties can be tackled. The debate refers especially to younger people in care homes in the Avon area, which covers more than 2,000 young people in the independent sector alone. However, the issue obviously has a nationwide relevance.

I do not want to imply that the Minister or the Department have anything other than the best intentions. I do not suppose for a moment that they support anything other than the best care for residents of the homes that we are considering. That is also my objective. My purpose tonight is merely to ascertain whether the Government will achieve their objectives through their proposed standards. The debate is not party political, and I hope that the Minister will gather from my tone that I am worried about some of my constituents who live in care homes and about whether the proposals are in their best interests.

Many of my comments are coloured by a visit to one care home, the Manor House, in my constituency. It cares for adults with learning disabilities from a variety of age groups. I want to raise two specific issues. First, I am worried that, in some cases, the proposed standards may close homes, especially those in the smallish category, with perhaps nine to 15 residents. The standards suggest that those homes might have to shrink to eight residents or that the required structural changes will cost them one or two bedrooms. Consequently, homes that provide a relatively homely environment, which we all want, may be jeopardised.

The sort of proposals that will cause the problems that I mentioned include a requirement for one toilet for every two clients next to their bedroom, one bathroom for every three clients, no more than eight people sharing a staff group or a dining area, respite care with separate facilities from long-stay residents, and no double rooms after 2004. The case for each standard is understandable, but together, they could mean the end of the road for homes such as the Manor House.

Why would the Manor House face problems? It is a listed building. Many buildings in which people are cared for are old, and the Manor House has specific problems. Any structural change takes twice as long and costs twice

as much. We all support higher standards, but how will they be financed? The list of standards that we can improve for free is probably short. Most of the proposed care standards have a price tag. For example, different staff for different groups, and more toilets for fewer residents have a price tag. That also applies to management time spent on many of the aspects that we have discussed.

Many care home places are barely adequately funded through local authorities. With the best will in the world, it is unlikely that there will be an increase in local authority fees to care homes to pay for the improvements. Those running the homes believe that they will lose revenue and not have the money to pay for the changes. I fear that some will simply close.

What would be the effects of closure? I have received dozens of letters from parents and other relatives of residents at the Manor House. I have brought one with me that gives a flavour of the anxieties that are being raised. It was written by constituents who have a grandchild in her late teens, to whom I shall refer as Mary. The grandparents state:

"We looked after Mary until she was 19 and we realised we were getting old and might soon be unable to look after her. We looked around for a suitable home . . . but we were dismayed to find there were no 'Happy' homes . . . until we 'found' the Manor House at Frenchay. Here was a happy home where they loved each other and were so concerned when someone was unwell; where they had lovely surroundings and the freedom to move around."

There is no question of this being a bad home or an exploitative one. It has emerged in letter after letter from relatives of the residents that this is a good home. The grandparents make this interesting observation:

"The owners and operators of this home are best qualified because they have a handicapped son of their own and know how to make a happy home for them all."

This proprietor and their family have been in the business for decades; they know what is needed and provide a good quality of service. In the context of whether people are getting a good enough standard of service at the moment, the grandparents say that their granddaughter

"has a lovely large room with two big windows and a full view of the garden in this beautiful old listed manor house."

That is going to be part of the problem.

In all the letters that I have received, this part of the grandparents' letter jumped out at me the most. They say:

"In October . . . I shall be 83 and my wife 72. We thought we had Mary settled for the rest of her life, but now we are worried that The Manor House will not be able to meet the new requirements so recently laid down and may have to close."

If my fears are unjustified, and if the Manor House can carry on, I will be delighted to write back to the grandparents, and to many others who have written to me, to say, "You need not worry. Your fear is that you may not be around for much longer, but your granddaughter will be properly looked after in a place where she is happy." I would love to be able to say that, but I have the anxiety that I may not be able to. I would be grateful for the Minister's reassurance on that. If places such as the Manor House close, I am not convinced that suitable alternative provision is likely to be in place in the foreseeable future.

I want to raise another specific concern about the regulations, with reference to the case of another resident at the Manor House, of which I became aware in the last few days. A lady in my constituency contacted me about her son, Mark, who is 15 and has a mental age of three. In the past week, she has been told by the local social services that homes will not be able to have dual registration for adults and children, and Mark is the only under-18-year-old in the building.

If I have misunderstood this, I have done so in all innocence, but I believe that Mark's mother is worried and has rung me to say that her 15-year-old may not be able to stay there if the new rules come in straight away. I am unclear about when and how they will come in. She says that the Manor House is the right place for him. He has been there for about five years, and it took him three years to settle. She says that he is not " a change person"; he likes stability, and to be in one place. Any disruption, any change, even to somewhere brand spanking new and apparently brilliant, would be a serious problem for this family.

Mark's mother says that, yes, some of his peers in the home are 18 or 19, but many of them have similar mental ages—chronological age is not the acid test here—and get on very well and are well suited to each other. She also says that some of the slightly older or more mature residents are good role models for him. Saying that he should not mix with those people is not in his interests. His mother would not believe anyone who said that it was in Mark's interest to be moved out.

I understand the argument that says we should not house teenagers with 60-year-olds and try to claim that we can cater for those two very different groups with the same sort of provision. I understand the thinking behind that, but my theme is that, when we apply these generalities to specific cases, we have to ask whether such sweeping generalisations work in every case. When they do not work, how much scope is there for flexibility?

I have raised this issue with the Minister, and responded to the consultation process. The Minister wrote back to me in mid-October; I am sure she has a copy of the letter to hand. The one slightly bitter comment that I might make is that one of the sentences in her reply states that

"homes that provide good quality care should have nothing to fear from the introduction of national standards."

The providers to whom I have talked take great exception to that sentence, because they say that the homes that go under will be the ones that are on the brink financially. They will be the ones that cannot afford the alterations; the ones that will lose some of their fee income when they lose a bedroom; the ones that simply cannot make ends meet. They say, "If I go out of business, it will not mean that I ran a bad home." If the Manor House closes, it will not be because it was a bad home; it will be because it could not make ends meet, perhaps because it was a listed building and could not afford the structural changes. Any suggestion that the homes that go under because of the regulations are bad homes would be bitterly resented. I hope that that was not what the Minister was saying.

The Minister also says in her letter that it will be for the Care Standards Commission to decide

"in the particular circumstances of each individual home whether the home conforms to the standards necessary to meet the assessed needs of its residents."

I must stress that although I talk about the care home owners—with whom I have had dialogue—we are concerned about the residents; the owners are the intermediaries. The key question is how much discretion

[Mr. Steve Webb]

or flexibility the inspectors will have. If a home meets 90 or 95 per cent. of the standards, but fails on two or three of the long list, will the inspector be able to say that, having talked to the residents, he has found that it is a good home, providing good quality care? If so, will he be able to allow the home to continue? Or will the inspector have to say that the home fails to meet the standards and that unless it meets them within a specified time, it cannot carry on? There is a danger that in the laudable attempt to raise standards, we are over-prescriptive.

For example, shared rooms are to be phased out. However, what if brothers want to be in a shared room, and their family and social workers think it works for them? Will the standards stipulate not merely that nobody should be forced to be in a shared room, but that nobody may be in a shared room? Is the system being too prescriptive when what works for the individual might be something different from the national model?

The Minister may ask what I would do, and one day I might get the chance. However, for the moment, I offer a suggestion. When we build new homes, we could build in the structural features that make sense. With existing homes, I envisage a situation in which every home that does not meet every standard has to report that fact in all the literature it produces, or whenever its staff talk to new or existing residents. The home would have to list any standard that it did not meet and say when it would meet it, and if it thought that it could. If the home could not meet the required standard, it would have to say why not, and why it did not think that that failure would be detrimental to the care it provided.

From the inspection point of view, I would argue that people who go into the homes should be asking, "What works?" The Government have been known to say on occasion that what matters is what works. What works in the Manor House may be an evolution of the present set-up towards ever-higher standards, but not a step change. If the sums do not add up now, they probably will not add up in 2007 either. However, inspectors will need to exercise some discretion.

There are very good homes throughout Avon, such as the Manor House at Frenchay, that risk closure because the Government's best intentions may have unintended consequences. I would be grateful if the Minister clarified the areas of uncertainty to which I have referred and perhaps offered some reassurance that the Government are still thinking these things through. I hope that she may be able to offer some flexibility on the interpretation of the standards.

11.8 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on obtaining a debate on this important issue. There is not much dispute about the principle of national minimum standards for people living in care homes. The old regulatory system evolved over the years in a rather ramshackle way and is riddled with gaps and anomalies. It is important to set the improvements we are making in that context. Existing standards for care homes are set and administered in inexplicably different ways by different authorities, and some homes are not regulated at all.

The Care Standards Act 2000 allows us to change that. It created the new and independent National Care Standards Commission to regulate care services, and introduced the concept of national minimum standards that can be applied consistently to all providers of services in Avon or anywhere else. I will return to the hon. Gentleman's point about the approach that the commission will take to the regulation and inspection process.

The standards put residents' interests at the heart of the regulatory system. I make no apology for that. We should never forget that we are talking about people's homes, where they live, possibly—and we hope—for many years. I certainly share the hon. Gentleman's objective of safeguarding good provision. We must also ensure that inadequate provision is improved through the implementation of our new care standards.

People who need residential personal care are entitled to as many as possible of the comforts of home life that the rest of us take for granted, and that is a big part of what the standards are about. The draft—I emphasise draft—standards for care homes for young adults were issued for consultation. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the consultation was genuine and we have listened carefully. We talked, we listened and we reviewed the evidence. We consulted a wide range of service groups, carers, providers, purchasers and regulators of the services.

Many of the hon. Gentleman's points echoed what we heard from others. We will publish the final version of the standards within the next few weeks. Without being too cryptic, the final version will not be identical to the draft version. This evening I will go as far as I can to suggest the direction in which we have been moving, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand that, much as I would love to, and despite his view that he may one day be in my position at the Dispatch Box, I cannot give him a sneak preview of the detail.

I will write to the hon. Gentleman about the specific issue of the home with the young man aged 15.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the cost of implementing the standards. We are well aware of the difficulties with which many homes are struggling. That is why earlier this year we set up the strategic commissioning group, which brought together some of the key individuals and organisations involved in commissioning and providing care services for adults, including representatives from the private and voluntary sectors. The group considered local commissioning arrangements and their impact on service users and providers. It published its report last month, supported by £300 million to smooth the flow of patients from hospital to care home. Its work will also help to bring some much needed stability to the sector by encouraging more long-term agreements between local authorities and providers.

We know that meeting the new standards will have cost implications for some homes, and we accept that ultimately they may need to reflect those costs in their fees. This is an issue that should be considered in what in some cases should be a much more participative commissioning process in local areas.

It is worth remembering that we have already raised funding for social services by nearly 18 per cent. in real terms since 1996–97. Next year and the year after we will raise it even more, by an average of 3.5 per cent in each year, giving local authorities some ability to reflect the increased costs in their fee levels.

The hon. Gentleman was concerned about the effect of the standards limiting the overall size of homes and, within homes, the size of the groups of residents sharing

staff and living areas such as dining rooms. The draft standards suggested that new homes should accommodate up to 16 people in groups of up to eight. Existing larger homes would be expected to organise into groups of eight residents by 2007. I am convinced that the principle behind that standard is right. It can make all the difference between an establishment looking and feeling like a large, anonymous institution and it becoming at least a little more like a family home. I know which I would rather live in, and I expect most people would feel the same.

Most people would sympathise with the principle, but many of those who responded to the consultation exercise felt that we had set the numbers too low. The concern was perhaps felt most acutely, although not only, in the substance misuse sector. Respondents from that sector argued that their residents tended to stay for limited periods of treatment rather than indefinitely, and that some forms of treatment depend on groups of more than 10 residents living and working through their therapy together.

I also recognise the points that the hon. Gentleman made about other care homes for young adults. The concerns were sincerely and persuasively expressed, and I can tell him now that the standard will be modified accordingly while staying true to its guiding principle. The limits will rise, and there will be some extra leeway for shorter-term stays.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issues of the number of toilets and bathrooms available to residents, and that has generated much debate, both during the official consultation period and since. The draft standards suggested one toilet for each two people and one bathroom for three people, in both cases adjacent to bedrooms. Many people felt that we were aiming unreasonably high. It is an important question of balance. Not many of us—not even Ministers—have completely unlimited access to our own individual, private facilities 24 hours a day. On the other hand, not many of us would be thrilled about constantly using public toilets and baths, even when we were at home. At the risk of repeating myself, we are talking about people's homes, not somewhere they spend the odd night or week.

We believe that we can find a sensible compromise. Many people told us that the requirement for toilets and bathrooms to be next door to bedrooms was not practical, and we have been looking closely at that. Many people told us that one toilet per two people was a higher standard than exists in many private residences, so we have looked closely at that too. We have also been thinking about whether we can give existing homes more time to meet the standards, for some of the reasons that the hon. Gentleman outlined. In other words, we are willing to reconsider when people make a good case, but what still matters most is that service users live in as homely and comfortable an environment as possible.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of single rooms, and the argument about single versus shared bedrooms has been one of the more lively ones. Not many of us would want to share our bedroom with someone we had not chosen to share it with, but it is not hard to see how providing single rooms for all from day one could make life very difficult for some homes.

The draft standards say that all service users should be offered a single room. Existing shared accommodation is to be phased out by 2004, unless people choose to share. I hope that that covers one of the points that the hon. Gentleman raised. New provision will be built with single rooms.

The objections have not all been financial or technical, although such objections are important and need to be considered. Providers of substance misuse services have argued that service users often need to share with a buddy—someone to discourage regression or self-harm. That seems like common sense. There is no actual evidence to suggest a link between how many people share a bedroom and how successful the outcome of their treatment is, but that is an important issue. Few things are more fundamental to privacy and a genuinely homely atmosphere for adults than having their own space which they share only with those whom they invite to share it.

Different circumstances might arise for special residential colleges for people who need care, and we are looking at that. We are also considering whether the standards could embrace the idea of a clinical need for sharing, as a form of protection for the service user. However, in general, we are clear that new build should be for single occupancy. Existing sharing might have to continue for a few years, but in future people should only share if they want to.

I hope that I have gone some way towards reassuring the hon. Gentleman to some extent, although I guess that he, and others who have expressed concerns, will reserve judgment until they see the final standards. I hope that I have at least convinced him that our consultation was not a cosmetic exercise, and that we valued and listened to all the responses and kept an open mind.

Once the final standards are published the focus will, of course, shift to the National Care Standards Commission, whose job it will be to interpret and use the standards as it inspects and regulates residential care for young adults. When the commission is deciding whether any regulation has been breached, it must take the standards into account, but the standards are not regulations.

The section from my letter that the hon. Gentleman read out still represents the Government's position. It will be important for the commission, as it develops its work, to work with providers, to use the standards and to ensure that the assessed needs of users, which are at the centre both of his approach and of the Government's, are fundamental.

It is right both to issue regulations and to set national minimum standards, because there are homes that are not good enough for users, and it is clear that action needs to be taken. The objective is to ensure, first, that we have a coherent set of regulations and standards across the country wherever such provision is made, and secondly, that we implement those in a way that is both flexible for providers and enables users to—

Mr. Webb: Is the Minister saying that one cannot under any circumstances breach a regulation, but that the regulations will not necessarily be absolutely exhaustive in defining standards?

Jacqui Smith: The national minimum standards and the regulations are different. Given the consultation process that we have gone through, the minimum standards are important.

It will not be for me to tell the commission how to go about its day-to-day business, but I am confident that it will act reasonably sensibly, and in the best interests of service users. That is something to which we can all look forward as we move towards raising standards for service users while maintaining good-quality provision.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 13 November 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Health Care (Durham)

1. **Mr. Kevan Jones** (North Durham): If he will make a statement on the work of University hospital, Durham and the North Durham Health Care NHS trust. [12105]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): North Durham Health Care NHS trust was formed on 1 April 1998. Since then, its income has grown by an average of 9 per cent. year on year. The trust met all its waiting list targets in 2000–01, and the new state-of-the-art University hospital of North Durham was completed on time and within budget.

Mr. Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that the success of the North Durham Health Care NHS trust is due, in no small part, to the chairmanship of Mr. Kevin Earley? Does he accept that Mr. Earley's removal from the chairmanship without any local consultation has left the trust leaderless and does nothing to help deliver the good health care that we expect in North Durham?

Mr. Hutton: I certainly agree that the trust has performed, not least in getting the new hospital built on time; I am sure that the chairman of the trust made a significant contribution to that. However, it was right to move responsibility for appointments to an independent appointments commission. The procedures have been approved by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Today, the NHS Appointments Commission confirmed that there will be a new chairman of the trust, and an announcement will be made in the near future.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): From his answer, my hon. Friend is obviously aware that Kevin Earley, who was chair of the trust, has been unceremoniously dumped after doing an excellent job in delivering the new hospital to us. My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) has tabled questions to the Secretary of State asking who was invited to interview by the new NHS Appointments Commission, which organisations were consulted and why Kevin Earley was not reappointed. Every single question went unanswered. Was that because Mr. Earley crossed civil servants in the north-east of England and, disgracefully, was sacked as a result? Is that not an example of transparency—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hutton: I am sorry, I cannot explain why those questions were not answered, but I shall certainly look into it. However, that has nothing whatever to do with the points that my hon. Friend made. We decided to set up the NHS Appointments Commission; that was the right thing to do. As I have made clear to the House, the commission's appointments procedures have been approved by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. How the NHS Appointments Commission goes about its task is a matter for it to decide, but I am quite sure that it did the right thing on this occasion.

Nurses

2. **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): If he will make a statement on progress in meeting targets for the recruitment of nurses under the NHS plan. [12106]

10. **Mr. Mike Hancock** (Portsmouth, South): What plans he has to improve the retention of nursing staff. [12114]

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Hurry up.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I am being as quick as I can.

In the first year following publication of the NHS plan, the number of nurses employed in the NHS increased by 6,310; the number of qualified GPs and consultants increased by 1,230. By 2005, we expect 20,000 more nurses and 10,000 more doctors to be working in the NHS.

Mr. Rammell: I thank the Secretary of State for his response. Does he agree that having 20,000 extra nurses under the NHS plan is critical to the future health and well-being of the NHS and is in stark contrast to the previous Government's cuts in the nurse training programme? Does he also agree that high nursing costs are one of the biggest deterrents affecting nurse recruitment in the south of England? While the additional £1,000 a year cost-of-living allowance in parts of the south-east is welcome, it is inexplicable that it has not extended as far as Essex. I strongly urge my right hon. Friend to get his officials to look at that issue again.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Or else.

Mr. Milburn: I am being barracked from the right and the left. As for Essex, my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) will be aware that we introduced cost-of-living allowances this year for the first time. By definition, there is an element of rough justice about that; I appreciate that, and accept that there is a pressing case for other areas to be included. We are keeping the issue under active review and want to be able to extend the cost-of-living increases both to parts of the country where the labour market pressures are greatest and to professional groups, apart from nurses and midwives, where recruitment is difficult.

In the more medium term, we need a better formula for distributing NHS resources so that we can take account of the fact that labour markets in the south-east, for example, are different from those in my part of the world. By and large, there are areas of full employment in the south-east. I hope that we will eventually have full employment in the north-east too. As for the number of training places and commissions, my hon. Friend is right; we still have nurse shortages today precisely because the number of training places were cut in the mid-1990s by about 20 per cent.

Mr. Hancock: Will the Secretary of State consider giving those returning to nursing greater help in meeting their retraining costs? Will he also consider a method of speeding up the re-registration of those who have returned to nursing, and will he comment on the fact that fewer than 50 per cent. of nurses working in the health service would be prepared to recommend nursing as a career with long-term prospects?

Mr. Milburn: Since April 1999, more than 9,000 nurses who had left the national health service have returned to it. They have been attracted back to the NHS because we have made it more worth while for them to come back. We have increased their pay, the staging of pay that used to occur regularly is no longer occurring, and we are giving them, I hope, decent and fair pay rises. We want that to be extended in the future and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, we are renegotiating the way in which pay is decided in the NHS, to make sure that it is fairer and more transparent for all members of staff, but particularly for nurses.

On nursing as an attractive career, it is important that those working in the nursing profession, those leading the nursing profession and all Members of the House continue to advocate the case for nursing. Nursing in the NHS continues to be a good career, as is evidenced by the fact that the number of applications for nurse degree courses over the past three years has risen by 86 per cent.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the evidence that shows that the private health care sector recruits its staff almost entirely from the national health service. In respect of the concordats with the private sector at local level, what steps are the Government taking to ensure that the increased use of the private sector does not have a detrimental effect on the local NHS?

Mr. Milburn: That is an important issue. One part of our health care system cannot benefit at the expense of another. We are making increased use of spare private sector capacity—for example, in private hospitals—so that we are able to expand the care available to NHS patients. That means that we can get more NHS patients treated more quickly. It is a matter of record that many of the private sector providers—the BUPAs of the world—employ their own nursing staff. There are issues that we will need to keep under review concerning the contribution to costs that those private sector providers make.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): Is the Secretary of State aware that many nurses are becoming increasingly unhappy about their conditions of work, particularly the fact that they are unable to give the time and attention to patients that they would wish? How many nurses fail their training course, and how many nurses do not go into the nursing profession, having completed the training course?

Mr. Milburn: The attrition rate, to which the hon. Lady is referring, is 10 to 11 per cent. of the number who apply for a nurse training course leading to a diploma or a degree, but the rate is falling. It is important that in the selection process we make sure that the candidates selected are appropriate for the job. The number of nurse training places, which was cut under the Administration whom the hon. Lady supported, is rising rapidly. That is welcome, but perhaps even more importantly, as I noted earlier, the number of people who want to go into nursing and who are applying for a nurse degree or a diploma course, is rising rapidly. I hope that that is a good sign of progress. It is one of many signs of progress that people will see in the NHS, and it is worth bearing in mind that there are currently 17,000 more nurses working in the NHS than when the Government took office.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I am pleased to hear what my right hon. Friend says about nurse training, but does he agree that in constituencies such as mine in the south-east of England, where there is a high level of employment, we need to be rather more imaginative about enabling people to get into the nursing profession—for example, by enabling those who have been hospital auxiliaries to do nurse training? What plans does he have to make nurse training more flexible and available to people who are currently employed in the health service?

Mr. Milburn: As my hon. Friend is aware, we have already taken steps in that regard. It is one of the absurdities of the way in which we have traditionally employed people in the NHS that staff are employed in ghettos, or in silos—nurses here, doctors there, health visitors over there, health care assistants over here. We are trying to develop the concept of a skills escalator, so that people can develop skills through their career and jump off into different careers as they develop professionally. We have certainly made it easier for health care assistants to become nurses. We needed to make it easier for nurses to develop their careers, too.

There is no simple answer to the problem of nurse shortages. An expansion in the number of nurse training places is obviously key to that and fair pay is important, but another crucial element is the so-called quality of life issue, which includes ensuring that nurses have flexible working conditions that suit them so that they can better balance their family and working lives, and that more child care is made available, not just in hospitals but in primary and community services too. There is real progress to report on all those aspects of improving the attraction of nursing as a career. Provided that we continue to invest in the NHS and, as my hon. Friend advocates, to make the reforms, we can look forward to an even bigger expansion in the number of nurses working in the NHS during the next few years than we have seen in the past few years.

Mr. Burns: Will the Secretary of State clear up a discrepancy on the targets? The NHS plan claims that there will be 20,000 more nurses by 2004, but in Labour's manifesto the year was 2005. On which target is the Government's policy based, what is the baseline for the

target, are the nurse figures based on targets for whole-time equivalents, and how can they be achieved when the Department of Health figures show that there are 9,400 nurse vacancies in Britain, 2,960 of which are in London alone?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman might have said that the number of nurse vacancies is falling, not rising, that the number of nurse training places is rising, not falling, and that the number of nurses is rising, not falling. With regard to the relationship of the NHS plan to the manifesto, the hon. Gentleman might have noticed that the general election came after the NHS plan was published. The NHS plan was based on a baseline of 1999 figures up to 2004. The manifesto, on which we fought the election, was based on a baseline of 2000 up to 2005. *[Interruption.]* There is no particular revelation there. I know that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) is from Essex, but even for a man from Essex he is getting terribly excited. *[Interruption.]* I am assured that men from Essex do get excited. *[Interruption.]* I have brought my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) back into the Chamber. I always think that it is nice to make people happy, which is a rare occurrence in my job.

We can be confident of making good progress towards the targets precisely because of the changes that we have introduced. Nurses would not be working under the sort of pressure that they are working under today if the hon. Gentleman, among others, had done the right thing when he was a Minister in the Department of Health, and increased the number of training places rather than cutting them.

Smoking

4. **Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): If he will make a statement on progress on smoking cessation services. [12108]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The national health service smoking cessation services are making excellent progress. In 2000-01, 61,500 smokers successfully quit.

Mr. McFall: What will be the funding for the next financial year, and is it in place? Does my hon. Friend agree that it is shameful that Parliament has not grasped the nettle and introduced a ban on tobacco advertising? When will the Government face up to their responsibilities, so that we stop all people, particularly young people, starting to smoke in the first place, and thereby remove the need for such programmes?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right that smoking cessation is a top priority for the Government. Smoking causes 120,000 deaths a year and costs the NHS £1.7 billion. With regard to future funding, we are asking primary care groups and trusts to plan for the needs of their communities because the services are incredibly successful. As I have said, 61,500 smokers quit last year, and the target for this year is for 40,000 smokers to quit. Nearly 30,000 quit in the first quarter, so the services are successful and we must ensure that they continue in the future. It is right that we try to prevent people from smoking in the first place. We have a manifesto commitment to bring back the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill in the lifetime of this Parliament. If it had not been frustrated by the Opposition, we might be further on than we are now.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Will the hon. Lady confirm that it is not only patches that help people to give up smoking, but that there is a range of other alternatives, including hypnotherapy, reflexology, cranial-osteopathy and shiatsu? Is she aware that shiatsu is now available in the House of Commons Gym and that it can help with the cessation of smoking? Does she think that it is right that, although Members of Parliament can benefit from shiatsu, it is not available on the health service?

Ms Blears: As usual, the hon. Gentleman is creative and imaginative, and suggests wonderful solutions. I agree that there is a range of therapies that can help people to give up smoking, and we should be exploring whatever works in helping people to do that. In terms of access to hands-on therapies, I am not entirely sure whether Members of Parliament should be taking that route. None the less, I believe that we should explore whatever therapies work for people.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Does my hon. Friend agree that when smoking cessation services are part of programmes carried out in health action zones, such as the Thurcroft healthy hearts programme in my constituency, they, too, should be evaluated? If they are providing what we believe to be major services for improving health in our communities, they should be funded in years to come.

Ms Blears: Many of the health action zones have done marvellous work in this field. For example, many of them are training young people to act as peer mentors. Thus, young people are persuading other young people why it is good to give up smoking and not to take it up in the first place. That is far more effective than older people telling younger ones what to do. Health action zones have been incredibly innovative in those areas. That is why we are asking primary care groups and primary care trusts to plan their commissioning for the long term, so that these excellent examples of good practice can be put into the mainstream of the health service.

Residential Care Standards

5. **Dr. Andrew Murrison** (Westbury): If he will make a statement on how the national care standards for residential care homes will reflect the treatment needs of those with drug and alcohol problems. [12109]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): The standards will promote better quality care and help to prevent abuse by grounding practice in the principles of dignity, choice, privacy and respect. They will reflect the treatment needs of those with drug and alcohol problems by ensuring that their assessed and changing needs and personal goals are reflected in their individual plans.

Dr. Murrison: I thank the Minister for that response. I welcome evidence from yesterday's Adjournment debate that the Government are softening their thoughts on the

regulations. However, they have confused the needs of short-stay patients in treatment with those of residents whose care homes constitute their homes. There is a big difference. Does she agree that free access to mail and visitors would give freer access to illicit substances and that lockable bedrooms would increase the likelihood of deliberate self-harm by residents? Does she also agree that—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is far too long, and the hon. Gentleman is reading.

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman's first comment was right. Although this may be difficult for Opposition Members to recognise, the consultation was a real one. We have listened and we will respond to the concerns that were expressed. The particular concern that he raised related to the treatment regimes that will be allowed under the standards. It is important to emphasise that we realise that, sometimes, the overriding need is to ensure that people get the care and treatment that they need in a safe and secure environment. That is why the standards, at the request of representatives from the drug treatment world, include standard 2.7, which recognises specifically that there will be times when freedom and choice might need to be restricted. It asks only that that be discussed and agreed with prospective service users as part of their initial assessment.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I am grateful for my hon. Friend's response. Will she please note that the European Association for the Treatment of Addiction, Drugscope and Release, among others, have estimated that, if the care standards are adopted and unit costs are driven up, more than 50 per cent. of the care beds are likely to be lost in this sector?

Jacqui Smith: I think that my hon. Friend is referring particularly to concerns about multi-occupancy rooms. The care standards will put in place the good standards that users of services have every right to expect, and ensure that they are provided and regulated uniformly across the country. When we consulted on multi-occupancy rooms, strong views were expressed by service users about the lack of privacy and dignity involved in sharing. I do not think that many hon. Members would be happy to share their bedroom with someone whom they had not invited into it, and we need to bear in mind the principle behind that when determining the standards.

It is also important, however, that we ensure that the standards are based on evidence of the outcomes for service users. For that reason, we are seriously considering the standards relating to multi-occupancy rooms and, more importantly, we shall also consider whether and how it would be helpful to carry out new research into links between the occupancy of rooms and the sort of outcomes that service users achieve.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): How can the House have confidence in the Department of Health's awareness of the suicide risks and the potential for continuing drug and alcohol abuse among those patients when the draft standards stipulate that

"Staff enter service users'"—

that means patients—

"bedrooms . . . only with the individual's permission . . . Service users have a key to their own bedroom . . . which can be locked from the inside . . . Service users choose when to be alone or in company, and when not to join an activity"—

and that

"Service users' own rooms include: . . . lockable storage space"?

Who writes this stuff? Have the draft regulations been approved by any of the Ministers, or have they simply been written by advisers who seem to have no understanding or experience of this sort of patient?

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman obviously wrote and decided to deliver that question before he had listened to my previous responses. On his point about consultation, the standards were drafted and considered by experts within and outside the Department. They were subject to consultation meetings involving users, at which it is fair to say that users and providers expressed different views about them. This is a real consultation, and we are listening. I have already outlined, in relation to standard 2.7, how some of the concerns that he has mentioned might be overcome, but we will continue to listen and respond to people's concerns. When he sees the final standards, he will recognise that this is a Government who talk, but who also listen and respond to concerns.

Dr. Fox: The last time that the Government promised us consultation on similar regulations was in relation to care homes in general. The Minister might remember that, during those debates, we predicted that the result of their botched approach would be the loss of a large number of care home beds, and bed blocking throughout the national health service. Does she understand the anger of those who now see 15 per cent. of beds blocked in Birmingham, 17 per cent. blocked in Buckinghamshire and 18 per cent. blocked in Brent? How can anyone have confidence in a Government whose incompetence means that, nowadays, people have to queue up not only to get into hospital but to get out?

Jacqui Smith: People will have confidence in a Government who put the needs of the users of care homes at the centre of their policy. The hon. Gentleman is restating his claim that 50,000 care home places have been lost. That is wrong, as we have already pointed out to him. We accept, however, that there is a problem with capacity in care homes. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set up the strategic commissioning group to consider how we can improve commissioning at local level in partnership with the independent sector. That is also why, on 9 October, my right hon. Friend announced a radical cash for change programme worth £300 million over this year and next, to tackle the problem of bed blocking. Such money was never promised by the Conservatives, and such measures would never have been delivered, had they won the last election.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Is not the move to national standards and national inspection of care homes meant to take that responsibility from local authorities to achieve greater consistency? Does my hon. Friend share my concern that some local authorities appear to be aiming to continue inspection under the guise of contract

monitoring? Is not such duplication a waste of resources and a nightmare for care home owners? Most of those I know welcome national standards.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I know that he has taken a close interest in the issue. He is right that the national approach to care standards is beneficial because there will be consistency across the country in regulation and inspection. The National Care Standards Commission, which comes into operation from next April, will ensure that that consistency exists while recognising the flexibility necessary to ensure that good provision continues.

Local authorities, given the extra investment that this Government have provided for them, should concentrate on how they work constructively with local independent sector providers and other partners to ensure that we maintain and expand capacity for older people and others in need of long-term care. That is the priority that the Government set in the agreement that we published on 9 October, which is backed up with significant extra investment.

Digital Hearing Aids

6. **Mr. Charles Hendry** (Wealden): If he will make a statement on the availability of digital hearing aids through the NHS. [12110]

16. **Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): What are his Department's plans for the funding of digital hearing aids during 2002–03. [12120]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): National health service trusts may provide digital hearing aids for patients if clinically appropriate. Digital hearing aids are being provided by 20 NHS trusts in the modernising NHS hearing aid services project. Further decisions on digital hearing aid provision will be made in the light of the research evaluation of the project.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful to the Minister, but is she aware that millions of people with hearing difficulties will consider that reply to be deeply inadequate and wholly complacent? Is not it unacceptable that, in the 21st century, hearing aids in the United Kingdom continue to be based on outdated 1970s technology, whereas digital hearing aids are increasingly common in other parts of the world? Is not it time for the Government to stop posturing, push ahead faster with the trials and, particularly in the coming year, allocate the funds that are desperately needed to tackle the problem?

Jacqui Smith: I am willing to take a lesson on posturing from Conservative Members, if necessary. The Government have invested practically in the whole process, which is necessary not just to give people digital hearing aids, but to provide them in a modernised fashion in the health service. In the pilot areas, people are being assessed in terms of their needs. They are fitted with digital hearing aids, which also involves the necessity for computer programming and skilled input, and then assessed to ensure that the hearing aids are appropriate.

I hope that everybody in the Chamber believes that we have a responsibility in the NHS to provide not only the equipment, but the process, the support and the skilled staff to ensure that that is done effectively. That is why we are using the pilot phases to ensure that we can roll out modernised hearing aid services provision across the NHS in a way that benefits patients to the maximum.

Mr. Foster: The Minister will be aware that the audiology unit at Bath's Royal United hospital is one of the first-wave pilot schemes. Will she give it an absolute assurance that it will receive continued funding for the scheme from April next year? When, precisely, will that announcement be made? Is she aware that, even in the first-wave project areas, there is a difficulty in that some patients are given the new digital hearing aids and others the old aids?

There is a solution to that problem. Will the Minister at least agree that it is inappropriate in pilot areas such as west Dorset for audiologists to be advised:

"It is also very helpful if you can downplay the benefits of digital versus standard NHS hearing aids."?

Will she join me in deprecating that advice?

Jacqui Smith: I can say that, in the near future and subject to evaluation, we will make statements on the roll out of digital hearing aids and their continued provision in areas where that is clearly successful. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important to ensure that we have strong evidence about the effectiveness of digital hearing aids so that, across the NHS, we provide not only the technology but the most appropriate procedure for patients. That will ensure that situations such as the one to which he referred no longer exist.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): As the user of a hearing aid due to industrial deafness, may I point out to my hon. Friend that the current NHS hearing aids give people all the noises that they do not want to hear and make it difficult to hear those who are talking? Something must be done to ensure that deaf people can hear when people are speaking to them.

Jacqui Smith: I am not quite sure what sounds my hon. Friend does not want to hear in Chamber!

Part of our evaluation of the success of digital hearing aids will refer to the modernisation of the whole process—fitting, assessing and follow-up. That is why it is important both to evaluate technical success and to ensure that we can put in place the processes that will enable digital hearing aids to be fitted as part of the service that we expect for NHS patients.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): May I tell the Minister about the excellent work done by audiology staff at Fairfield general hospital in my constituency? The issue that concerns them, in addition to the supply of digital hearing aids, is the screening of young babies for deafness. Does she have any plans to introduce pilot schemes for that kind of screening, which will bring enormous advantages to children in my constituency?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend is right: the early screening of babies enables problems to be identified and better joint working to be undertaken. That is why

screening the hearing of the newborn, which is done before they are discharged from hospital, or as soon as possible thereafter, is being piloted by 22 health authorities during 2001-02. Over the next three to four years, we intend to implement the scheme progressively across the NHS in England using the lessons that have been learned. It is important to recognise, however, that the programme involves screening rather than provision. We must therefore also ensure that we facilitate and improve joint working between the NHS, the education service and social services so that those children who are identified as having hearing difficulties are followed up and cared for. They will be identified earlier through the screening process, and we then have a responsibility to ensure that they get the treatment that they deserve from all those agencies.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Minister can be thankful that she does not understand about shutting out unwanted noises from hearing aids. I have benefited from a digital hearing aid, and I trust that the NHS experiment will start to be applied faster than at present. If the Minister is not prepared to take lessons from the previous Government's experience of postcode rationing, I fear that certain areas will not benefit from the digital roll out.

Jacqui Smith: On the speed of delivery, the modernised hearing aids services project was announced a little over a year ago by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. Twenty NHS trusts now routinely fit digital hearing aids. It is from that experience that I shall take lessons, and make sure that we roll out the programme in the most effective way. By the end of October, 13,278 digital hearing aids had been fitted and 16,178 people had been assessed. By the end of March, we expect that more than 18,000 people will have digital hearing aids on the NHS for the first time.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Last week, in a speech characterised by such soundbites as "The modernised patient journey" and

> "The patient, not the hearing aid, is at the heart of the fitting process"—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 132WH.]—

well, that is a relief—the Minister claimed credit, as she has again, for the 13,270 digital hearing aids fitted by the 20 first-wave trusts. Now, there is widespread confusion about the Government's commitment to continue funding that first wave with up to £25 million by or in 2003–04, let alone to roll out provision across the whole country. When will the Government finally acknowledge what we all know—that digital hearing aids work and clearly bring enormous benefits to people with hearing difficulties—and give a proper commitment to provide them across the country as soon as possible to the 2 million people who would benefit from them?

Jacqui Smith: Conservative Members are high on commitments and a bit low on the practical details of how to meet them. My concern as a Minister is to ensure that patients receive not only the hearing aid, but the necessary assessment and fitting, conducted by a skilled work force. That is what patients of the NHS deserve. That is why we will evaluate the results of the pilots that we set up. We will announce how we will roll out the programme in the near future.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): I appreciate what my hon. Friend says, but is she aware that there is a queue a mile long in my constituency for digital hearing aids because of their technological advantages over traditional ones, and that on 6 June last year my right hon. Friend the Minister of State made the plea that that technology be introduced into the NHS as quickly as possible? Can we introduce it more rapidly?

Jacqui Smith: We want that technology to be introduced into the NHS as quickly as possible, but in a manner that provides support for patients, assesses them properly and ensures that the necessary computer and related equipment is available and that skilled staff are available to give the sort of service that people expect from the NHS. That is why it is right that we get it right. I assure hon. Members that we will look carefully at the results of the evaluation of our pilots so that we can use that information to roll out the benefits of technology across the NHS as quickly and effectively as we can.

NHS Patients (Overseas Hospitals)

7. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): If he will make a statement on sending NHS patients for treatment in overseas hospitals. [12111]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Following rulings of the European Court of Justice, I announced in August that NHS health authorities and trusts could commission treatment for their patients overseas. Three areas in southern England are working through the legal and practical issues involved, with the aim of offering, by the end of the year, treatment abroad to those patients who want it. I shall publish guidance for the NHS based on the experience in those three sites.

Mr. Brady: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his response. He will know that in the Salford and Trafford health authority, the proportion of patients waiting more than a year for NHS treatment has doubled compared with four years ago. In that situation, he must know that his announcements have raised the expectations of many people who are waiting for treatment, sometimes in severe pain. When will he bring forward clear guidelines that will say under which circumstances and criteria people will be entitled to treatment overseas?

Mr. Milburn: I thought that I had just set that out.

Mr. Brady: When?

Mr. Milburn: I did say when. Three sites are currently working through the issues because, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we want to get this right. Patients who want overseas treatment will be able to go abroad—I repeat: patients who want that; there should be no question of sending patients abroad against their wishes. Not only will such an alternative be offered according to clinical need and a proper assessment of the patient's need, but that person will have to want to go abroad for treatment.

It would be a disaster to send patients abroad and to find, for example, that the taxpayer was not getting good value for money and, more important, the patient was not receiving the highest standards of care. That is why we are working through the three pilot sites. I hope that we will be able to make the offer to patients by the end of this year, with a view to issuing guidance early in the new year to the NHS based on those patients' experiences. I think that that will be helpful.

Incidentally, on the numbers who are liable to take advantage of such an option, my view is—other hon. Members may have a different opinion—that what most patients want, as the hon. Gentleman has rightly said, is the choice of good-quality local care based in their local hospital, and falling waiting times. Indeed, in the past year, the number of in-patients waiting more than a year for treatment has come down by 13 per cent.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the best ways of making a clinical assessment is to talk to and listen to the patient? Will he give an undertaking that no one will be offered care in a country where there are not sufficient doctors and nurses capable of performing that task? Will he also ensure that anyone receiving treatment abroad has a clear pattern of after-care, should that be needed, under post-operative treatment?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes a very good and telling point. It would be extremely foolish, as the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) seemed to be suggesting, to rush into such arrangements. We have to get them right to ensure not only that patients are fit and well enough to go abroad to be treated, but that they receive the appropriate support and after-care that they need in the country of treatment and once they return home. Those issues have to be worked through properly.

I give my hon. Friend the assurance that she seeks on her first point. As she is aware, spare capacity is available in Germany, France and elsewhere, and we are looking to those countries so that we can treat what I believe is a minority of NHS patients, but that choice should be available to as many NHS patients as possible.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Does the Secretary of State recognise that there are plenty of patients in West Sussex and west Surrey—where one in 10 of those awaiting in-patient treatment are waiting more than one year—who would welcome not only the possibility of going abroad, but the opportunity to be treated in the Durham health authority or by his own authority, where the number of those waiting more than one year is almost nil? Such postcode delays could be sorted out without worrying about languages or going abroad. What is he going to do about that, and when will he do it?

Mr. Milburn: That is a perfectly reasonable suggestion and, as the hon. Gentleman is probably aware, we are exploring ways in which we can make more choice available to patients. He is also quite right that waiting times vary in different parts of the country; even in London, the average in-patient waiting time varies from seven weeks in one hospital to 23 weeks in another. Very often, patients are locked into a contract with their local hospital that the local primary care group or primary care trust has negotiated. Although GPs have the right to refer to other areas, it is important that they should exercise that right in a more proactive manner. We are investigating whether it is possible to extend more choice to patients, precisely to enable them to take advantage of the shorter waiting times available in some hospitals.

On travel, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that, certainly in constituencies in southern England, geographical proximity is an issue. It makes sense for patients in Kent, for example, to travel to northern France rather than northern England. Although I know that geography is not necessarily the hon. Gentleman's strong point, I should have thought that even he would be able to distinguish his Arras from his Elmet. For the avoidance of doubt, one place is in northern France and the other is in west Yorkshire.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I welcome my right hon. Friend's proposals to seek any opportunity to ensure that people in this country receive the treatment that they deserve. We will have to use whatever stop-gaps are necessary to deal with the 20 years of decline. In examining how the system might operate, will he consider issues such as travel to the destination, necessary support care during travel and especially the cost of travel? I should not like people on lower incomes to feel that they could not take advantage of the system because they might have to bear the burden of travel costs.

Mr. Milburn: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. As she is aware, the question asked by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West raises difficult and complex issues. The NHS already operates a scheme for patients, and particularly for low-income families, who need to travel to hospital, whether it is a local or more distant one. It seems obvious that we have to be able to extend the benefits of that type of scheme to those who might be travelling abroad for treatment. We have to assess that issue properly. Crucially, we also have to ensure that not only patients going abroad for treatment but their carers and families are offered appropriate support. We are seeking to address precisely those issues in the three pilot areas. Based on that experience, we shall be able to issue the appropriate guidance to the national health service.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): If the initiative or stop-gap is to be taken seriously, it is the Government and not guinea pig patients on the south coast who must answer the questions. If patients have to pay for their own and their families' travel, where will be the fairness for those who cannot afford to pay? If the health authority or PCT pays for travel, how will value for money be delivered?

If things go wrong, whom will the patient be able to sue, or—a more appropriate question for the Secretary of State—whom will the Government blame? How can informed consent be given and received in a foreign language? How will the Government feel if overseas trusts and providers advertise for British nurses and doctors to go and do the work?

Is not the very fact that we are even considering this an indictment of the Secretary of State's management of the health service, and a sign that he has failed to deliver?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman began by asking good questions—precisely those to which we seek

answers. Believe it or not, it is not easy. I know that the hon. Gentleman thinks that it is easy, and that a magic wand can be waved to solve every problem in the national health service; but this is not the Harry Potter appreciation society. Difficult decisions are involved. Perhaps at some point even the Liberal Democrats will have to make a difficult decision.

Mr. Burns: Oh, no!

Mr. Milburn: Well, let us hope not.

Issues of standards, negligence and informed consent are precisely the issues that must be worked out. With regard to standards, we are exploring whether it would be possible to accredit certain overseas care providers, perhaps with the involvement of the Commission for Health Improvement as the independent inspectorate of the NHS. As for negligence, complex legal issues need to be considered. It is right for us to do that in conjunction with primary care trusts, which, after all, will be the fulcrum of the health service that we want.

The hon. Gentleman is right about the difficulties involving languages and informed consent. We will have to provide not just support enabling patients—and their carers and families—to travel, but language support, if the system is to offer genuine choices.

The hon. Gentleman made a wider point about this being, somehow or other, all the Government's fault. He must realise that, as we said a year or more ago in the NHS plan, turning around the NHS will mean a long hard struggle. He knows as well as I do that the service suffered decades of neglect and underinvestment. We are putting that right, and we will continue to do so, because we have put the money in.

District Nurses

8. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What plans he has for involving district nurses in profiling the health needs of their community. [12112]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): District nurses play an important role in profiling the needs of health communities, through their knowledge of local communities and also through their work with individual patients. They will support primary care trusts as part of their responsibility for preparing health improvement plans from 2002. They are also eligible to serve as members of the professional executive committee of primary care trusts. The process for their selection is determined by local nursing colleagues.

Helen Jones: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, as well as playing a major role in improving people's health—allowing them to be maintained in their own homes, and avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions—district nurses, precisely because they work in the community, often have a better idea of its health needs than people sitting in offices elsewhere? Will he ensure not just that district nurses are eligible for involvement in PCTs, but that PCTs make a real effort to consult them when drawing up health improvement programmes and trying to improve primary care? These are the people with a real knowledge of their local communities.

Mr. Hutton: I strongly agree. District nurses do a brilliant job, and will have an increasingly important role to play in the pattern of NHS services that we want to be delivered in future. I certainly want all PCTs to consult fully, and to involve district nurses in the development of their local strategies. We aim to devolve more and more responsibility and power to the front line of the NHS, and I do not think anyone is closer to the front line than district nurses.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Would the Minister be willing to consult the district nurses of Southend-on-Sea, where, with their encouragement, the John Grooms establishment for severely disabled people carried out a massive, costly improvement to provide separate residential units? It was then hammered by separate rating demands, which increased its rates by 300 per cent. The arrangement has only just started, although I understand that it has now been applied to another establishment in Wells, and will also be operated elsewhere. Will the Government review the law to ensure that homes providing care facilities do not receive separate rating demands? This is a new situation, and the Minister's help would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. Hutton: I am not aware of the situation in Southend, and I am concerned about what the hon. Gentleman has said. If he is prepared to write to me about these matters, I shall take certainly them up with my colleagues in Government.

Schizophrenia

9. **Liz Blackman** (Erewash): When he expects the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to publish its recommendations on the prescribing of atypical anti-psychotic medicines for schizophrenia. [12113]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): We anticipate that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence will publish guidance on atypical anti-psychotic drugs in March 2002, provided that there are no appeals against the draft guidance.

Liz Blackman: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, and I welcome the fact that NICE is appraising this class of drugs at the moment. I hope that there is no slippage in that programme. Is my hon. Friend aware that, although the traditional anti-psychotic drugs used at present on patients suffering from schizophrenia are useful, they also have some worrying long-term effects? Those effects include irreversible involuntary facial and body movements, which have long-term consequences for patients' employability and care needs.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the consequences of side effects on the wider lives of people suffering from schizophrenia, and I assure her that the NICE appraisal will look at the side effects of both traditional and atypical anti-psychotic drugs. It is

important that a wide range of stakeholders—including users, carers, professionals and industry representatives—should be consulted and provide evidence to NICE.

The appraisal will contribute to the on-going development of the clinical guideline on the management of schizophrenia, which is due for publication by the end of 2002. In that way we will be able to ensure that people with schizophrenia receive the very best and most appropriate care on the NHS across the whole range of treatment options, including treatment with drugs.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will the Minister confirm the general point that drugs licensed in the United Kingdom—including the atypical anti-psychotic drugs and the anti-TNF drugs for rheumatoid arthritis currently under consideration by NICE—can still be prescribed and funded by local health authorities? Will funds be made available to local health authorities to enable them to prescribe the drugs permitted or encouraged by NICE?

Jacqui Smith: We have made it clear that local health authorities should continue with their prescribing activities, but the problem highlighted by the hon. Gentleman is the reason that we have introduced NICE. NICE is a key component in ensuring that there is a common-sense way to end postcode prescribing: without it, the mess of variable access to treatment under different local policies would have continued. Where NICE has laid down guidelines already, rapid progress has been made towards giving people access to treatments on the NHS.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): The Minister will be aware of the widespread concern in the House that these modern medicines should be made available to patients, and she will have seen the reports from the Zito trust and heard the representations from the National Schizophrenia Federation, MIND and other bodies. Will the Minister say whether NICE has already reached its provisional findings in relation to those medicines? If so, will she insist that they be published? That would give those of us who want to argue and make further representations a chance to do so?

Finally, will she confirm that, if NICE finds against the medicines on the grounds of affordability, it will still be possible for the Government to consider the matter again, as happened with beta interferon? If that is not going to be possible, will she say why?

Jacqui Smith: As I said earlier, it is right that NICE should undertake the detailed analysis and consultation with stakeholders that is already under way. Provisional appraisal decisions are made available to the consultees, so that there can be continuing input into the decisions being made by NICE. Having set up an independent way of determining both the cost and the clinical effectiveness of drugs, I do not believe that it is right for Ministers to intervene in the approach that NICE is taking, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that—as I pointed out earlier—the evidence of the effectiveness of NICE is that it has brought into the NHS, for the benefit of NHS patients, many treatments that were previously available only on the basis of a postcode and random prescribing process.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have given previous notice of this matter. Under the guidelines published by the Cabinet Office in July 2000, Departments are required to disclose sponsorship amounts of more than £5,000 in the departmental annual reports. This year, the Department of Health disclosed that, from various sponsors, it had received £500,000 for the public consultation on the NHS plan. In response to a parliamentary question this week, the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), said:

"The Department funded the NHS national plan consultation leaflet and the public consultation to inform the NHS plan. There were no sponsors involved."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 229W.]

Mr. Speaker, those two things cannot be right. On which occasion were we misled?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has put the matter on the record. It is now up to him to pursue it, perhaps through parliamentary questions.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have given you prior notice of my point of order, which relates to the ability of Members of Parliament to hold the Executive to account—an ability that I believe Members on both sides of the House consider extremely important. This afternoon the parliamentary ombudsman will lay before Parliament a report entitled, "Access to Official Information: Declarations made under the Ministerial Code of Conduct". That relates to a series of questions that I tabled in the summer of 2000, to try to get declarations out of the Government. I asked each Department on how many occasions Ministers had made a declaration of interest according to the ministerial code of conduct. Each Department, with the honourable exception of the Department for International Development, stated that they were hiding behind exemption 2 of the code of practice on access to Government information. I asked the ombudsman whether that was reasonable—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman seems to be taking a long time. He must raise a matter that the Chair can deal with.

Mr. Robathan: Sir, the ombudsman has found, for the first time, that the Government will not accept his recommendations, and has laid that before Parliament. Mr. Speaker, have you heard from any Minister that a Minister will come to the House to explain why they have defied the ombudsman for the first time?

Mr. Speaker: My answer is no.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You are absolutely scrupulous and fair in trying to balance the speakers called from both sides of the House during Question Time, and the House greatly values that. I wonder whether you have noticed that Government Whips and Front Benchers are using your very fairness to try to suppress debate, discussion and questioning on the issues that are most contentious, by dissuading their own Back Benchers from rising and by getting them to withdraw questions. Thus today, having grouped three questions, one of which was withdrawn, on the key issue of the shortage of nurses and doctors, so few Labour Members rose—perhaps because they are not interested in the shortage of nurses and doctors—that only two questions from the Opposition could be asked on that key issue. Could you have words with the Whips, Mr. Speaker, about the way that this is handled?

Mr. Speaker: I can take the blame for many things, but not for the activities of the Whips.

Opposition Day

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Railtrack

[Relevant documents: The transcripts of evidence taken before the Transport Sub-Committee of the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee on Wednesday 17th October, HC 239-i, Wednesday 24th October, HC 239-ii, Wednesday 31st October, HC 239-iii, and Wednesday 7th November, HC 239-iv, in relation to the Sub-Committee's inquiry into Passenger Rail Franchising and the Future of Railway Infrastructure.]

Mr. Speaker: Before we come to the main business, I inform the House that there is a limit of 12 minutes on Back-Bench speeches, and also that I have selected the Government amendment.

3.34 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the fact that there are discrepancies between accounts given by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to the House of his meetings with the Chairman of Railtrack and his discussions with the Rail Regulator relating to the putting into administration of Railtrack, and their accounts of these discussions; notes the concerns of overseas investors such as those expressed by David Winters, portfolio manager for Franklin Mutual, that 'a bigger risk premium is to be attached to investing in British companies now'; condemns the Secretary of State for failing to inform the House fully; notes that his failure to set the record straight has further undermined his, and the Government's, credibility; and calls on the Secretary of State to resign his post before further damage is inflicted on the Government's reputation, both in the business world and the country at large.

I am sure that the House will want to join me in expressing our sympathy for the families of those who died in the tragic air crash in New York yesterday and, indeed, our sympathy for the people of New York. All of us who have any interest in air travel or responsibility for it will realise that this latest incident poses further challenges to an ailing airline industry and should be a matter of concern to us all.

The Secretary of State has been brought to the House today to be called to account for the statements that he has made to the House in recent weeks, to explain why those statements have been disputed by third parties involved and to respond to concerns expressed across the House, as in the statement made on Radio 4 on Friday of last week by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who said that there were "gaps" in the various accounts. Above all, the Secretary of State is here to face up to the damage that he has done to the credibility of this Government and to the future of our rail network.

Let us not be under any illusions. For this House, the Secretary of State's failure to account properly to Members for his actions is a matter of deep concern. For the travelling public, it is his failure to protect the interests of the railways that will hurt most.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No, I will not give way at this stage.

The Secretary of State has been guilty of a breathtaking sleight of hand that has dealt a savage blow to future improvements in the railways, left railway workers robbed of their life savings and damaged the Government's credibility.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: I will make some progress before taking interventions.

The Secretary of State stands accused of failing fully to inform the House of events leading up to the court's decision to grant an administration order for Railtrack. Let me remind the House that only last week, on 5 November, in response to my private notice question, the Secretary of State said that, on 25 July, the chairman of Railtrack had told him that, without Government financial assistance, on 8 November he would not be able to make the statement that Railtrack was a going concern. The very next day—Tuesday 6 November—the chairman of Railtrack disputed that, saying that that was not his recollection of the meeting. Indeed, he said, "It is not true".

Railtrack has now passed over copies of the notes of that meeting, and other relevant documentation, to the Financial Services Authority. Will the Secretary of State now commit to placing copies of his Department's note of that meeting in the House of Commons Library, and will he make a copy available to the FSA?

Sadly, that was not the only incident last week when the Secretary of State's account of events to Parliament was challenged by a third party.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): Oh dear!

Mrs. May: I suggest that the Under-Secretary, a former Whip, pays a little more attention to matters relating to people giving statements to the House and the veracity of those statements.

On 5 November, I asked the Secretary of State if he had threatened the Rail Regulator with legislation if he used his powers to intervene in Railtrack. The Secretary of State replied that "there was no threat". Yet on Thursday last week, the Rail Regulator, Tom Winsor—in evidence to the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions—stated clearly that, in a meeting on 5 October, the Secretary of State had told him that if he, the Rail Regulator, used his powers to intervene in Railtrack, the Secretary of State would introduce legislation to direct him.

As the regulator said, he had to pause

"to consider whether I had really heard what I had just heard."

Not only was the Secretary of State going to direct the Rail Regulator in his powers to order an interim financial review, but he was going to direct him in all his powers: that is, take away his independence.

The Secretary of State says that he was not threatening the Rail Regulator. I was not asking the Secretary of State if he had bullied the regulator to make him cry, or if he had shut him up in a cupboard and thrown away the key. I was asking if he had told the Rail Regulator that he

[Mrs. May]

would legislate if the regulator intervened. The correct answer was yes; the Secretary of State, to all intents and purposes, said no.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Is the hon. Lady aware that the Rail Regulator also told the Select Committee that he was amazed that Railtrack had bypassed the normal procedures, and had in fact not come to him for a settlement?

Mrs. May: The hon. Lady might also like to note that the Rail Regulator told the Select Committee that what the Secretary of State had done put under threat Virgin projects for the purchase of tilting trains for the west coast main line—a line which I know is of particular interest to the hon. Lady—and for its new country networks, and had put under threat the independence of the Bank of England as well. Perhaps the hon. Lady would like to consider that before she intervenes in future.

Hugh Bayley: I wonder if we might establish one fact at the start of the debate. Does the hon. Lady believe that Railtrack made a sufficient contribution to rail safety and improved reliability of services in return for the hundreds of millions of pounds of public subsidy and billions of pounds of access charges that it received?

Mrs. May: If the hon. Gentleman would like to examine the record of rail safety under public sector ownership and following privatisation, he will find—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] Just listen. He will find that, notwithstanding the tragic crashes that did occur after privatisation, at Hatfield and Paddington in particular, the safety record under privatisation actually improved.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Is my hon. Friend also aware that the Rail Regulator, in his evidence to the Select Committee, appeared to contravene the statement made by the Secretary of State that Railtrack was insolvent on Friday 5 October?

Mrs. May: Indeed, and it seems that Ministers find it a little difficult to define the issue of insolvency. I note that yesterday, in another place, Lord Falconer had to apologise because there was a period when the New Millennium Experience Company, running the dome, had been insolvent when, as I understand it, he had said that it was not insolvent. It is an interesting contrast because, for the Government's pet project of the dome, they overlooked a period of insolvency pending a few grants, but for Railtrack, they could not wait to pull the plug, regardless of whether it was really insolvent.

After the Secretary of State had made that reference in the House to the fact that there was no threat to the Rail Regulator, the Prime Minister's official spokesman, when challenged on the Rail Regulator's response to that, said that he was simply setting out "the logical consequence" of the Government's decision. Well, if it was a logical consequence, why did he not tell the House? We can only assume that he did not want Ministers to know what he proposed to do to the Rail Regulator and took great pains to keep Members in the dark. He must now explain that failure to inform the House. Moreover, he must tell the House his intentions regarding the Rail Regulator. Will the Rail Regulator retain his independence, or will the threatened legislation go ahead?

As I have said, that question has implications for more than the railways. The former gas regulator, Clare Spottiswoode, said this morning that

"the way things are going it's quite difficult to know what might happen because if Stephen Byers did threaten"—

[Interruption.] When it gets difficult, no Labour Member wants to listen and hear what will actually happen—

"emergency legislation and got his way by doing that, and it's not quite clear exactly what other, sort of, things might be got through, through threats rather than through the normal due process of the law. I think this is a very serious accusation".

How does the Secretary of State answer that accusation?

I am sorry to say that these are not the only examples of the Secretary of State's failure. On 15 October, he told the House that the Government had

"met all our legal obligations regarding payments to Railtrack."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 959.]

On 5 November, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), he said:

"The decision was taken on 5 October not to provide additional funding for Railtrack."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 28.]

Yet a payment of £162 million that was due to be paid on 1 October under an agreement reached with the Rail Regulator in January was withheld by Government—four days before the Government pulled the plug on the company and two days before Railtrack staff took their dividends in the form of additional shares.

Why was the money withheld? It was withheld supposedly because the Office for National Statistics could not decide under which heading it should appear in the national accounts. Forget the substance—just worry about the presentation.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will the hon. Lady confirm that, had she been in the Secretary of State's position, she would have paid the money? Will she now commit the Opposition to reprivatising the successor to Railtrack?

Mrs. May: I have news for the hon. Gentleman—he should watch what the Secretary of State does to the new Railtrack. The right hon. Gentleman has invited bids from the private sector, so Railtrack may well end up back in the private sector once again. That may wipe a few smiles off Labour Members' faces.

The real answer is that the Government were playing fast and loose with Railtrack, stringing the company along. At the end of September, the company still believed that the money would be paid, but the Government did not want to pay the money because it might have jeopardised their case for administration.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that officials in his Department and/or officials in the Treasury put pressure on the Strategic Rail Authority not to make that payment on 1 October? Will he explain why, as of 30 October, the Government were willing to make that payment? Will he publish the correspondence between his Department and the SRA relating to negotiations on the proposed company Renewco?

Those are not idle questions. The case for the administration order put before the judge on 7 October raises several questions to be answered by the Department. Did the Secretary of State, through the statement made on his behalf by the Director General of Railways, explicitly tell the court on 7 October that the Rail Regulator had the power to intervene to bring forward an interim financial review, which could have brought forward funding for Railtrack, thus changing the company's financial position and its future solvency? Did the Secretary of State—

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No.

Hon. Members: Give way!

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is not giving way.

Mrs. May: Did the Secretary of State, through the Director General of Railways, explicitly explain to the court that he had decided to introduce emergency legislation to remove the powers of the Rail Regulator?

During that case, much was made of the evidence of Arthur Andersen on the financial status of the company, yet Arthur Andersen says:

"It is not clear to what extent the forecast funding requirement could be reduced through careful cash management",

adding that, "we have no information" regarding the company's ability

"to raise additional funding via alternative sources."

The Government knew. They knew that the company was preparing plans to reduce costs. They knew that the Rail Regulator could bring forward financing through an interim financial review. They knew that the company had not been given the chance to explore alternative sources of funding. They knew that they were not going to give the company that chance, because they had decided to pull the plug on Railtrack a long time before.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Did the hon. Lady read the Rail Regulator's evidence carefully, especially the part where he said that Railtrack had not asked for an assessment, and that the company only rang him on the Saturday night to ask whether it would be possible for him to carry out an assessment in 24 hours, completing it on the Sunday and finding what the chairman described as "millions and millions" of pounds in cash by Monday morning?

Mrs. May: As one in the hon. Lady's position knows well, the timetable was such that at that stage the regulator was not able to produce an interim financial review. However, she also knows—or should know—that during the whole of the summer, Railtrack was negotiating with the Government on restructuring the company and introducing a new company. The Government kept it thinking that that was going to be permitted and that money would be forthcoming, until 5 October when the chairman was called in.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Has my hon. Friend noticed that in the summer the accounts of Railtrack were signed off and both the accountants and directors certified that it was a going concern? They had to certify that it would be a going concern for the whole of the coming year. There must have been agreement and letters from the Government offering comfort. Would it not be interesting to see those and to know why the Government ratted on them?

Mrs. May: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. It would be interesting to see all the documentation that passed between the Government and Railtrack on this issue.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No. I want to make some progress.

There is no doubt that in the summer the Government had already decided on other plans for Railtrack. Let me take hon. Members back to June—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the hon. Lady speak.

Mrs. May: On 6 June, in a radio call-in, the Prime Minister told listeners as regards the renationalisation of Railtrack:

"I don't know that it would be very sensible. If we took it back, it's not just the share price we would have to pay for, we would also have to pay their debt back as well."

Indeed, the Secretary of State himself admitted at the Labour party conference this year—just four days before he pulled the plug on the company—that the Government had received legal advice, influenced by the Human Rights Act 1998, that it could not buy back Railtrack shares at the current depressed price. Acquisition of the company's equity on top of its outstanding debt would cost the Government between £7 billion and £8 billion. I wonder when the Government asked for that legal opinion.

Clearly, at that stage the Labour party was thinking about renationalisation, but compensating shareholders was going to cost too much. So, the Secretary of State—

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will the hon. Lady confirm that it is the Conservative party's policy to compensate shareholders to the tune of between £7 billion and £8 billion?

Mrs. May: Shareholders are entitled to compensation based on the value of the company. [HON. MEMBERS: "How much?"] Labour Members all want to know how much, but perhaps they would also like to know that those were not my words but those of the Prime Minister.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mrs. May: I will not give way.

The Secretary of State and the Labour party were thinking about renationalisation some time ago, but compensating shareholders would cost too much. So the right hon. Gentleman—ever keen to help the new Labour project—devised a cunning plan. He knew a way of renationalising without compensating shareholders. He would drive the company to the wall, put it into administration and renationalise on the cheap. How else

[Mrs. May]

could he explain the way in which he and the Treasury held out on the discussions on the new company, Renewco? How else would he explain holding back the payment of £162 million that was due on 1 October, keeping the Strategic Rail Authority in the dark and not meeting its chairman from June to this day, as far as I am aware, to discuss his plans for Railtrack? How else does the right hon. Gentleman explain that he took such great pains at the beginning of April to state—a statement that he has relied on consistently since the company was put into administration—that the Government stood behind the network, not any company? How does the right hon. Gentleman explain keeping the Rail Regulator in the dark and then stopping him in his tracks when he suggested that he could help the company out?

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Is the hon. Lady aware that the head of the Financial Services Authority gave evidence to the Select Committee in which he confirmed that evidence from Railtrack has now been lodged with the FSA? He has therefore written to the Secretary of State and the Department asking for a response. Does it makes sense for the House to make a judgment on those issues and the Secretary of State's future without even bothering to read the report that the FSA is now going to prepare?

Mrs. May: We are not short of accusations against the Secretary of State which we can use to make a judgment on him, notwithstanding the report that will be prepared by the FSA. The plan is clear; it was devised by the Secretary of State and the Treasury was complicit in it. But like all Baldrick's cunning plans, it does not look so clever now. It means delayed or cancelled projects; phase two of the west coast main line has been delayed; likewise Thameslink 2001 and improvements to South Central.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. May: No, I am not giving way any more.

It is clear that the plan of the Secretary of State means two years of chaos on the railways and delay in improvements. Indeed, the Prime Minister predicted that on 6 June, when he said that it would

"probably take two years before we sorted everything out and, in those two years, we would have the railways in a state of paralysis and not be able to start the investment programme that is there now ready to go."

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. May: Yes.

Mr. Winterton: I am glad that I carry some small influence. Is my hon. Friend prepared to go into detail about the implications of that sad saga for the west coast main line, which is critical to the economic future of the north-west of England?

Mrs. May: I should tell my hon. Friend that I never could resist a more mature man.

The plan has indeed delayed the second phase of the west coast main line project; I know that that is a cause that my hon. Friend has valiantly championed. As the Rail Regulator made clear in his evidence to the Select Committee, it has caused extreme problems for Virgin in the purchase of tilting trains. Indeed, the Government can kiss goodbye to the subsidy that they were going to receive as a result of those developments.

Mr. Donohoe: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No. The hon. Gentleman should take that as a compliment; I obviously do not think that he is more mature.

The plan of the Secretary of State means increased cost to the taxpayer as the private sector walks away from investment or demands more government guarantees or a higher price for that investment.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. May: No, I am not going to give way any more—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Do not drown the hon. Lady out.

Mrs. May: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Claire Spottiswoode, the former gas regulator, said this morning when talking about Government intervention in Railtrack that

"that would increase the cost of raising capital in the markets. And, of course, if the cost of raising finance for Governments goes up, then that affects all of us through increased taxes."

The right hon. Gentleman's plan means that small shareholders, like Edith Knowles, aged 81, will lose their life savings—*[Interruption.]* It is a sad day when members of the Labour party are not interested in the problems faced by elderly people in this country. Edith Knowles from Preston has told how she paid £13,000 over the years for Railtrack shares which she hoped would cover any nursing care that she might need. She says:

"Now all I have left is my pension. We aren't the fat cats Mr. Byers and MPs think we are."

The Secretary of State's plan means that the Government could end up in the courts. He has let the railways down; he has let passengers down; he has let railway workers down; he has let taxpayers down; he has let savers down; and he has let the Government down.

The Secretary of State stands accused of failing to inform the House; of holding promised funding back from the company; of stringing the company along by talking about the future, while he knew that he was going to pull the plug on it; of letting Railtrack staff take dividends as extra shares, when he knew that the shares would soon be worthless; of increasing the cost to the taxpayer of future investment in the railways; and of causing delay to the improvements in the rail infrastructure. The Secretary of State stands accused. There is only one verdict for the House to return: guilty as charged.

4.1 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'recognises that many of the problems of the railways stem from the years of underfunding of the industry by the previous Conservative Government and the shambles of their rushed and ideologically driven privatisation of Railtrack; welcomes the decisive action that Ministers have taken in regard to Railtrack which will be welcomed by the travelling public; congratulates the Government for developing contingency plans for the industry as soon as it was told of the company's plight; rejects the policies of the Opposition, who would have offered the company a blank cheque and even now wish to pay over £1bn to compensate shareholders; and welcomes the work of Ministers in developing positive policies to take the industry forward in terms of a successor to Railtrack and to put the interests of passengers first.'.

At the outset, I associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) in relation to the tragic accident in the skies over New York yesterday. I am sure that the sympathies of the entire House go to those affected, their families and their loved ones.

We are witnessing a Tory smokescreen—an attempt to hide the fact that the Labour Government, and I as the responsible Secretary of State, have taken action against the failed privatisation that was Railtrack. The travelling public know that Railtrack was a failure. The City knows that Railtrack was a failure. The railway industry knows that Railtrack was a failure. The only people who regard it as a success are the architects of Railtrack: the Conservative party.

The hon. Lady made a number of allegations and posed some questions this afternoon. It is interesting to note that they are the same allegations and the same questions raised by people who have a vested interest. There are those who seek compensation from the Government. Those shareholders are now clearly aided and abetted by the Conservative party. The Government's position is clear. We believe, as the Prime Minister said last week, that shareholders should get what they are entitled to, but that there should be no new taxpayers' money to compensate them.

We now know that Railtrack has said that it wants £3.60 a share, guaranteed by the Government, regardless of the company's assets or liabilities. That would mean more than £1 billion of taxpayers' money being used to compensate shareholders for a bad investment. No doubt pressure will continue to try to force the Government to pay for the company's incompetence, but we are clear: investments can go down, as well as up. As we said on 2 April, we stand

"behind the rail system but not behind individual rail companies and their shareholders".

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House what he has so far refused to tell me in reply to my written question: when, after 1 August, did his Department receive advice from the Treasury that it was unlikely that public funding for Railtrack would be approved?

Mr. Byers: The issue that the right hon. and learned Gentleman raises concerns the relationship between different Departments. The position is clear. I took the decision on 5 October based on the advice that I had received, including advice from my colleagues in the Treasury.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): On 3 July, the right hon. Gentleman told the House that it would cost £6 billion to set up a not-for-profit company, £2 billion to pay the shareholders and £4 billion to pay the debt holders. We know that he has decided to mug the shareholders and rob them of the whole £2 billion, but is it also his intention to rob the bond holders? Should they not be told, or does his scheme cost £4 billion plus the cost of sorting out the mess?

Mr. Byers: The right hon. Gentleman knows, because I have made the statement in the House before, that on 25 July circumstances changed dramatically. That was the day on which the chairman of Railtrack, John Robinson, came to see me and outlined the position as he saw it. I will say something specifically about 25 July in a couple of minutes because the hon. Member for Maidenhead raised some serious points about that discussion.

The Conservative party's difficulty with the issue is that Railtrack was the last throw of the privatisation dice when, in the dying days of the Major Government, it was floated on the stock market. Helpfully, the flotation was subject to a report by the Public Accounts Committee during the previous Parliament, when it was chaired by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), who is now chairman of the Conservative party. That report, the twenty-fourth report of the Public Accounts Committee, makes valuable reading and I commend it to Opposition Members.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: No, because I want to address this particular issue, but I will be more than happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

The key finding in relation to the flotation of Railtrack that emerged from the Public Accounts Committee's report—bear it in mind that it was rushed through ahead of the 1997 general election—was:

"The timing of the sale was a factor in the poor value achieved, and the Department themselves acknowledge that the large increase in Railtrack share price since flotation was because it had been undervalued and sold in haste."

The report goes on to disclose the scale of the loss to the taxpayer.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I want to make this point, but I will give way in a minute.

The report continues:

"The share price of Railtrack quadrupled in two and a half years with the result that the taxpayer received less than £2 billion from the sale of shares compared with the company's current valuation of nearly £8 billion."

At the time of the report, there had been a £6 billion loss to the taxpayer.

Mr. Salter: Will my right hon. Friend explain to the House, in addition to the staggering increase in the share

[Mr. Salter]

value of Railtrack after privatisation, exactly how much money has been paid to the shareholders and directors? The information that I have suggests that about £700 million has been paid to shareholders and £10.4 million has been paid in bonuses to Railtrack directors. Are those figures correct?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. During the period of privatisation, some £700 million was paid in dividends to shareholders and some £10.4 million to directors by way of remuneration.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: Members of the Select Committee will have an opportunity tomorrow afternoon to quiz me at great length, so I shall give way to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant).

Michael Fabricant: Will the Secretary of State answer the question of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), and say precisely on what date he was advised by the Treasury that funding would not be made available to bail out Railtrack?

Mr. Byers: I have answered the question, although hon. Members might not like the answer. The decision was mine, taken on behalf of the Government, on Friday 5 October. That was when the decision was taken by myself as Secretary of State. It was a decision for me to take on behalf of the Government. That is the situation. I have explained it to the House before.

Michael Fabricant: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that the Secretary of State has misunderstood my question. I asked him not when he made the decision, but when he was advised.

Mr. Speaker: The Secretary of State is entitled to misunderstand questions.

Mr. Byers: I will try not to misunderstand the question, Mr. Speaker.

Michael Fabricant: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: If I can have a second chance of explaining the matter to the hon. Gentleman, he may find it beneficial. I know that he has not had experience of government and is unlikely to get any, but the reality is that, in government, there are Secretaries of State who are responsible for taking decisions. I was responsible for taking the decision in relation to Railtrack.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): It was the right one.

Mr. Byers: I thank my hon. Friend very much. I took the decision on Friday 5 October.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I want to make some progress, as many hon. Members wish to speak.

Mrs. May: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: Of course, I give way to the hon. Lady.

Mrs. May: Perhaps I can give the Secretary of State some assistance in this matter. Will he inform the House whether he had any discussions with the Treasury, or whether any of his officials had discussions with Treasury officials, in which it was indicated that funding would not be forthcoming, prior to 28 September, the date on which The Stationery Office published the administration order?

Mr. Byers: I have to say that the question of the printer's mark of 28 September—*[Interruption.]* That is the issue that the hon. Lady raised. I have already explained that the nature of government is such that there is advice that Ministers receive, and decisions were taken on Friday 5 October. That is the situation. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House should allow the Secretary of State to answer. It is unfair not to do so.

Mr. Byers: In relation to 28 September, I explained to the House last Monday that that was a printer's mark, and not a fax, as some people suggested. It was a printer's mark of the sort that The Stationery Office often uses. The issue was raised by the hon. Member for Maidenhead. I am seeking to outline the circumstances. I shall answer the allegations in a minute.

Mrs. May: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way a second time. I did not ask him about 28 September and the printing of the document. I asked him whether he or any officials in his Department had had any discussions prior to that date with Ministers or officials in the Treasury at which it was indicated that funding for Railtrack was unlikely to be forthcoming from the Treasury. It is a simple question—is the answer yes or no?

Mr. Byers: The situation is this, as I have explained to the House on two previous occasions: there were two options that were being worked up. One was a situation of a decision being taken to put Railtrack into railway administration. Of course, in all those discussions, various Departments would have been involved. Alongside that were the restructuring proposals being made by Railtrack, which were being actively considered at the same time. We had two programmes of work that went alongside each other, with a decision taken on Friday 5 October. I hope that that makes it perfectly clear for Opposition Members.

Mr. Salter: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Byers: No; I want to make some progress.

I am trying to explain the background to Railtrack's formation, because there is a very important message here about how the Conservatives use public money to prop up their own approach to public services. I have already outlined the useful finding from the chairman of the Conservative party that the shares were undervalued by some £6 billion. But the situation is worse than that, because to ensure that the flotation was a success, £1.4 billion of debt owed to the taxpayer was written off by the Conservative Government. In addition, £69 million of profit, earned while Railtrack was in public ownership, was held back from the public, but then given to shareholders by way of a dividend. Taxpayers' money

was recycled as profit for Railtrack, sprinkled like confetti among shareholders—yet not one of them was a shareholder at the time when that profit was made.

It is also enlightening—it shows the climate of the times under the Conservatives—to consider how the shares in Railtrack were marketed at the time of flotation. One financial adviser produced a pamphlet that stated:

"Railtrack is essentially a property company and the land that Railtrack will own could be regarded as one of the most valuable pieces of real estate in the United Kingdom."

This is the marketing for Railtrack. It refers to these sites as being ripe for exploitation, with retail developments at mainline stations being able to compete with major department stores up and down the country. The pamphlet then described how stations would have

"a captive audience of passengers who are all potential customers . . . This waiting time is valuable selling time for retailers and food providers".

That was the sales pitch for Railtrack flotation: to capture passengers at railway stations that have been redeveloped as shopping centres.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead has made—

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: No. I want to address the thrust of the hon. Lady's charges this afternoon, because they are important and significant. I want to address these allegations, because that is the basis on which this debate is being held.

The hon. Lady has not addressed the important policy issues concerning my decisions. Instead, she fell back on innuendo, smear and allegations. So, today, let us cut through all that and look at the facts. I want to get on to the substance of the allegations that have been made.

Mrs. May: Is the right hon. Gentleman saying to the House that the evidence given by the Rail Regulator to the Select Committee on the Treasury was innuendo, smear and allegation? That is what he has just implied.

Mr. Byers: I shall come to the Rail Regulator. It was the hon. Lady's comments to which I was referring. I shall address the position of the Rail Regulator specifically. Before I do so, I want to address the issue raised by the hon. Lady about the meeting that I had on 25 July.

Mr. Donohoe: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Byers: I shall not give way, for the simple reason that I want to put on the record the facts in relation to the allegations made by the hon. Lady. I hope that the House will indulge me if I do not take any interventions while I put on record the truth of the situation.

The first allegation is in relation to the meeting between me and the chairman of Railtrack held on 25 July. I am aware that there has been some disagreement about what was said at that meeting. In my earlier statements to the House, I sought briefly to describe those discussions. Let me now set out the events in a little more detail.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is not giving way, and when I rise, I expect hon. Members to be seated. Could we have some order in the House? The Secretary of State is entitled—*[Interruption.]* The rabble is not just over there. The Secretary of State is entitled to a hearing.

Mr. Byers: On 25 July, Mr. Robinson discussed with me a range of issues about Railtrack, including its management and the difficulties that it was being presented with by the present regime of regulation. He outlined to me in general terms the seriousness of Railtrack's financial situation, making it clear that the position was far worse than he had first thought. He spoke to me about needing a soft letter of comfort from the Government by the autumn, before being able to access existing banking facilities. If Railtrack was unable to access those facilities or receive extra financial assistance from the Government, it was clear that, on 8 November, when Railtrack was due to give its interim results, it would be unable to make the critical statement that it was a going concern.

At the same time, Mr. Robinson suggested that my officials have further discussions with Railtrack's advisers, Credit Suisse First Boston, to consider in more detail the state of the company's finances and management, and a series of proposals for restructuring the company and the regime of regulations. Initial discussions took place between my officials and Railtrack's advisers on 27 July, and the message was stark. It was clear that the viability of the company was at issue. That is the sequence of events, and I hope that that clarifies the position for the benefit of the House.

Mrs. May: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: I want to put on the record the specific points in relation to the series of allegations that have been made.

The second allegation relates to the so-called threats to the Rail Regulator, Tom Winsor. The hon. Lady alleges that I made threats to the Rail Regulator; she did so again today. Now that the Select Committee has helpfully made the transcript available, Members will see clearly that the Rail Regulator at no stage said that he had been threatened. I ask Members to read the transcript, which is here. That was put to him and that was the position.

I want to get on the record the truth of the situation. The hon. Lady made the allegation. I made it clear to the House on Monday 5 November that there were no threats. The first people to raise the issue of suspending the regulator were Railtrack's own advisers. I also made it clear to the House that, in my meeting with the chairman of Railtrack, we covered how the regulator would deal with those matters. Having taken the decision that we could not pour unlimited amounts of taxpayers' money into Railtrack additional to that which had already been agreed, it followed that, if necessary, we would introduce legislation to ensure that that objective was achieved. That was communicated to the regulator in response to a point that he raised with me.

I made a factually accurate statement that I had the necessary authority to introduce legislation if need be. It would, of course, have been for both Houses of Parliament to consider the merits of such legislation. There were no threats. Just imagine the outcry there would have been—*[Interruption.]* No threats. Imagine the outcry there would have been had I refused to be open with the

[Mr. Byers]

regulator or had I misled him about the Government's intentions. There would have been cause for complaint and cause for the Opposition to raise the matter in the House, but that was not the case. It was raised in discussion by the regulator, and I gave him a factual reply.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I am not giving way, because I want to get points to do with the allegations on the record.

Most importantly, the regulator himself, in his evidence before the Select Committee, clearly did not feel threatened in any way. As he told the Select Committee, for him it was business as usual. It was clear that he did not feel that his independence had been undermined and clear that he retained his independence unless and until it was removed by Parliament.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has said that he is not giving way.

Mr. Byers: The regulator told the Select Committee that he informed the chairman of Railtrack on the evening of Saturday 6 October that if an application was made to him for an interim review, it would be considered and it would be possible for the regulator immediately and publicly to announce that he had begun such a review. That all took place on the evening of Saturday 6 October, the evening before the High Court considered my—

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have a transcript here, which I understand is—

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): A shareholder.

Miss McIntosh: Yes, I am a shareholder in Railtrack, Eurotunnel and First Group.

I have in my possession a transcript, which I understand was not made available to the public. I am not sure of its status, but it is not the evidence taken by the Committee.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Those are matters for debate. Hon. Members can rebut what the Secretary of State has said.

Mr. Byers: If the hon. Lady is challenging the accuracy of the transcript, that is a matter for the Select Committee.

Miss McIntosh: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: If it is on a point of clarification, then of course.

Miss McIntosh: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I shall not enter into the semantics of whether it was a threat or a promise to act. The evidence that we took from the Rail Regulator was that his ability to intervene and apply for an interim review was completely neutralised. Why did the Secretary of State take away the independence of the only person able to protect the investment in Railtrack?

Mr. Byers: Two issues are important here. First, only this House and another place could take away the independence of the regulator.

Secondly, it is alleged that I somehow took away the regulator's independence so that he could not act. The evidence given by the Rail Regulator is precise on this point. On Saturday evening, 6 October, the regulator is phoned by the chairman and the chief executive of Railtrack. They ask him, "Can you conduct an interim review?" He says, "Yes, I can." That is what the Rail Regulator said last week in evidence before the Select Committee. The Rail Regulator told the Select Committee that, if an application were made to him for an interim review, he would consider it and

"it would be possible . . . immediately and publicly to announce"

that he had begun that review.

The following day, my petition was heard in the High Court. No move was made to oppose my petition for railway administration.

Mrs. May: As ever, the Secretary of State has been careful in choosing his words and in quoting the Rail Regulator. Will he confirm that the Rail Regulator went on to say to the Select Committee:

"but I did not think it would be possible for me to complete it in 24 hours over a weekend"?

That is what he had told the chairman of Railtrack.

Mr. Byers: I do not know who advised the hon. Lady to put that quote in the public arena, but the truth is this: had Railtrack applied for a review on the Saturday evening, which is what the regulator indicated that he would be prepared to accept, then—this is the crucial point—on the Saturday evening, the regulator would have made public the fact that the review had begun. On the Sunday afternoon, the High Court judge, knowing that a review had commenced, would probably not have granted the petition. That is the situation.

However, on that Sunday afternoon, Railtrack attended the High Court with counsel, and I presented my petition. Railtrack did not oppose the petition. Had Railtrack refused—

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): You refused it.

Mr. Byers: For the benefit of Opposition Members, I cannot refuse an interim review. On the evening of Saturday 6 October, the Rail Regulator indicated to Railtrack that he would be prepared to conduct a review, or consider it, if an application were made. No such application was made by Railtrack.

Andrew Bennett: Does my right hon. Friend accept that it seems incredible that Railtrack, knowing immediately after the Hatfield disaster that it might have financial difficulties, did not consider going to the Rail Regulator and asking for a review, but preferred to try to negotiate with the Government? If Railtrack was really

concerned to protect its shareholders, should it not at least have approached the regulator before that date, almost 24 hours before the order was made?

Mr. Byers: Those are issues for Railtrack rather than for me, as Secretary of State. People will no doubt want to raise questions about the conduct of Railtrack.

Geraint Davies: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Byers: No, because I want to put on the record exactly what happened, in answer to the serious allegations that have been made by the hon. Member for Maidenhead.

The final point that the hon. Lady made was that, somehow, I had kept my approach, and the possibility of legislation, secret from the House. That is a serious allegation. I have made no secret of our position. It was disclosed in a letter from our financial advisers, which formed part of our evidence to the High Court on 7 October. That same letter was one of a number of papers placed in the Library of the House on 23 October—so much for keeping it secret. It was placed in the Library on 23 October—a big secret. More important, on 2 November, the shadow Minister for Transport, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), received a parliamentary reply from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport drawing his attention to the fact that the papers had been placed in the House of Commons Library. *[Interruption.]* No, it was not after the event. Clearly, there was a breakdown of communication between the beauty and the beast—[HON. MEMBERS: "Who is the beauty?"] It is a close-run thing.

There was clearly a breakdown of communication because last Wednesday 7 November, the hon. Member for Maidenhead said about the possibility of introducing legislation that it was a stark new piece of evidence. It had been in the House of Commons Library for over a fortnight. That is the reality. Therefore, the position in relation to the regulator is this: open and honest, no misleading of the regulator and the House kept fully informed of the Government's position.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Is the Secretary of State in effect saying that he values the independence of the Rail Regulator, and that he will protect in perpetuity that independence? It is not what the Rail Regulator appears to have understood the Secretary of State to say when he said:

"The Secretary of State said to me that if there were an application for an interim review he had the necessary authority to introduce immediate legislation to prevent the review taking place."

That is a threat to independence. Is the Secretary of State now saying that he will protect the independence of the Rail Regulator?

Mr. Byers: The independence of the Rail Regulator is a matter for the House. It is as simple as that. Conservative Members will be aware of that. That is the situation.

Mr. Donohoe: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Byers: What happened is that, in conversation, it was raised by the regulator—

Mr. Donohoe: Please.

Mr. Byers: I had better give way.

Mr. Donohoe: I make just two points. First, did the regulator not say last week to the Select Committee that Railtrack at no time had ever approached him, and indeed, he felt that he was being cut out of the loop? Secondly, Railtrack thought that the Government were a soft touch and hoped to get the money out of the Government because it knew full well that it was never going to get it out of the regulator.

Mr. Byers: As a member of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend will be aware of the evidence that was given last week. I think that he has accurately stated the regulator's position.

One other major allegation was made by the hon. Member for Maidenhead—

Mrs. May: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: No. I have given way several times to the hon. Lady. I want to go on to that particular point. I want to put on the record the response to her very important allegation that the £162 million that was legally due to be paid on 1 October was held back by the Government. I want to be clear about that, too.

As part of the April deal, £337 million was due to be paid on 1 October, which the Government were legally obliged to pay. That was paid in full, every penny, on 1 October, but in addition, in April, all parties accepted that they would use their best endeavours to establish a special purpose vehicle called Renewco. It was recognised that it could be only on the basis of best endeavours because the arrangement could go ahead only if Renewco were not classified as being in the public sector. By 1 October, that condition had not been met, so the payment could not be made.

However, the payment of the £162 million is a real diversion from the issues facing Railtrack. In discussions on restructuring, Railtrack made it clear that, even with the Renewco arrangement in place, Railtrack would still need additional Government support, and as my unchallenged petition to the High Court said, Railtrack would have a deficit of some £700 million by 8 December this year, and £1.7 billion by the end of March next year. Those were the figures. Railtrack's own view was that Renewco would not make a difference to those figures.

Geraint Davies: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, as the Select Committee minutes show, on 7 October Tom Winsor said:

"right up to the 5th October 2001"—

which is the Friday before that Saturday—

"I did not know that the company was claiming to government that it was in serious financial difficulties . . . The company's representations to my office were all consistent with the company having enough money to keep going until . . . sometime in summer 2002".

In other words, Railtrack was misleading the regulator. That is why, as we have heard, Railtrack presented the new petition to the regulator.

Mr. Byers: I think that when all hon. Members have the opportunity to go through the evidence and the regulator's statements, they will see that Railtrack did not avail itself of the possibility of an interim review although it was invited to do so by the regulator on the evening of

[Mr. Byers]

Saturday 6 October. The petition that I presented to the High Court was unchallenged although Railtrack and its counsel appeared in court.

Chris Grayling: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: No. I have been very generous in giving way, and I want to conclude my remarks because many other hon. Members wish to speak.

The serious allegations have been addressed.

Mrs. May *rose—*

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Byers: The record will show that I have previously given way to the hon. Member for Maidenhead. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has stated that he is not giving way, and that includes to Front Benchers.

Mr. Byers: Hon. Members know that I am generous in giving way. I have already given way in this debate three or four times to the hon. Member for Maidenhead. I should now like to address the issue at hand, and specifically to examine Railtrack's stewardship of the railway network.

My decision on 5 October to refuse further funding to Railtrack was not an easy one. However, I firmly believe that Railtrack was not part of the solution for our railways but a major problem. Let us consider Railtrack's stewardship. No asset condition register for the rail network is yet in place. Railtrack consistently opted not to invest in and maintain the network to a sufficiently high standard. Six months after Hatfield, more than 1,000 temporary speed restrictions were still in place. Costs on the crucial west coast main line project had leapt from about £2 billion to £6.3 billion under Railtrack's leadership, which is an increase of more than £4 billion.

We had to say, "Enough is enough. Let us get to the root cause. Let us look at the structure and put it right, so that for the extra money that the Government are committing to railways, we will get a real return for the travelling public."

The Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee has made its concerns very clear. It said:

"We . . . agree with the Rail Regulator's assessment, that Railtrack has not maintained and renewed the network to a standard which could reasonably be expected of it. Its past record is simply not acceptable."

The Committee continued:

"The system of managing contractors who carry out maintenance and renewal work on the railway through the system of 'cascaded safety cases' has been shown to have utterly failed. It is not just the system that has failed: Railtrack's management of its contractors has been woeful."

The Rail Regulator—the man who is responsible for regulation and for maintaining the railway network's independence—made the following points when asked whether he would have provided extra funding for Railtrack.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not unprecedented for a debate of this importance to be held without the attendance of a single Cabinet member bar the Secretary of State?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order.

Mr. Byers: The advice that I gave to my Cabinet colleagues was not to be too exercised by a half-day Opposition debate. To be honest, most Cabinet members have far more important things to do than to listen to the rubbish that we have heard today from Opposition Members.

I was about to give the House the benefit of the Rail Regulator's view on Railtrack. Asked whether he would have provided extra funds for Railtrack, he said that he had no duty or inclination to give taxpayers' money to a company to make up for its being inefficient and incompetent. It was possible, he said, that the company thought that if he would not give it money for being inefficient and incompetent, maybe the Government would. He thought that that was

"an extraordinary judgement for the company to make".

Mrs. May *rose—*

Mr. Byers: No, I will not give way. The hon. Lady has had her opportunity: she has intervened four or five times, and she has not scored a hit so far.

Interestingly, one group did very well out of Railtrack. We have heard about the dividends paid over the years—£700 million—but the other group that did well was the directors of Railtrack. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) gave the figures: the directors were paid more than £10 million between 1996 and 2001, including £1.3 million paid to Gerald Corbett, Railtrack's chief executive. This is the man who told Members of Parliament in the year before the crash at Ladbroke Grove that the tracks outside Paddington were safe. Lord Cullen described those comments as complacent or misleading.

We have heard it all before, and we will hear it all again. This is the Tory privatisation culture that led the chief executive of Railtrack to tell Members of Parliament that the tracks outside Paddington were safe, which, according to Lord Cullen's investigation, was complacent or misleading. Two days after his report, which said that Gerald Corbett was complacent or misleading, Railtrack revealed the payment of £1.3 million. It is clear that the only things that Railtrack could get working on time were the executive compensation schemes.

This country has the fourth largest economy in the world, but we do not have a railway service to match it. Action was needed to put the interests of long-suffering rail passengers first. They know that Railtrack has been at the heart of the problems experienced by the industry—a company that failed to offer an adequate service, and then came asking for yet more taxpayers' money.

The Tories, in this debate and previously, have backed the interests of a quarter of a million shareholders against the interests—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not shout.

Mr. Byers: The debate will show clearly that the Tories are backing the interests of 250,000 shareholders against the interests of 2.5 million people who travel on the railway network every day. They cannot come to terms with the fact that a failed privatisation has been ended by the Government.

Delivering to passengers will now come before dividends for shareholders. Our people and our country deserve a railway system that is fit for the 21st century, and, no matter what the criticisms may be, we shall make the decisions that are necessary to enable that to happen.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you offer me some guidance? I think that, during my right hon. Friend's speech, an Opposition Member intervened claiming to be a shareholder in Railtrack. I may have misheard, but I understood that that was what was being said. Given the nature of the debate—part of whose purpose is, I understand, to shore up the share value with taxpayers' money—is it in order for shareholders to take part in it, or not to declare an interest?

Mr. Speaker: It is up to individual hon. Members to declare an interest. Additionally, I remind hon. Members that we must have some calmness in the Chamber.

4.45 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I begin by joining the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and the Secretary of State in expressing sympathy to all who were affected by the dreadful air crash in New York yesterday.

Given that so much desperately needs to be put right about our railways, it is regrettable that precious parliamentary time is being spent on a debate that is largely about who said what to whom, and when that was said. We have failed to address the key problems of our railways for far too long. It is a great pity that the Labour Government failed to act more quickly. It is also a great pity that, in this debate, we have not heard a single, solitary solution to the problems of the railways from any Conservative Member. Even worse, no Conservative Member recognises the nature of the real problems that faced Railtrack and that needed to be resolved. Despite the excellent work of many Railtrack employees, there were significant worries about the organisation, and reference has already been made to the matter of golden goodbyes. Although the Secretary of State referred to Gerald Corbett, he forgot to add that it was Gerald Corbett who apologised for Railtrack's failures.

There have been numerous worries about Railtrack's repeated failure to meet each of the new deadlines that it set itself in order to get back to so-called normal following the Hatfield tragedy. There have been worries about the management and supervision of sub-contractors, and about cost overruns. Many people who saw the work of Railtrack at close quarters have expressed considerable worry. Much of the debate about Tom Winsor's evidence to the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions last week has been about whether he was threatened by the Secretary of State. Sadly, little attention has been focused on some of the Rail Regulator's other comments about precisely what he thought about Railtrack as an organisation. He said that he believed that they were the authors of their own misfortune, and that the core problem was the competence of the management of the company. He added that

"I have no duty—and indeed no inclination—to give . . . taxpayers' money to the company for being inefficient or incompetent."

Amazingly, the Rail Regulator went on to say that, for the life of him, he could not understand why a company that depended so much on its assets should have failed to produce a proper detailed asset register. He had to ask Railtrack on three separate occasions to produce voluntarily such an asset register and, when it failed to do that, he had to make its production obligatory. Tom Winsor was clearly worried, as were the train operating companies.

It is worth reflecting that over the past four weeks—from 13 October—there has been a significant decline in passenger numbers on our railways. Approximately 2 million people have abandoned the railway system. Phil White, the chief executive of National Express, which is one of the largest train operating companies, was asked the reason for that. He made it clear that he blamed Railtrack and, not least, passengers' increasing frustration with the number of speed restrictions that are still in place.

Of course something had to be done—not least because of the financial viability of Railtrack. In January, the company was placed on credit watch and then its credit ratings were dropped. On 18 February, Railtrack itself announced that it was significantly slashing its five-year investment programme. On 2 April, Railtrack went round with its now infamous begging bowl, asking for additional money.

Chris Grayling: As the hon. Gentleman is giving the same speech that he gave in Westminster Hall this morning, perhaps I could make the same intervention that I made then. Does he agree that one of the reasons for the financial pressures on Railtrack was that the regulator had given the company what amounted to, in effect, a standstill budget for the next five years for repairs and maintenance of the network, despite the fact that the company was being asked to preside over a 50 per cent. increase in passenger numbers over the next few years?

Mr. Foster: Let me shock the hon. Gentleman by giving him the same answer that I gave him in Westminster Hall: he will be well aware that, before that time, Railtrack had already decided to slash its investment budget. Furthermore, let me give him some additional information that I did not give him in Westminster Hall: it is clearly on the record in the Rail Regulator's evidence to the Select Committee that, on many occasions, he had made the offer to the company that it could come to him for a further review, but it failed to take up that offer. It is further evidence of real concern as to the competence of the management of the company that it failed to take up such offers.

It is also important to consider what happened as we came nearer and nearer to the Secretary of State's decision. On 24 May, Railtrack reported an annual loss of £534 million and the share price fell by a further

[Mr. Foster]

3.7 per cent. Throughout the life of the company, the general trend of its share price has been downward. By 6 June, the share value had fallen so low that the company was ejected from the FTSE 100. Interestingly, one of the main commentators, A.B.N. Amro noted:

"The full year results should leave investors in no doubt that their equity is in danger of being wiped out."

It is a great pity that Railtrack's management did not warn shareholders of that situation.

Amro also pointed out that Railtrack

"has been valued on hope rather than fundamentals for too long".

It was thus hardly surprising that, on 12 June, the Rail Regulator advised Railtrack to stop hawking its begging bowl around.

In August, as the Secretary of State has already told us, Railtrack's own advisers suggested that there were only three options: restructuring, renationalisation or receivership. As all those problems were mounting, it makes perfect sense to those of us on the Liberal Democrat Benches that the Secretary of State had to act. He had to do something in the interests of the public.

Although the Secretary of State must bear some responsibility for the way that he acted—as I shall explain in a moment—the shareholders, whose grievances have been so loudly expressed by Conservative Front Benchers, should be looking to the real author of their difficulty: not the Secretary of State, but mainly the management of Railtrack.

I fully realise that many of those shareholders are Railtrack employees, but I hope that they will reflect on the interesting fact that on 25 July the company was prepared to hand out to its employees shares worth £5 million, but two weeks later began to develop plans to slash one in 12 of the work force. That is the measure of its regard for its employees.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I am interested in the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about the company's shareholders. In a previous life—in the latter part of last year—I was approached by a stockbroker who was advising one of my clients to invest in Railtrack. I pointed out that the share price was poor at that point, but I was told: "Don't worry about that, because the assets are much greater. Even if anything goes wrong, you'll be all right". The fact that such advice was being given to shareholders may be one factor, but they should have been aware of the falling share price even at that time.

Mr. Foster: Indeed they should, and attention was drawn to that point on 25 July. The hon. Gentleman hits on an important point. I hope that the House will remember that the hon. Member for Maidenhead suggested that the shares were now completely worthless. That is simply not true, for the very reason that the hon. Gentleman gives; there are still significant assets available to shareholders.

Mr. Byers: It is also important to make the point that there are effectively two companies. The first, Railtrack plc, is in administration. The other, Railtrack Group, is not in administration and the value in Railtrack Group is available to the shareholders of Railtrack.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for making that point, but we shall return in a minute to the issue of the two companies and the confusion that has existed because of that. The Secretary of State is absolutely right to remind us that significant assets are still available to shareholders and those are the subject of on-going deliberations. The shares are not worthless, as the hon. Member for Maidenhead said.

Our argument is that the Secretary of State was right to act. He was certainly right to decide that the solution was not one that involved pouring yet more taxpayers' money into this ailing and failing company. He was right also to seek to develop a solution that would end the conflict in a monopoly between shareholder profit and passenger safety. Something had to be done, and the Secretary of State's proposals to seek to develop a not-for-profit public interest company were definitely right.

It is not surprising that we say that because, as far back as 14 February, we proposed that model to the Secretary of State. The week after we made our proposal, the Institute for Public Policy Research made a similar proposal. I acknowledge that the solution was the right one, but I fear that the way in which this has been handled, in part by the Secretary of State, may mean that following a botched privatisation, we are in serious danger of botching the solution with which he has come forward.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State could have exonerated himself from the charge of planning renationalisation by pointing out that nobody would willingly and with premeditation cause as much confusion in the railway industry as he has by his actions?

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I will come on to why I believe the Secretary of State, having got the right solution, has caused great confusion. Partly that was because the Secretary of State had to rush into making the decision. For a long time, the Labour party—particularly when in opposition—railed against the Conservative Government's privatisation of the railways. One had the impression that, once in Government, Labour would take some serious action to address the problems. But, in practice, they did very little in their first term of office.

There were times during their first term when one began to wonder whether they had changed their tune and were now great fans of privatisation. Within two years of coming into office in 1997, the Labour Government Foreign and Commonwealth Office—in collaboration, interestingly, with the Department of Trade and Industry—produced a booklet from the UK Railway Sector Group entitled, "Releasing the Power of Rail". That certainly did not criticise the Conservative party's privatisation of the railways. It is perhaps worth noting that the booklet was intended for overseas consumption, and not for consumption in this country.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Liberal Democrats are long on criticism but short on solutions. Since his party was so clever as to propose a not-for-profit company in February, will he now tell us how the Liberal Democrats would lever in £30 billion of private money under such a not-for-profit company?

Mr. Foster: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, I will come to that. I was critical of his party for failing to

come up with any solutions, so it is clearly incumbent upon me to give some suggested solutions to the problem. I have every intention of doing so in a few minutes.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No. I want to quote from the booklet, because it shows the problem that the Labour Government had in reaching a solution. The booklet, intended for overseas consumption, was hardly critical of privatisation when it said things such as:

"Railways are back . . . Trains are cleaner, safer and often a good deal faster . . . There is new energy and enthusiasm in the industry."

It even boasted, despite what it now says about fragmentation:

"There are now 25 operating companies, instead of just one"

and concluded:

"The arrival of competition has produced a surge of talent and innovation."

Therefore the problem was that there was a schizophrenia in attitudes to privatisation in the first term of a Labour Government.

In the second term, after the general election, there still was not the glimmer of an intention, even by a new Secretary of State, to act. On February 14, when we produced the proposals that the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) mentioned, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) had raised the proposals at Prime Minister's questions, and received from the Prime Minister the bizarre answer:

"I do not know what the right hon. Gentleman means by a not-for-profit organisation".—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 308.]

Obviously, that solution was not even a glimmer in the Government's eye at the time.

Much later, in June, that solution was still not being planned—nothing was afoot—because the Department's press release No. 285, of 18 June, had an interesting heading: "Government Pledges Certainty to allow the Industry to tackle the tough job ahead on our railways" and the Secretary of State was quoted in it as saying:

"So I am not going to embark on big structural changes. What the industry needs now is a period of stability and certainty so it can concentrate on the vital job of delivering safe, reliable services for passengers and freight."

In July, as the situation continued to worsen, Liberal Democrat Members again made attempts to persuade the Secretary of State to push the not-for-profit model. On 3 July, at Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions questions, I asked the Secretary of State:

"Will he reconsider his decision to make no major structural changes and examine proposals for bringing the parts of Railtrack that directly"

relate to running

"the railways into a not-for-profit public interest company?"

The Secretary of State had an opportunity to reply, and he did. He said, interestingly, that the proposals would require legislation; we have heard nothing about any need for legislation now. He then said of the proposals:

"They would simply introduce paralysis into the system, when we want genuine improvements."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 137.]

In July, therefore, there was no intention to follow our proposals and yet, despite all that confusion, by 5 October the Secretary of State—and, presumably, the Prime Minister—had done a huge U-turn and decided to do so. The problem was that everything had to be done in such a rush that, effectively, the Secretary of State had to adopt the nuclear option approach, instead of taking the time, as we proposed in our document, to have discussions with Railtrack about that option—something that Railtrack's advisers proposed could be discussed with the Government as early as the middle of August.

Mr. Redwood: Is it Liberal policy to give any compensation to either or both shareholders and bondholders? What is the Liberal party's estimate of the costs of strengthening the balance sheet, paying the current bills, sorting out the administration and giving the new not-for-profit company a strong enough foundation? Would it not be a very expensive matter?

Mr. Foster: I shall answer the second part of the right hon. Gentleman's question in a minute. In answer to the first part of the question, we have made it absolutely clear that we do not believe that any additional Government—that is, taxpayers'—money should be put into supporting the shareholders. We recognise absolutely that a significant value remains in those shares as a result of the assets that still remain available to them, and that matter is being discussed at present. However, as many hon. Members have said, people holding shares should be aware that their value can go down as well as up. Anyone who had followed the value of Railtrack shares over a long period would have seen exactly where they were heading; the graph shows it clearly.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No.

However, if the Secretary of State had to rush into his decision, there is also some confusion as to precisely what that decision is. On 15 October, having said that he was going to try to make changes, he said:

"We shall propose to the administrator that a private company limited by guarantee be established to take over Railtrack's responsibilities. Any operating surplus it makes will be reinvested in the railway network . . . As it would have no shareholders, we would remove the conflict between the need to increase shareholder value and the interests of rail passengers."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 955.]

It is clear from that that the proposal was one that the Secretary of State was putting to the administrator. However, on 5 November, in an answer to his hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), he said:

"Now we can move forward and put in place a structure whereby, because it will be a not-for-profit organisation, any operating surpluses can be used for the interests of the railway network."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 24.]

At that point, the Secretary of State is stating definitely what the structure will be. However, on 6 November, in his speech to the Confederation of British Industry, he said:

"But the company limited by guarantee is only one possible model."

[Mr. Foster]

There is considerable confusion, so I hope that the Minister who winds up the debate will provide a clear explanation. My understanding is that the administrator is entirely independent, and that it is for the independent administrator to decide whether or not to establish the model that both the Secretary of State and the Liberal Democrats want.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman make clear his party's policy on the not-for-profit company? He has said that he would not countenance compensation from the public purse being given to shareholders, but if he rolls back the clock to the summer, when his policy was to pursue that option, did he expect that the company's assets would be confiscated through an administration order, as the Government have done?

Mr. Foster: No. I am more than happy to share with the hon. Gentleman a copy of the document that has been publicly available since 14 November. It sets out three stages, the first and most sensible of which would have been to hold discussions with Railtrack. Given that that sector of its overall activities was making a huge loss, it is not unreasonable to suppose—as the company's advisers hinted during the August discussions with the Government—that the company might have wanted to pursue that option with the Government's support. The hon. Gentleman can read about the other stages.

There is one other area in which the Secretary of State is guilty of causing some confusion. Just a few minutes ago, he intervened to remind the House that there are two separate organisations: Railtrack Group and Railtrack plc. He is absolutely right to say that the distinction between the two is crucial to understanding what happened.

When I raised that specific issue during the discussion following the private notice question on 5 November, the Secretary of State replied:

"Some of the confusion has been caused by the fact that there are two companies: Railtrack plc, which holds the licence to operate the network and which is in administration; and Railtrack Group, which is not in administration and is still run by the directors of Railtrack."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 24.]

That is clear. The implication is that it is everyone else, not the Secretary of State, who is confused about the distinction between the two bodies. Yet in his statement to the House on 15 October, he made specific reference to Railtrack on no fewer than 30 separate occasions, on 29 of which he referred only to "Railtrack" and made no distinction between Railtrack plc and Railtrack Group. On only one occasion did he refer to Railtrack plc. Perhaps most significant of all is that part of the statement in which the right hon. Gentleman spoke about what was being put into administration. He said, not Railtrack plc, but

"Railtrack was taken into administration because it was, or was likely to become, unable to pay its debts."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 955.]

I do not accept that it is worth spending much time debating issues of who said what to whom and when. I genuinely believe, however, that the way in which the Secretary of State has handled the issue has led to some of the confusion. My biggest fear is that, because of the confusion, the new vehicle that the right hon. Gentleman hopes will be agreed by the administrator—the not-for-profit public interest company—may have real difficulty in attracting private investment. That is the key concern.

The hon. Member for Cotswold asked me what the Liberal Democrats would do about this. We have always made it clear that we believe that a not-for-profit public interest company should be able to raise bonds, but those should be Government backed. The Government are creating huge problems for themselves because of their obsession with the public sector borrowing requirement. The only successful way to move forward is by the approach I have outlined.

Mrs. May: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for responding to my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). The hon. Gentleman has just said that the bonds would be Government backed. Presumably, that means a Government guarantee. How big a guarantee would he expect them to give? Would it be for the full £34 billion?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Lady must consider the sums of money that would be required. As she is well aware, there are normally three ways to borrow money. The first is for the Government to borrow directly, which is the cheapest way and that is why a number of people want the complete renationalisation of Railtrack. The most expensive way is to borrow on the open market. The middle way—if one dare use that phrase—is to do it with Government guarantees. That would seem to be the most likely way to ensure that the money is produced.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): How much?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman referred to the 1 per cent. and 2 per cent. returns that would be required in an earlier debate, so I will not go into that now.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No. I want to finish now as many other hon. Members want to speak.

I end where I began. A great deal needs to be done to put right the problems on our railways. We should be debating not who said what to whom and when, but how we are to move forward with this new model for Railtrack: how to reduce fragmentation in our railways and find ways to put the track and trains together; how to get rid of the perverse penalty system; how to tackle the real problem of ridiculously high fares, which are some of the highest in the world; how to make more of our stations safer; and how to integrate trains and other forms of travel. Those are the questions in which the travelling public are interested. They want a safe, reliable and affordable railway and they want it quickly. Today's debate has not moved that on one iota.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker I remind the House that a 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches applies from now on. I call the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall).

5.13 pm

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): First, I offer my condolences to the families of those killed in the air crash in New York yesterday. It is right and proper for hon. Members to realise the gravity of that accident and to offer our condolences.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in a debate that has, ostensibly, been called by the Opposition to scrutinise the role of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in placing the administration order on Railtrack.

We could look at the debate in a completely different light and see that it is a smokescreen intended by the Opposition to block out why we are debating the issue in the first place. It was the Conservative Government's privatisation of Railtrack that has left us where we are this afternoon.

The start of the debate was interesting. The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) had the opportunity to explain Conservative party policy towards public transport in general and the railways in particular. She failed to do so and instead launched a personal attack on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. That attack was unwarranted. She did not make the case and, at the end of the debate, we will see clear support for his actions in the Lobby, which is right and proper.

Clearly, the Tory party does not want to debate the failure of Railtrack because it was the architect of that failure. In 1993, the Conservatives were responsible for the legislation that paved the way for Railtrack and they proceeded with the flotation of the company on 20 May 1996.

I am conscious of the fact that I have not spoken in the House for a while, but I have listened to an awful lot of debates. The Tories' contribution to this afternoon's debate qualifies them as a top candidate for the brass neck of the year award. The way in which they have broached the issue is breathtaking.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman is reading from a prepared speech.

Mr. Hall: Of course I am. It is a long time since I have spoken in the House, and I am being careful about my remarks. Earlier today, I noticed that the hon. Gentleman was reading out his speech from the Dispatch Box in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Pickles: There is no Dispatch Box in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Hall: But the hon. Gentleman read out his speech.

This is an interesting debate. Railtrack came to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and asked for a blank cheque to oversee the running of the company not just for this year, but for many years to come. It is interesting that a public company should come to the Government and say, "Please will you give us a blank cheque to cover our operations." It is not the Government's role to underwrite companies on the stock exchange, nor is it their role to give further subsidy to a company that has had so much Government money in the past five years that it should not have had to go to the High Court.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hall: Not at the minute. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I will develop my argument. If I do not cover the point that he wishes to make, I am prepared to give way to him later.

When the previous Government floated Railtrack on the stock exchange in 1996, it should have had a secure future. It had a valuable property portfolio and an annual guaranteed income stream of Government subsidy worth £1.8 billion. Why did it need to come to the Government after five years, during which it must have received £8 billion, to ask them to prevent it from being put in a position in which it might be trading insolvently and in which it was certainly unable to cover its costs.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hall: Not just yet; the hon. Gentleman must be patient. If he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he may get the chance to speak. There is a time limit on this debate, and I am conscious that many Members want to participate in it.

Railtrack ultimately failed because privatisation by John Major's Administration was a rushed, botched and incompetent exercise that failed to deliver value for money for taxpayers. Specifically, it gave shareholders confidence in an unsound company and left the travelling public saddled with an inefficient and unsafe railway network.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Government have had four years to sort it out.

Mr. Hall: Things take time. If the privatisation had not been botched in the first place, we would not have needed to use so much public money to sustain that public limited company. Today, we have not had any apologies from the Opposition for the way in which they privatised Railtrack.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hall: Not at the moment.

We should receive at least some apology from the Opposition for the way in which they dealt with privatisation and for putting the travelling public in a difficult position. Right from the start, the Tories' motivation for privatising Railtrack was not difficult to discern. It was not to maximise receipts for the Treasury or make sure that the travelling public had a safer or more efficient railway—as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, they were motivated by pure party political dogma.

I do not expect the House to take my word for that. I urge Members to read the twenty-fourth report of the Public Accounts Committee, from the 1998–99 session. The House will recall that Railtrack was floated on 20 May 1996, as I said, and shares were issued at £3.90. The offer was oversubscribed by 10 per cent. and the Government raised £1.9 billion from the sale. Like many preceding

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privatisations, the sale of Railtrack was characterised by the fact that the company was undervalued, shares were underpriced and taxpayers were ripped off. It is no wonder that the PAC said that Railtrack

"had been undervalued and sold in haste".

It is clear, even to the most partial observer in the Chamber, that the sale of Railtrack was not motivated by a desire to drive up standards in the railways, and certainly not by a desire to maximise profits for the Government—it was motivated by pure party political dogma.

On 15 February 1999, in evidence to the Public Accounts Committee, Sir Richard Mottram, the permanent secretary at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, told the Committee that

"in the political circumstances of that period, a 100 per cent. sale was required".

The circumstances to which Sir Richard referred, as confirmed in the twenty-fourth report of the Public Accounts Committee, were that the Tory Government had decided to sell 100 per cent. of the shares in Railtrack because of the prospect of a Labour victory in the pending general election.

I have no doubt that I am right. Sir Richard Mottram is a highly regarded, top-ranking civil servant. His evidence to the PAC was given impartially and provides irrefutable proof that Railtrack was privatised for political purposes. The report also confirms that the aim of privatising Railtrack was to give shareholders the best possible deal. The House will realise that the Tories failed to achieve that.

At the time that Railtrack was privatised, it was described as having a secure and profitable income stream; a large asset base, including a substantial property portfolio; scope to reduce costs; and considerable investment potential. The Tory Government went even further and guaranteed the company an annual income of £1.8 billion, wiped off £1.4 billion of debts and offered the shareholders, in their first year, a return of 19 per cent. on their investment. Over the past five years, Railtrack has enjoyed about £8 billion of hard-earned taxpayers' cash, but in the same period the travelling public have suffered enduring delays in services, increased travel costs and misery at the hands of a privatised company.

Anyone who has had the misfortune to travel on the west coast main line will confirm that the two major problems facing the line are that the track is totally inadequate and the signalling is in urgent need of modification and major investment. The west coast main line connects the north-west and Scotland to London. It is in a deplorable state. I cannot tell the House how much the economy of the north-west has lost as a result of the state of the line, but one thing is certain: because of the way in which Railtrack has handled its affairs, the prospect of the west coast main line being improved and upgraded under its stewardship has been no more than a pipe dream. The cost of that project has risen to more than £6 billion.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hall: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, whom I have come across before.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman is presenting a black picture of Railtrack and its capabilities. If that is the case, why did his Government choose to make Railtrack the principal investment vehicle for their 10-year plan for rail?

Mr. Hall: That is an important question. Railtrack was the company that owned the track at the time that the 10-year rail plan was introduced. It was not until the early part of this year that Railtrack told the Government that it was facing severe financial difficulties. That is the straightforward answer. It would have been stupid not to include in the 10-year plan the company that owned the track.

I beat the Conservative candidate in Warrington, South by only 191 votes in 1992. The hon. Gentleman fought the seat in 1997 and lost to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Helen Southworth)—*[Interruption.]* I had not gone on the chicken run by then.

How could a company like Railtrack find itself in such financial difficulty? With all that public money, why could it not invest in the rail and provide a brighter future for people who travel on the railways? There are two possible answers: at the time of privatisation, either the then Government did not know the state of disrepair of the track, or they knew the state of disrepair but did not tell anybody. The investment problems that Railtrack has experienced since the Hatfield disaster have brought it to its present state. If the then Government sold Railtrack without knowing the state of the track, that is one thing, but if they knew about the state of the track and did not tell anybody, that is criminally deceptive. That question needs answering.

The next question that needs answering is why, once Railtrack was a publicly owned company, it did not carry out an investigation into the state of the track to find out what liabilities it had taken on? It might then have been able to plan a way forward to prevent the position in which it now finds itself. It might have been able to put a plan into action to build, over time, a railway that was efficient and effective for people to travel on.

I am not sure what the answer is, but one thing I know for sure is that Railtrack did not tell its shareholders about the state of the company when it went to see the Secretary of State to ask for more money. I am certain that it knew that it would find itself unable to meet its debts, and therefore went to the Secretary of State. He has made the right decision, which is why the Tory party is on the wrong side of the argument this afternoon. We must take forward Railtrack in administration, find a secure future for it and ensure that the travelling public are better looked after.

5.25 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): The Secretary of State was typically calm in the face of this afternoon's attack and the Back Benchers who came in to support him were extremely boisterous in that support. I am afraid that that merely arouses further my alarm about the future of the railways. I do not think that Labour Members appreciate just how much damage has been done. The blunders and behaviour of the Secretary of State will have lasting consequences which will be felt in more than one area.

One important area, which we have debated this afternoon, is the damage done to shareholders' interests. It is plain that the Secretary of State remains unrepentant.

I am sure that it will be further explored not only in this debate but by the Financial Services Authority and, in due course, by the courts. The way in which the Secretary of State has behaved would bring considerable retribution on anyone in the private sector involved in the affairs of a publicly quoted company who behaved in such a way towards the markets and the company's owner.

The damage that is obviously not appreciated by the Secretary of State or by Labour Back Benchers is that done to the future prospects of the railways. We should remind ourselves that there is probably widespread agreement in the House that the dominant issue to be addressed is how we are to raise the vast amounts of investment required to modernise the railway system and provide the travelling public with what they require. There is a need for £35 billion of private investment, on top of which it is likely that a lot of public investment will be required. No one listening to this debate could appreciate that that statement is supposed to be agreed to by the Labour party with the same enthusiasm with which the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats endorse it.

In order to raise huge amounts of private investment, it is extremely important that the markets respond to the appeal and that the investment should be delivered in good time—parts of the railway network are probably deteriorating as we speak. It should also be delivered at reasonable cost to the taxpayer and the travelling public who have, in part, to service the return on that investment, and it must be invested efficiently to provide high quality service delivery to the public.

The Government have gone backwards on all those counts. The way in which they have treated Railtrack and handled the events of the past few weeks has gravely damaged the potential to raise that sum of money at all, let alone in time.

Dr. Pugh: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: No, because I am speaking to a strict time limit, otherwise I would do so with pleasure. I will touch on what the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) said in a few moments.

The Secretary of State's behaviour—his whole demeanour as well as his argument—shows me that he has learned nothing whatever either from his short time in office in this particular post or from the fact that the Government have, in more than four years, made remarkably little progress towards their ambition of getting the required private investment into the railways.

As the hon. Member for Bath said, the Secretary of State rushed into the decision. Looking at and listening to the Secretary of State, and it is the second time recently on this subject that I have done so, I think that he is enjoying it. I think that he thought that this would be a popular decision, which would play well with Labour Back Benchers. It is playing well with some of them, and I will come to that in a second—they will come to regret it.

Railtrack had been so vilified by members of the Government and their supporters that the right hon. Gentleman thought that insolvency would be greeted as a kind of public service, because fat cats who had caused accidents were being dispatched. I suspect that he even rushed out his announcement to ensure that it was not stolen from him by someone such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, trying to take the credit for an announcement that was very popular with old Labour or those who still have some vestige of old Labour instincts.

The fact is that that instinct of the Secretary of State and of some of the hon. Members who have spoken is contrary to the Government's declared policy position. Since the moment when they came into office, the Government have never espoused the cause of renationalising the railways, because they know perfectly well that they have not the slightest prospect of raising the sums involved or of getting the quality of management that would be required if they ever reverted to a nationalised railway. Their policy is to make investment in the railways so attractive that it will continue to bring in the funds that are required.

I am genuinely indebted to the hon. Member for Bath, as I was not previously aware of the pamphlet that the Government published in their first term extolling the virtues of privatisation as it had progressed thus far, two years into office. The pamphlet needs to be commended to people such as the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall), who is responding in the way in which the Secretary of State wants his Back Benchers to respond. He made a speech that he could have made before 1997 or when he was fighting the election that year. He still thinks that the whole point is to vilify the privatisation process and to suggest that making profits out of private investment in railways causes accidents and reduces the level of service to the public. However, that is completely contrary to the direction in which the Government wish to go.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) pointed out, that argument is also completely contrary to the evidence and facts for the first two or three years. The Government's pamphlet was well supported by the evidence. Following privatisation, usage of the railway soared. Indeed, that turned out to be one of the problems, given the old-fashioned infrastructure. I think that passenger usage increased by about 35 per cent., although I am speaking from memory, for which I apologise. Freight usage increased by about 45 per cent., trains became more punctual and the safety record improved. Hence, the virtues of the approach were extolled to people overseas.

The Labour party never quite learned from that and still has not done so. It was hostile to privatisation and it hankers to go back to more public sector control. I think that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have adopted the principles of privatisation and the private finance initiative, but, alas, their party has never done so. Indeed, even some of their Ministers have never really adopted those principles and do not approve of them.

That is why the Secretary of State should be careful before he gets too happy about his fate this evening. He may have every confidence in the Government Whips or think that there are only small numbers in the Conservative party, and he may get favourable write-ups in sections of the press—however, no Cabinet Ministers are here. Understandably, there is no sign of the Prime Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer. If I were the Secretary of State, I would look out for them as soon as the first reshuffle occurs. I do not think they are pleased with his work, as something must be done to deliver improvement on the railways. That is meant to be the

[Mr. Clarke]

second-term duty of the Government, who say they want to deliver noticeable improvements in the quantity of public service, but, as hon. Members may gather, they have gone in the opposite direction and are gravely damaging the prospects of raising the private sector investment that they want.

The Deputy Prime Minister followed exactly the same pattern when he was responsible for these matters in the previous Parliament. He was hostile to the people with whom he should have been working from the moment when he took over responsibility for the railways. He enjoyed any discomfiture on the part of the companies or those who were responsible for them. He was inclined to intervene too much and to encourage over-regulation, which was one of the factors that inhibited the progress of the privatised railway companies. Of course, he found the same problem—he was attacking the companies that were supposed to be raising the capital that was necessary to deliver the Government's policy.

The actual disaster that hit the finances of all the privatised companies was the aftermath of the railway accidents. The Government ordered inquiries, whose results I accept. They discovered management errors of the sort that occur in all organisations. However, the Government were content to allow the conclusion to be drawn that privatisation was somehow causing the accidents. The politicisation of railway accidents quite obviously meant that the reaction to the Hatfield crash was wholly excessive. The whole network was closed down for months and the finances of Railtrack and the operating companies have never been able to recover from that blow. Yet sections of the Labour party rejoiced, because they thought that the reputation of privatisation was being damaged again by those consequences.

The present Secretary of State, in his short time in office, has sought to make matters worse. The operating companies have been offered shorter franchises, which make it less likely that they will be able to raise the capital for more modern rolling stock. He has got rid of the people who should be helping him. He sacked—in effect—Sir Alastair Morton, with whom I worked on developing the private finance initiative—now the Government's policy—in the first place. Sir Alastair Morton is a very difficult man to work with; that is why I used to have him there. He has fear of no one—he gives Ministers his own opinion, and he gives their officials his own opinion.

That was all wrong for new Labour, and the best public servant it had was sacked. He was replaced by other public servants who were also difficult. Tom Winsor, the Rail Regulator, is now at odds with the Government over his account of what happened. That is a matter of pure semantics, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone said. [HON. MEMBERS: "Maidenhead."] Yes; they are a little different. The idea is absurd that the independence of the regulator is intact, when a Secretary of State with a huge majority says that if the regulator seeks to intervene further, legislation will be passed to curb his powers. That was an absurd intervention on the powers of the regulator by the Secretary of State, designed to deliver his chosen objective—the closure of Railtrack.

The Secretary of State has fallen out with all those people. He must have had a say in the choice of the directors of Railtrack, with whom he is now at war. That goes on. Now he wants to put a not-for-profit company, which he is unable to explain, in a position in which the same shareholders will come back to put up the money again and put themselves at the mercy of his behaviour again.

I conclude with the point with which I began. I do not think that it has crossed the Secretary of State's mind to consider the damage that he has done to the future of the railways and to the service that is likely to be given to the travelling public.

5.37 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): It is wholly appropriate that the Conservatives have brought the issue of Railtrack to the Chamber today. A better use of their time and ours, however, would have been to debate the possibility of a public apology by the Conservatives for their botched privatisation of our rail system, and to debate constructive proposals on how we might restore a rail service that meets the needs of the travelling public whom the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) mentioned. We certainly do not have such a service at the moment.

Railtrack was, from the beginning, part of a botched privatisation. Some of my hon. Friends have already referred to the conclusions of the National Audit Office's report, and to the £6 billion shortfall in valuation between what was obtained and what was due to the public. Railtrack was part of a flawed system of privatisation that separated wheels from rail and fragmented the public transport rail system. Worse, Railtrack soaked up public subsidy as the beneficiary of at least £9 billion of taxpayers' money. It paid out £10 million to directors and £700 million to shareholders.

Mr. Pickles: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Ellman: I am sorry, but there are time constraints in this debate. I might give way later.

In the uncontested petition made to the High Court by the Secretary of State, it was shown that the company had a projected deficit of £700 million by December, rising to an anticipated £1.7 billion by the end of March next year. Are the Conservatives seriously saying that the Government should have been prepared to give more to a company in such a financial state? It was eating up taxpayers' money and failing to deliver. It wanted unidentified amounts of money—open-ended cash supplies—and had predicted deficits that were not challenged in the petition to the High Court. To have done so would have been a dereliction of public duty.

We should consider what Railtrack has failed to achieve. I will make particular reference to the west coast main line, because as hon. Members have said, that is an important issue, especially to the north-west region. The Transport Sub-Committee discussions made a number of things clear. They showed that, before Railtrack was placed in administration, discussions took place between Railtrack and Virgin, and that compensation to Virgin was considered because of Railtrack's failure to modernise the west coast main line as promised.

During the Sub-Committee discussions, £300 million in compensation which Virgin thought was due to it from Railtrack was mentioned. Indeed, I have heard reference to larger sums. In addition, reference was made there and

elsewhere to the fact that Virgin sought rail ticket price increases as part of the compensation package. Virgin considered that it had lost money because of the failure to modernise the west coast main line.

It is surely absurd and unjust that travellers on the west coast main line are losing out because Railtrack, before going into administration, failed to deliver modernisation as promised. Individuals are losing out; the economy is losing out. The economy of the north-west, and that of other regions, has suffered a great deal because of that failure; but according to statements made by the chief executives of Railtrack and Virgin in the Sub-Committee, we have confirmation that the public purse was asked to compensate the privatised company for failure to deliver what the public were promised. That adds insult to injury.

Mr. Pickles: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Ellman: I may give way later.

The travelling public have already lost out because modernisation did not take place as promised, and now they are being asked provide compensation. That is particularly galling for travellers from Liverpool.

Owing to the privatised system and price rises inflicted by Virgin, some Liverpool-to-London services have increased in price by more than 100 per cent., and it is now impossible for anyone on such a service to get to London for less than £153 standard or £240 first class if they want to arrive before the afternoon. Liverpool is regenerating itself, but how can that be achieved if passengers face price increases of that order? They now hear that Virgin may increase saver ticket and other fares by 33 per cent. as part of the compensation package, because Railtrack failed to deliver.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Lady explain how she can have confidence in her own Secretary of State levering in £34 billion of private finance, which will be needed if her constituents are to experience improvements in the London-to-Liverpool service and modernisation of the west coast main line?

Mrs. Ellman: My comments show how Railtrack, despite receiving large public subsidies, woefully failed to modernise the west coast main line. Instead of trying to cover up their bad record on rail privatisation, will the Conservatives suggest some positive ways forward? If they did so, I suggest that support from the private sector for investment would be forthcoming. However, Conservative Members are more concerned to cover up their misdeeds, mismanagement and incompetence than to look after the needs of the travelling public.

Condemnation of Railtrack's management is easy to find. The evidence was clear in discussions that took place in the Select Committee over the past two weeks. Before that, the Select Committee's all-party report of March 2001 criticised Railtrack's performance in maintaining, renewing and developing the network, and described it as seriously inadequate. That criticism was supported by Conservatives on the Committee.

Only last week, Tom Winsor, the Rail Regulator, told the Select Committee:

"I believe that the company spent too long complaining about multiple stakeholder pressures and interfaces and failed to understand the simple realities of its business which are this: you do not neglect your assets and you are not hostile to your customers."

I cannot think of a more damning indictment. Comments of that nature were also made, by implication, to the Select Committee by the Strategic Rail Authority, the Department and by others giving evidence, including by the chief executive of GNER. Again and again, we heard about a company that apparently had no interest in its customers. Indeed, according to the regulator, it was hostile to them.

Our interest, however, must be in deeds rather than words. For the west coast main line, Railtrack simply failed to deliver. One privatised company is now seeking compensation from the Government, and fares have been put up for already hard-pressed travellers because the privatised Railtrack failed to deliver. I cannot think of a more damning indictment of a privatised industry.

Mr. Pickles: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Ellman: I am sorry, but I have only two minutes left.

We must now look to the future and consider what to do. I applaud the decision taken by the Secretary of State. It is appropriate that questions be asked about procedures and legalities, and questioning on those issues will continue at tomorrow's meeting of the Select Committee. However, it would be more appropriate if Conservative Members faced up to their failings of the past and, instead of continuing their dogged adherence to failed privatisation, accepted that rail privatisation was wrong. It was not in the interests of the taxpayer or of the travelling public, and I ask them to join Labour Members in seeking a constructive way forward, in which we have once again a rail service run in the interests of the travelling public.

5.48 pm

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): The essence of this debate on the handling of the Secretary of State's decisions relating to Railtrack is best summed up by the fact that he could not even stay to listen to what was said about his behaviour, and has already fled the Chamber. I wanted to start by finding some common ground with him, although I admit that I shall go on to be critical thereafter.

I share the Secretary of State's unhappiness about the quality of Railtrack management over the past few years. Had the Conservatives been in government, we would have taken a similarly jaundiced view of some of the decisions and behaviour of the Railtrack board. Mr. Corbett has a lot to answer for.

The giveaway in the Secretary of State's speech was how frequently he had to resort to the partisan and ideological instincts of his Back Benchers. We have seen that in the House for generations; it is not a new instinct, but it is always a reflection of a Minister who is in trouble. That is what we heard today.

The Secretary of State was all injured innocence. He could not understand what the fuss was about, but the truth is that he has form. Some time ago, he told the nation about a conversation that he had with the chairman of BMW, and the chairman of BMW said, "It ain't so." He tells the nation about a conversation with the chairman of Railtrack and the chairman of Railtrack says, "It ain't so." He tells the nation of a conversation with the Rail Regulator and the Rail Regulator says, "It ain't so."

[Sir Brian Mawhinney]

It reminds me of that old saying, "Everybody's out of step except our Johnny"—everyone knows the meaning of that.

I dealt with the Rail Regulator. We had a series of meetings during my 11 months as Secretary of State for Transport. We recognised our individual responsibilities. We showed respect for each other's responsibilities. Neither I nor any of my Secretary of State colleagues ever threatened to take away the independence of the regulator if he did not do what we wanted him to do, or thought should be done.

We have now got to the point where, following the Rail Regulator's evidence—I am not getting into semantics, either—the chief executive of Railtrack has, I am told, talked on the record about the possibility of legal action against the Secretary of State for "malfeasance in public policy". The House should not underestimate the seriousness of that charge. Whether he is proven in a court to be guilty or not, the damage is done to Railtrack and indeed to the Secretary of State by the very raising of that charge. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was right, as he so frequently is. The Government do not understand that the Rail Regulator is one of the guarantors of the confidence of the City and the private sector in putting money into organisations such as that. The damage will be enormous.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: No. There is only a limited amount of time.

Talking of the City, I remind the House of another comment that the Secretary of State has made in the Chamber on two or three occasions recently. It was one of the few things that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) did not mention. He has repeatedly told the House that he has had discussions with people in the City and that they were all enthusiastic about putting more money into private finance initiative and public-private partnership projects.

Those of us who have had some experience found that a bit incredible, but there was no evidence to contradict the Secretary of State until I opened yesterday's *Evening Standard* and read:

"The Institutional Shareholders' Committee, which represents every investing body in the City . . . suggested there was a clear legal case for pursuing the Government over its handling of Railtrack.

The ISC also called on Bank of England Governor Sir Edward George to intervene in the situation to prevent lasting damage in relations between the City and the Government.

The committee states that it has written to Sir Edward 'to explain its concern over the need for a stable and productive relation between the Government and the City'".

Listen to this:

"It says the letter 'urges the Governor to use his good offices to promote a solution that alleviates this concern and will allow the City to continue financing projects of vital importance to this country'".

The City is telling the Governor of the Bank of England that, unless he finds a solution to the dispute between the Government and the City, the City will not invest in Government projects. That is not what the Secretary of State has told the House repeatedly.

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: I will not. The right hon. Gentleman will have time to respond at the end of the debate.

Yet again, the Secretary of State is saying one thing in here which is being disputed outside. Johnny still seems to be out of step.

I turn to the question that the Secretary of State did not answer. He was asked repeatedly whether he consulted the Treasury before the decision of 5 October. Indeed, he patronised my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) by telling him that he did not understand what he was asking because he had never been in government. Well, I have. I believe the Secretary of State when he says that he signed the documents on 5 October. I do not believe the Secretary of State when he says that the decision was made on 5 October. I shall tell the House what the Minister for Transport knows to be true, although he will not say it at the Dispatch Box. Because transport is one of the big spending programmes, the relationship between transport, the Treasury and No. 10 is extremely close.

My private office talked to the private office of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the private office of the Prime Minister regularly. My senior officials talked to senior officials in the Treasury and in No. 10 regularly. The idea that I as Secretary of State would have made such a decision without its having been talked about and cleared by the Chancellor and the Prime Minister is bunkum—plain, ordinary, common or garden, copper-bottomed bunkum. That is why the Secretary of State would not answer the question this afternoon, though it was put to him repeatedly. The truth is that he signed the paper on 5 October, but the decision was made primarily by the Chancellor and the Prime Minister some time in advance. They said to the Secretary of State, "Go out and handle it."

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe was not always the easiest Chancellor for a Secretary of State for Transport to relate to, but my guess is that he was a jolly sight easier to relate to than the present Chancellor. If he would not have allowed me to make that decision, I do not think that the present Chancellor and the present Prime Minister would have allowed the Secretary of State to float off freely and on his own behalf, without reference to anyone, to make a decision and to announce it to the world. If the House thinks that that is what happened, it is more gullible than I know it to be. All that sums up the indictment of this debate, from which the Secretary of State has fled.

I accept that the Secretary of State is unlikely to take advice from me, but I would like to offer him three pieces of advice in a spirit of co-operation. First, he should get back to the positive and constructive things that he said about the railways when he first took office, before he understood the massive damage that his predecessor the Deputy Prime Minister had done to the rail network.

He started well. Indeed, if he is not too embarrassed to admit it, he will even tell the House that one or two of us told him privately that we were encouraged by the start that he had made. He should get back to that frame of mind.

Secondly, the Secretary of State should work extremely hard to extricate the railways from the political football stadium in which he has placed them, which was demonstrated yet again by his speech today. Some of us who are keen to see an effective railway system might be more willing to respond positively to trying to help establish the railway system if it were done in a much less partisan and politically driven way.

Thirdly, the Secretary of State is in the Cabinet. He is a grown-up in political terms. As a grown-up in political terms, he should understand that what counts is not the volume of applause behind him or the vitriol of those in front of him. He will be measured by his effect on the railways. He has damaged them almost beyond repair. It is now time that he tried to redeem some of that damage.

5.59 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): As one who experiences the joys of the west coast main line most weeks, the issue of how to get our railway system up to scratch is of some importance to me. As one who represents a midlands constituency, I know that the future of our railway system is a far more important matter than whether my train gets to London on time. Establishing a rational structure in our rail industry is critical to the economic health of the region that I represent. As my hon. Friends the Members for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) said, a rational structure is also vital to the north-west.

The issues and decisions that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has faced in the past few months are enormously important, and I believe that the public expect them to be treated as such by politicians of all colours. The public expect us to get our priorities right. Although I did not agree with many of the comments of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), I think that he was at least attempting, certainly in parts of his speech, to address some of the real issues facing the rail industry.

If the public saw how Opposition Front Benchers have approached this debate, I would be surprised if they thought that the Opposition were getting their priorities right. The public know that, when Conservative Members privatised the railways, the theory was that the rigours of the market mechanism, with its winners and losers, would lead to service improvements. Many hon. Members were not convinced by that theory, and polls at the time suggested that the public were not convinced. However, the subsequent management failures and incompetence have exceeded the expectations of even the most cynical of us.

If the public were not convinced when the railways were privatised, they will be even less convinced that Conservative Members have their priorities right now or that they have the interests of the travelling public at heart. Conservative Members seem to be concerned most about the losses sustained by shareholders because of the operation of the very market mechanism that they introduced. Although no one wants shareholders to lose money, Conservative Members need to say clearly, as I hope they will in reply to this debate, whether they believe that the off-setting of shareholders' losses should be the priority call on public funds, ahead even of investing the same sums in improving services.

If Conservative Members are arguing that they would not have got into this situation, they have to say whether they would have written a blank cheque to Railtrack. If they would not have done so, what would have been the upper limit to their support?

Getting our railway system up to scratch will cost money, and it will be expensive regardless of which party is in government. We have to face that fact. The key point is that we have to be confident that the structure by which investment is delivered has the interests of the travelling public, our industry and our economy as its first priority and not somewhere down the list.

Conservative Members initiated this debate not to discuss priorities or the railways, but to try to get at the Secretary of State. Last week, the shadow Secretary of State said—it has been repeated by the Leader of the Opposition and, today, by the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney)—that the Secretary of State has "form". In alleging that, they have attempted to draw parallels between the way in which he has handled Railtrack and his handling of the Rover crisis last year, when he was at the Department of Trade and Industry. As I was pretty close to last year's events, if there are parallels to be drawn, I should like to share a few of my own recollections that are relevant to today's debate.

I recall that within 24 hours of BMW making that appalling announcement, the Secretary of State was in the region talking to BMW and the unions, and getting involved right from the word go. I recall that when most industry experts and Opposition Front Benchers were saying that Rover was finished and thousands of job losses were inevitable, he was one of the few people saying that we should try to find another way. I recall that when he acted in that manner he was attacked for interfering and meddling, much as Opposition Front Benchers have been trying to attack him today on Railtrack. However, were it not for his interference and that of a few other people, 20,000 jobs would not have been saved and MG Rover would not be the successful company that it is today. If parallels are to be drawn, my right hon. Friend's "form" bodes rather well for his handling of Railtrack.

My right hon. Friend is, of course, not the only one with form, and there are other parallels to be drawn between last year's events at Rover and this year's events at Railtrack. One is very clear. Last year, when thousands of jobs were at stake at Rover, the Opposition's priority was not to work out how to defend the jobs or to get the company back on its feet, but to engage in endless public tittle-tattle about who said what to whom and when they said it. Scoring party political points, both then and today, was and is not a means to the end of illustrating a serious political alternative; they have been seen by Conservative Members as an end in themselves. Scoring party political points is the precise purpose of today's Opposition day debate.

Despite Conservative Members' crocodile tears and everything that they say about investor confidence, I think that no one would be more pleased than them if their words and this debate further damaged investor confidence. Their objective is to score points, not to deal with the matter.

[Richard Burden]

There are huge issues facing our railway service, including how to provide it with the necessary investment. There are huge issues about finding the right structure to deliver the interests of the travelling public and ensure that Great Britain has a railway service of which it can be proud. If we are to have a debate on those issues, we need a different approach from the Opposition. They had no credibility last year when they tried to discuss the car industry, and they have no credibility this year as they try to talk about Railtrack.

6.7 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I have declared my interests in the register.

The Secretary of State finds himself in a dreadful situation. I echo the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), who spoke with considerable experience, about how much more costly it is now going to be to sort out the problems of our railway industry, how much delay there will be in sorting them out and how much confidence this Secretary of State, on behalf of this Government, has knocked out of the relationship between the Government and financiers, bank managers, bond financiers and those who raise equity money.

It is right for people to ask what the Opposition would do. I am very happy to suggest what could be done in this situation, as it is clearly well beyond the skills and attention of the Secretary of State. The legal position, as I understand it, is that the shareholders of Railtrack, at group level, retain residual assets. They must make their own decisions on whether they wish to continue trading those assets in some form or sell them and rescue what little money they can from the group assets that are not in administration. They also have a clear interest in the administrator obtaining best value, if he can secure value, for the assets in administration. That is also the legal duty with which the administrator is charged.

The Secretary of State is not in control of that process, nor should he be. Those are assets that have been placed into administrative receivership and now have to be sorted out as best they can by the administrator. The sooner that they are sold on to an owner who can do something with them and set about rebuilding the battered balance sheet, the better it will be.

The Secretary of State is in danger, I think, of misleading his own Back Benchers. He implies that his model of the not-for-profit company is the one that will naturally emerge from the administration process. That is by no means clear. Labour Back Benchers may be disappointed to discover that bids are received, and they may be even more disappointed if one or other of them is better than any bid that can be put forward by the not-for-profit company. We still do not know who will sponsor the not-for-profit company, how it will write a prospectus, how it will raise cash, who will serve on it and what type of guarantees it or other bidders will receive from the Government.

I hope that the Government are in no doubt that they will have to offer fair funding to any bidders. They should, of course, first apologise for the mess that they have created, but the only sensible course that they can then follow is to state clearly to Parliament and the public, for the first time, what money is available to those who will be charged with the duty of running the Railtrack assets. Bidders will then be able to bid on the basis of greater certainty, and to ascribe a negative or positive value to the assets that are in administration. I fear that, in their current shape, the assets have a negative value, and that a substantial dowry will be required by whoever takes them on.

It is obvious that Railtrack's balance sheet must be strengthened. In answer to one of my questions, the Secretary of State said that he hoped that the new company would have an A credit rating. There is no way that Railtrack, on paper, could command such a rating in its current guise. I would expect the balance sheet to require a sum well above £1 billion of additional equity, or surrogate equity, which I think is the Secretary of State's preferred route. He cannot quite bring himself to admit that he must inject new extra capital into a company whose shareholders he has just helped to bankrupt, but he will have to put in that equity, or surrogate equity, of well over £1 billion to give it any chance of securing some kind of credit rating in the City.

The Secretary of State seemed to know that on 3 July, when, in rejecting the idea of the not-for-profit public interest company that had been suggested by some Members, he told the House that it would cost £2 billion to buy out the shareholders—we know that he does not wish to do that now—and another £4 billion to sort out the bond holders, because there is that amount of bond finance in Railtrack. When I asked him today, in the House, whether he proposed to wipe out the bond holders or whether he was effectively offering a Government guarantee for the £4 billion, he characteristically declined to answer; but the question is terribly important to assessing the cost to the Secretary of State of the forced administration of the Railtrack enterprise.

Then there are the costs of the administration itself, which are likely to be high. Given the phenomenal legal bills that the Secretary of State and his advisers must be incurring, and those incurred by those advising the administrator, Railtrack and the regulator—many of which will be a charge on public funds—I suggest that there will be no change out of £100 million for the fees of lawyers, accountants and others involved in reporting on the progress of Railtrack, and the amount could escalate well beyond that. I should be delighted if the Minister intervened to assure me that the Government have received quotes for all those charges well in advance and the amount will be smaller, but I think that it would be safe to pencil in well over £100 million—something similar to the huge fees that the Government are running up in the public-private partnership negotiations in regard to London Underground, which remain stalled and mired in difficulty and uncertainty.

There is also the cost control that the company itself was minded to implement, but that is probably not currently being implemented by the administrator. I estimate that at least £250 million of costs would have been saved in the trading year ending next March, and will probably not materialise because a degree of management has been removed from the company, and the administrator is taking things more easily in an attempt to find out what is there and how he can proceed.

We then come to the £800 million that has already been guaranteed by the Government. That was squirrelled out by a question asked by someone else; I was not told, although I asked a direct question that should have required that answer. Anyway, we know that £800 million has already been guaranteed, or has gone, to deal with the day-to-day bills of the company in administration—and, given the cash forecasts that we have heard from the Secretary of State, presented by the company before he made his decision, there may be another £650 million to go out before the end of the year. I am sure that the Government will feel that they must guarantee that in some way.

If we leave aside the £4 billion of bond holders' money—there are different ways of treating it, but according to the Secretary of State it should all be a direct charge on public accounts—we arrive at a total of £2.8 billion by the end of the year to try to keep the company going, and start sorting out the problems in administration. I suggest that that is well in excess of anything that the Government needed to give, or would have granted, to the company before it was put into receivership.

I have asked the Secretary of State to tell the House how much would have gone into the company this year and next if plans had continued under the 2 April agreement, but I have received no answer. I think that Ministers should tell us how much they had planned to put in, both directly and through the Strategic Rail Authority; what the timing of the payments would have been; and what extra amount they estimated might be needed on top of that. I find it extraordinary that Ministers could sign off on a going-concern audit basis in the summer of this year, and a few weeks later be scrambling around saying that the company would become insolvent and something drastic would have to be done.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe made a more general point about the cost of this Secretary of State to the Government. Let us take just the transport element of private finance under the 10-year plan—£35 billion, perhaps £34 billion. If we assume that the cost of the Secretary of State's damage amounts to only an extra 1 per cent. per annum in interest to allow for the greater hazards involved in doing business with the Government now, we are talking about an extra £3.5 billion over a typical 10-year term of debt.

That would be the extra cost of financing a programme of this size, and that is just one element. The Secretary of State will have to stand accused of increasing the costs of financing a number of Government programmes. The Government anticipated large sums of private money for other transport systems, health, educational establishments, prisons and a wide range of other public facilities. There is no doubt, given the City's current mood, that the price has just gone up. Some very smooth talking, and the removal of the Secretary of State, will be required to reassure people and put the price down again. [*Laughter.*] I am glad that the Government think that a matter for so much hilarity, but the public are not amused.

This has meant a delay in vital investment in the railway industry. It has interrupted the progress of an industry that the Government themselves said was going rather better as a result of privatisation. Before the general election—in May, in Westminster Hall—the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), then a transport Minister, made a very good speech praising the growth in traffic, the improvement in investment and the new equipment that was coming to the railways—success that he believed had been achieved by the industry in privatised ownership since 1997. I found myself in full agreement with him. I did not confess that at the time because I knew that he had said those things because an election was coming up and he wanted to claim some credit for a Tory success a few years earlier. But I see that he is enjoying the situation now, because he knows that what he said was true, and that those who have taken over have made an awful mess. A new Secretary of State came in and overruled the perfectly sensible policy espoused by the hon. Gentleman and his then colleagues, causing the trouble that we are now seeing.

Time does not permit me to say much more. Let me end by saying that this Secretary of State is going to send a huge bill to the travelling public, the taxpayer and the Government as a whole. It is a disgrace and he should go. We need someone who understands how the market works, and how to raise the colossal sums that we need to get the railways on the move.

6.18 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was entirely right to take the public finance trough from under the Railtrack snout. His decision could be described as an admission of failure—failure to tame Railtrack, a monopoly created at the time of privatisation which separated track from trains. Since it was first created as a public body and later privatised, it has consistently failed to control its costs. More important was its failure to deliver on its obligation to provide an efficient and reliable network. The train operating companies will be relieved to know that their needs no longer have to play second fiddle to Railtrack's shareholders.

Railtrack was created in April 1994, and questions about its finances have existed ever since. That continued after privatisation in May 1996, despite assurances given by the then Tory Government. In 1995, there was concern about Railtrack's ability to meet its financial investment targets. In September 1996, the Rail Regulator introduced the "Network Management Statement", intended to ensure that Railtrack fulfilled its investment commitments, especially in regard to maintenance. In November 1996, half-year figures showed that Railtrack was underspending on maintenance and renewals. The regulator stated that that was wholly unacceptable. He repeated that again in the following January at a meeting with the directors of Railtrack and, again, in a letter responding to Save Our Railways. He said in that letter:

"As I said in December 1996 the current level of underspend"—

on maintenance and renewals—

"is wholly unacceptable."

In May 1997, Railtrack published a further amended network management statement. The regulator responded by calling for greater public accountability from Railtrack and stated that he intended to alter its license to ensure that that was delivered. His statement acknowledged that Railtrack was a monopoly and that the regulator must provide a system of controls such as those that would be expected of a competitive market. After May 1997, the newly elected Labour Government announced their intention to introduce a new regime for the regulator to increase Railtrack's accountability.

[Clive Efford]

There have been repeated reports of Railtrack's failures throughout its history. Numerous newspaper articles have warned everybody about the dangers of investing in Railtrack. As early as June 1996, *The Economist* discussed "The Railtrack Trap" and the arrangements to finance Railtrack that were set up by the Railways Act 1993. On 21 December 1996, *The Daily Telegraph* contained an article called "Watchdog in Attack on Railtrack Underspend." The *Financial Times* ran a series of articles early in 1997 with headlines such as "Railtrack Warned to Speed up Investment" and "Railtrack Investment Row Gets Up Steam". There is a catalogue of reports of Railtrack's failures.

We have had a constant stream of failures and attempts by the regulator and successive Governments to tame the Railtrack beast. However, all attempts failed because they tried to remould Railtrack into something that it was not set up to be. Public money was passed to private shareholders through a set up that was devised to do nothing but launder public money into private hands.

In April 2001, Railtrack received an extra £1.5 billion from the Government. Immediately, Railtrack used nearly £200 million of that to pay dividends to shareholders. The public's anger about privatisation is underlined by the Paddington and Hatfield crashes, which epitomise the effect of privatisation on our rail network. The public have no doubt where the blame lies. They know that profit was put before safety. That was epitomised when the former chairman of Railtrack sat with his colleagues in his office on the night of the Hatfield crash and emerged at 6 am to state that he was the only man to see Railtrack through the crisis. A few weeks later, he was handed £400,000 and he went out through the back door. It is clear that Railtrack was not set up to run an efficient railway, but was set up with only shareholders in mind.

On Second Reading of the Railways Bill in 1993, John McGregor, the then Secretary of State for Transport, said that the Bill was

"an historic change for the better in Britain's railway system."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 156.]

He described Railtrack as an "entrenched monopoly" that had

"an instinctive tendency to ask for more taxpayers' subsidy and to feel that public subsidy will always be there as a crutch whenever things look difficult. Inevitably public ownership also brings with it the constraints of public finance, not least given the many competing demands on the public purse."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 156.]

There is clearly not a competing demand on the public purse when public money is passed into private hands, but only when a public service is subsidised.

Railtrack has given us constant excuses for its failures to deliver. The Railways Act 1993 paved the way for rail privatisation. The first mention of the possibility of Railtrack's privatisation was made only in October 1992. If Opposition Members do not believe me, I am referring to a House research document that states that the first reference that was ever made to Railtrack's privatisation occurred in that month. However, an Act that effectively privatised Railtrack had been passed by the end of November 1993.

The reason for such undue haste is explained by a leaked memo from the then Chancellor, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), who is now Minister for the Environment, referred during an Opposition day debate on 18 October 1995. He said that the then Chancellor of the Exchequer wrote to the then Prime Minister to ask for Railtrack privatisation to be speeded up because it was

"integral to the Budget arithmetic."—[*Official Report*, 18 October 1995; Vol. 264, c. 358.]

We were treated to the Conservative Government's money-raising exercise to finance pre-election tax cuts. That is why Railtrack's privatisation was rushed and botched, and why we are debating the matter today.

Tom Winsor offered Railtrack an interim review, as he stated when he gave evidence to the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions last week. From 15 January, it was open to Railtrack to go back to Tom Winsor to ask for an interim review of charges to access railways. It failed to accept that offer until the weekend of the meeting with the Secretary of State, when it asked for that interim review to be carried out in 24 hours over a weekend. Opposition Members' entire argument appears to hinge on that single fact, which is a thin thread on which to charge the Secretary of State with misleading shareholders and mishandling the affair.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State ended Railtrack's repeated failures. Public finances cannot continue to pour into the private sector at the expense of an efficient rail service. I support my right hon. Friend's actions, which I hope will lead to an efficient public rail service that the people of this country have the right to expect.

6.27 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I repeat, for the record, my declaration of interest. I hold shares in Railtrack, FirstGroup and Eurotunnel, and my husband works for an American airline company. Therefore, I share the sentiments of other hon. Members following yesterday's tragic plane crash and loss of life in New York.

Today, we have seen a classic case of the manipulation of evidence. It is time that the record spoke for itself. I especially refer to paragraph 765 of the evidence given by the Rail Regulator to the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions last week. He said:

"I added that taking me under polit cal control would go entirely against the grain of the major theme of the Government's policy position in the General Election campaign, which was about getting private sector capital into the provision of public services. I told them that such a step would do considerable harm to the ability of the Government to get companies to put money into public projects. I also mentioned the implications of the Human Rights Act 1968 because of the right of the citizen to have his civil rights determined by an impartial tribunal."

That was against the background of the Rail Regulator stipulating in a press statement on 12 June that Railtrack had the environment to confound its critics and to succeed.

The Rail Regulator told the Select Committee that when the Secretary of State told him that the Government had decided to put Railtrack into administration that weekend, he had said that he was

"very surprised at the circumstances as they explained them to me and the suddenness of the decision on railway administration. I explained that we at ORR had had no indication of any imminent insolvency from the company."

In paragraph 761, Mr. Winsor notes:

"Mr Byers said that they had thought of that"—

an interim application from Railtrack—

"and that if such an application were made, he had the necessary authority immediately to introduce emergency legislation to entitle the Secretary of State to give instructions to the Regulator. After pausing to consider whether I had really heard what I had just heard, I asked whether that would be to over-rule me in an interim review or in relation to all my functions. Mr. Byers said that it would cover everything but that its first use would be in relation to an interim review which the Government did not want to proceed".

Mrs. Ellman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss McIntosh: No, I will not.

In the devastating evidence that Mr. Winsor shared with the Committee, he admitted his surprise at the suddenness of the Secretary of State's decision to put Railtrack into administration, at the fact that the company's financial situation could have deteriorated so badly in so short a time and that his office had no inkling of Railtrack's impending insolvency. Mr. Winsor explained to the Secretary of State that, in his view, Railtrack would exercise its right to apply for an interim review to keep it afloat.

It is my firm belief, which the Secretary of State is free to contradict in the House, that he had effectively neutralised and neutered the power of the Office of the Rail Regulator, Mr. Tom Winsor, to process such an interim review. In fact, the Secretary of State had countermanded that application. He expected that Railtrack would make such an application and he fully intended to bring emergency legislation before the House to enable him to instruct the regulator.

In that well-thought-out, well-prepared, swift move, the Secretary of State completely neutralised the Rail Regulator and blew his independence out of the water. The implications and ramifications of that move are enormous and deeply alarming, both to the House and outside, for Railtrack as a company, for its shareholders and especially for the Office of the Rail Regulator. Furthermore, there are implications for the regulation of other industries.

The implications for the travelling public are clear. The question that the Secretary of State must answer in the House today, or perhaps tomorrow in the Select Committee, is: how can he give an assurance to train operators and investors that whatever the successor to Railtrack may be, it will be adequately funded and that that investment will be protected by an independent regulator?

Successive sectors have used this model: energy, telecommunications and transport depend on the role of an independent regulator for the smooth operation of the industry and for the ultimate protection of the interests of shareholders.

There are also ramifications for the public sector. Clause 24 of the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill deals with the independent regulation of the health service and the reform of the General Medical Council, yet clause 25(2) provides—yet again—for power of direction to the Secretary of State to overrule the very independence of that regulator. That threatens the principle of the independence that the Bill is intended to create.

The inadequacies of the Secretary of State are well rehearsed. His lapses of memory are only too familiar, but his poor record in this matter is noteworthy: for example, his decision not to award a 20-year franchise to GNER, against the clear advice of the Strategic Rail Authority. The Select Committee heard in evidence that neither the Secretary of State nor any of the Department's Ministers had tried to hold a meeting from the date that the right hon. Gentleman took office to the date of the announcement of Sir Alastair Morton's retirement. That meant that the two major applicants in that east coast main line renewal spent £4 million apiece—a total of £8 million—in promoting their bid. At present, that money is not recoverable.

The cost of putting Railtrack into administration runs at £2 million a week—a cost to be met by the Government and thus the taxpayer. Following the demise of the independence of the Rail Regulator, one question remains to be answered. In the bidding for Railtrack—the new not for profit company, limited by guarantee—who will set the base line?

The Secretary of State may care to answer that question this evening, but is he the man in whose hands the travelling public want to see the future of the railways? The answer is no, and I beg the right hon. Gentleman to consider his position.

6.35 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Before I begin my speech, I wish to associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about the people of New York who continue to suffer. We all admire their bravery.

The debate got off to a marvellous start with my hon. Friend's speech. There were distinguished contributions from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), my right hon. Friends the Members for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) and for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), and my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh). We are grateful to her for all her hard work on the Select Committee, and especially for exposing the truth about these matters.

It is a cause of regret to the Opposition that the Secretary of State has not seen fit to be in the Chamber much today, and in particular that he is not here for the winding-up speeches—*[Interruption.]* Ah, here he is! I am glad that he has made it; we can all be late.

I have felt a little sorry for the right hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* No, I have, because we have made history today. This is the first ever vote of no confidence in a member of the Cabinet and not a single member of the Cabinet thought fit to turn up to support the right hon. Gentleman. He said that he had sent a message to his colleagues: "Don't come today, you've got more important things to do." I am sure that we would all like to see that particular e-mail.

We knew that the right hon. Gentleman was in trouble when he tried to present himself as a Gucci-suited class warrior, talking about the fat cats and reeling off sums of money—the many millions of pounds of bonuses—yet those sums pale into insignificance against the amount of extra interest that we shall all have to pay for our infrastructure projects because of the Secretary of State.

[Mr. Eric Pickles]

The right hon. Gentleman failed to answer the principal question: on 5 October, when did he first receive the information from the Treasury that it was not prepared to fund Railtrack? On 5 October, did he receive information from the Treasury: "Well, basically Steven, do whatever you like. If you want to give it billions of pounds, we are right behind you"? I do not believe for one moment that the Treasury said that. The right hon. Gentleman should understand that, sooner or later, we will find out the date and that from that point on he will have been guilty of creating a false market in shares. Sooner or later, that date will come out—*[Interruption.]* In reply to the Whip, the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin), I am certainly on the side of the workers who have been robbed of their savings by the Government.

As the Secretary of State is thought to be relying on his notes of 25 July, he has no alternative but to place them in the Library. We look forward to being able to study his version of the minutes. We have seen everyone else's minutes for that date, so we should see his.

The right hon. Gentleman made a great statement that he did not feel that he threatened the regulator and that he should be acquitted of that. As one of my hon. Friends said, we do not think that the right hon. Gentleman is a physically imposing or intimidating person. Even if he took a dose of steroids, we would not find him very frightening—as might have been the case with his predecessor. We were interested in the substantive point of whether or not he had promised to produce legislation. We now know that he said that he would produce legislation.

Let us be blunt with the right hon. Gentleman. He said no to the House when he should have said yes. At the very least, we should have received a qualified no. We completely accept that the right hon. Gentleman did not threaten the regulator. Instead, he chose the well-trodden path of the Corleone family, by making the regulator an offer he could not refuse. Railtrack is in administration because the Government refused to provide additional public money, as was their right. More importantly, Railtrack is in administration because other modes of finance were cut off by the Secretary of State. No one can save Railtrack because the Secretary of State was determined—

Hugh Bayley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: I will not give way to a part-time attender of the debate. The hon. Gentleman cannot expect to swan in at the beginning and then again at the end. I am not taking interventions from someone who has not had the courtesy to attend the debate. He can sit down.

Hugh Bayley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The reason I left the Chamber after the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) had replied to my intervention was because she inadvertently misled the House. I have been to the Library to get the facts—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that that is not a point of order. He must find other ways of pursuing matters of debate.

Mr. Pickles: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is a quicker speed reader than that.

It is the same offer that the Government made to the court—

Hugh Bayley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is perfectly clear that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) is not giving way.

Mr. Pickles: I would give way to anybody who has attended the debate.

It is the same offer that the Government made to the court. With the removal of the independent regulator, the company exists at the whim of the Secretary of State.

Mrs. Ellman: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that he would give additional funding to a company that has a predicted deficit of £700 million by December and £1.7 billion by next March—an uncontested allegation?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Lady earlier made great play of the west coast main line. On 8 October, the Secretary of State was due to receive from Railtrack a solution to that problem. When, in about 10 years' time, the hon. Lady is still receiving complaints from her electors, we will have to remind them that she supported a decision that meant that money for phase 2 of the west coast main line was not made available.

There is a gap in the Secretary of State's story. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that

"frankly, there is a gap, but I don't know it is quite as artificial as anyone is making out."

Given that the next capital project is to be the underground, perhaps the Government are realising that "mind the gap" might be a good way to remind themselves of how their capital projects are going.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was right to ask where the missing £34 billion will come from. Most will rest on the back of 15 special purpose vehicles to create a mixture of public and private finance. Few have any realistic chance of getting off the ground in less than two or, more likely, four years, by which time the problems will be much worse. That means the delay or cancellation of projects. Goodbye west coast main line; goodbye Thameslink 2000; goodbye improvements on South Central. The result?—stagnation of the railways, low investment and fewer passengers.

Mr. Hopkins *rose—*

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman has attended the debate so of course I will give way.

Mr. Hopkins: I travel on Thameslink every day and I understand that Thameslink 2000 was to have been finished by 2000 under privatisation. Is that successful privatisation?

Mr. Pickles: If the hon. Gentleman travels on Thameslink every day, he must realise that he will be later and later and that he will have to get up earlier to arrive in this Chamber. That will go on for years. I wish the hon.

Gentleman many years in this Chamber, but I guarantee that when he retires, which I hope will be many years from now, he will have seen no improvement.

There will be fewer passengers, less freight and higher fares; in other words, welcome back British Rail.

Hugh Bayley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: I have told the hon. Gentleman that he did not attend the debate and I am not satisfied by his explanation.

We know that the senior civil servant within the Department said in a meeting with Credit Suisse First Boston in July that the movement towards a non-profit company was neither "appropriate nor attractive". We know that Mr. Winsor told the Select Committee that he warned the Secretary of State that this would affect public-private partnership deals. Hospitals, roads, railways and airports will all be affected, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham said.

We all know that the next PPP deal will be the underground. Interest rates alone will cost an extra £10 million because of the incompetence of the Secretary of State. When we think about the number of hospitals and roads on top of that, we can appreciate the full extent. We know that Ministers have absolutely no interest in the shareholders or the employees of Railtrack. They realise that 92 per cent. of the employees of Railtrack own shares. Overnight, a grade 1 signaller took a pay cut of 9.4 per cent. For clerical staff, 6.1 per cent. of pay was taken away by the Government.

Let one family speak for them all; a Mr. and Mrs. Byers. They are pensioners who invested £3,500 for their old age and nursing care. They have said that their lives are "absolutely ruined". I suspect that the right hon. Gentleman who bears the same name will also bear the responsibility for his career being ruined.

We have read the views of an anonymous Minister, who is not here today, but who, I understand, is a member of the Cabinet. He told *The Independent:*

> "It's not Tony's style to bow to external pressure to get rid of a Minister but nor is it his style to keep a discredited one in the longer term. And, let's be honest, a Cabinet Minister's job is not as safe as a spin doctor's."

The Secretary of State must realise that he represents the single greatest obstacle to investment in the railways. Let us put it simply. The City no longer trusts the Government and the public no longer trust their money with the Government. The Government now have the great task of raising the sums necessary for the railways, but they cannot do so with the Secretary of State at the helm. He must now go.

6.47 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): First, I wish to associate myself with the comments made by others regarding the tragedy in New York yesterday and the impact that that will have on the aviation industry and those who work in it, many of whom are our constituents.

This has been an interesting debate—

Hugh Bayley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for allowing me the opportunity to intervene at this point. When I intervened on the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) to ask whether she believed that Railtrack had made a sufficient contribution to rail safety and the reliability of services in return for the money it received from the Government, she said that rail safety had improved since privatisation. The Library has provided me with figures showing that the number of fatalities grew from eight in the year prior to privatisation to 43— *[Interruption.]* It may be a laughing matter for Conservative Members, but it is not for the families of those who died. There has been a fivefold increase and if the hon. Lady looked at the brief from the Library—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions must be brief, particularly at this stage of the debate.

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend's point is well made.

We were pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) gaining his voice, and I was pleased to hear my neighbouring colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), putting the record straight on Railtrack and BMW. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House should hear the winding-up speech in silence, which we have not had so far.

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) ably represented, once again, a significant part of London's commuterland.

There were one or two interesting revelations. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) wished my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) a long period in the House, which shows an accurate reading of the opinion polls and the future prospects of the various parties. Alarmingly for those who sell hair dye, the hon. Member for Maidenhead revealed that she prefers mature men. There will be an instant reduction in the use of hair dyes and a great proliferation of grey hair around the Chamber in the coming days.

The debate was also interesting for the fact that we have wasted half a day when there are so many other issues that could be discussed—issues on which, at business questions, Opposition Members have demanded debates. Last week, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) asked for a debate on arable farmers, the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) for one on health, the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) for one on the House of Lords, and the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) for one on London. All those might have been more appropriate subjects—they are all important. The previous week, the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham asked for a debate on the Crown prerogative, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) for one on civil defence and the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) for one on the economy. All those were more significant issues.

An extremely interesting aspect of the debate was Opposition Members' failure to mention certain subjects. I heard precious little mention of passengers, of freight, or of the industry, but an awful lot of talk about a small section of the City—those who bought Railtrack shares

[Mr. Spellar]

recently, while others in the City were selling them those shares. That is a very small constituency—but it is the one to which the Conservative Opposition largely address themselves.

Let us deal with the underlying facts. Railtrack did not oppose our petition to the High Court for administration because it recognised the strength of the case. Our evidence to that court showed a deficit for Railtrack of £700 million by 8 December, rising to £1.7 billion by March 2002. Faced with those facts, the court—not the Secretary of State—in the person of Mr. Justice Lightman, said:

"this is clearly a case where the making of an order is not only appropriate but absolutely essential. I shall therefore make the order immediately."

Therefore Railtrack, in its current form, was not part of the solution for our railways but a major problem, and a very expensive problem at that.

During the debate, I was amazed by the cavalier way in which the Opposition treated public money. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), the hon. Member for Maidenhead and the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) all seemed to be quite easy about substantial but unspecified sums of public money being thrown around. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe—in a term used in the debate—has form in that. After all, during the time when he was Chancellor we nearly doubled the national debt.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As the right hon. Gentleman was listening to my speech, he will recall that I was concerned about the delay to future investment in the railways and the cost to future investment and the prospects of raising private investment, after all these incidents. Does he expect the west coast main line refurbishment to have made any worthwhile progress by the time of the next general election?

Mr. Spellar: I am very glad that the right hon. and learned Gentleman raised the west coast main line, a project which Railtrack originally budgeted at £2.3 billion. It is now an estimated £7 billion and rising. Railtrack's total failure to control its costs—*[Interruption.]* I shall tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), about the attitude of the City of London. Both the Secretary of State and I have had many meetings with a range of financial institutions about the London underground and other areas, and they believe that those are good business prospects and are keen to be engaged in them. That is the reality, contrary to the scare stories that are being put around by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe and his colleagues.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Spellar: If the right hon. Gentleman will wait a minute, I will come to him.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe is not alone. We also have some questions to pose to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar and the right hon. Member for Wokingham, who talk a lot about compensation. I simply ask them, compensation to whom, compensation for what, and how much? We have heard about the loss of shareholder value. The value of the company decreased from some £9 billion at its peak to £1.5 billion even before the events we are discussing.

I give way to the right hon. Member for Wokingham. I hope that he will now answer those questions: to whom, for what, and how much?

Mr. Redwood: As the Minister should remember, I said that the cheapest option now was to sell the assets back to the private sector and to have limited but agreed funding. Does the Minister agree that that is the best answer or is he effectively going to renationalise, and, if so, how big will the massive bill be?

Mr. Spellar: The right hon. Gentleman has totally failed to answer the questions that I asked him. The administrator will have to examine the assets within Railtrack and that assessment will determine the value that is realisable for the Railtrack shareholders. The question that I posed to the right hon. Gentleman, and which none of his colleagues has answered, is how much public money would they put in to pay the shareholders? That is the question that they must answer, and they have not answered it tonight.

During the debate, much weight has been placed on the comments of Tom Winsor. My colleague and hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) ably quoted some of the evidence about more recent events. However, let us consider what Tom Winsor said about Railtrack—the company that is obviously the jewel in the Tories crown, the apple of their eye. In his speech of 12 June, just after the Secretary of State and I entered our current posts, he said:

"I believe the answer is found in the mistakes of a rushed privatisation with too many corners cut, weak regulation and a company which squandered its skills base whilst neglecting the condition of its physical assets. And it did not happen suddenly.

The seeds of Railtrack's present predicament—and that of the whole railway industry—were sown in 1993-7"—

who was the transport Minister during part of that time?—

"when the industry was being restructured and prepared for privatisation. In those years, time and again, when there was a choice between protecting the public interest and promoting proceeds of privatisation, the latter was given a higher priority. The theory was—if there was one at all—that Railtrack would be responsive and competent, and would see its own interests coinciding with those of its customers and public interest . . .

Railtrack pursued an agenda which, in too many respects, left the dependent customer in the lurch. It sometimes appeared that it mattered more that Railtrack was the darling of the City of London rather than a supplier"—

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Spellar: It is Opposition Members who have been quoting the Rail Regulator with such approval throughout the debate, so I am surprised that they are so concerned when I quote other words of the Rail Regulator, many of which he reiterated in his evidence to the Select Committee.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Spellar: I will not give way.

Finally, the Rail Regulator said—illustrating well the on-going problems that there had been with the company—

"The company should put away the begging bowl, and stop spending valuable management time hawking themselves unwanted round Whitehall, and knuckle down to getting train services back to a sustainable level of reliability and quality of service."

We certainly did not hear much from the prosecution—the official Opposition. What we did hear certainly was not Perry Mason. I have just quoted a devastating indictment of a failed company, brought about by a political action by a previous Government. What this second debate on Railtrack has shown is history repeating itself as farce—and boring, repetitious farce at that. What was new this evening was not relevant and what was relevant was not new.

It is a shame that we do not have a procedure in the House for recording no confidence in Her Majesty's Opposition. I therefore have no hesitation tonight in being equally repetitious and repeating my closing remarks in the debate a fortnight ago.

The general elections of 1997 and 2001 showed that the voters believed that the Tories were not fit for government. Once again today, they have shown that they are not even fit to be the Opposition.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 152, Noes 394.

Division No. 57] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David

Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon

Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 335, Noes 193.

Division No. 58] **[7.12 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug

O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Mr. Ivor Caplin.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Morrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil

Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. John Randall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises that many of the problems of the railways stem from the years of underfunding of the industry by the previous Conservative Government and the shambles of their rushed and ideologically driven privatisation of Railtrack; welcomes the decisive action that Ministers have taken in regard to Railtrack which will be welcomed by the travelling public; congratulates the Government for developing contingency plans for the industry as soon as it was told of the company's plight; rejects the policies of the Opposition, who would have offered the company a blank cheque and even now wish to pay over £1bn to compensate shareholders; and welcomes the work of Ministers in developing positive policies to take the industry forward in terms of a successor to Railtrack and to put the interests of passengers first.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): We now come to the second debate, on the Government's stakeholder pension scheme. I should announce to the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.24 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I beg to move,

That this House regrets the Government's failure to deliver stakeholder pensions to its target group of 'those with moderate incomes of between £10,000 and £20,000 a year'; condemns the failure to reform the obligation to purchase an annuity at age 75, which is a disincentive to taking out stakeholders and other forms of personal pension; regrets the spread of means-testing which acts as a disincentive to saving; condemns the burdens on company pension schemes which are causing employers to close them to new members; and calls on the Government to review its pension policies so as to reverse the decline in funded pensions.

The purpose of this debate is to hold the Government to account for a policy launched in their election manifesto of 1997 on a new form of personal pensions—stakeholder pensions—known in the trade as genetically modified personal pensions. They were legislated for in 1999 and, of course, they were launched in April 2001. Stakeholder pensions have now been available and marketed for more than six months and it is time to hold the Government to account for the delivery of promises that they made when they were pushing their legislation through the House.

I shall briefly remind the House of what the Government promised. The target group for stakeholder pensions are the 5 million people on low and middle incomes who do not have a pension. Lord Rooker, the former Minister of State, said:

"Our estimate of the target group of five million people for stakeholder pension schemes is based on the number of people earning between around £10,000 and £20,000 who are not in an occupational pension scheme."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 2000; Vol. 348, c. 25W.]

So the target was the 5 million people with modest earnings who did not have pension provision. How successful are the Government in addressing that target group and ensuring that they take out stakeholder pensions? We know—not, I am afraid, from the Government's statistics, but from the Association of British Insurers—that 416,000 stakeholder pensions have already been sold; a modest but useful figure one might think, until one looks in a bit more detail at who those 416,000 people are.

We know that 160,000 people have transferred out of the construction industry pension scheme, which is already in operation. The biggest single move into stakeholder pensions has been by the construction industry, from another form of pension provision, which accounts for approximately 160,000 of the 416,000 pensions sold. We are therefore left with about 250,000 people who have taken out stakeholder pensions; perhaps they are in the Government's target group for the new pension provision. Again, the ABI estimates that approximately half the people taking out stakeholder pensions already have private pension provision above the minimum contracted-out level. They may be people who are transferring from some other form of funded pension scheme, or they may be taking the benefits of concurrency. However, it looks as if about 125,000 of the

[Mr. David Willetts]

250,000 people who are moving into a stakeholder pensions already have some form of pension provision. They are not the target group, which consists of people who do not already have a pension.

We are left with 125,000 people. How are the Government doing with them? The total may be a bit smaller, but at least 125,000 members of the target group have taken out stakeholder pensions. The Government said that stakeholders were aimed at people with modest earnings; perhaps they have overachieved on that. We know that approximately 25 per cent. of stakeholder pensions have been taken out by individuals with incomes of less than £7,500 or no income at all. Who are they? We have all been reading the financial pages of our newspapers, so we know that they are the non-working wives of people who have been well advised that the pension is a useful tax relief—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): It is wives, is it?

Mr. Willetts: Yes, by and large, it is usually non-working wives. They appear to make up another 25 per cent. of the people who have taken out stakeholders, and account for another 62,000 pensions.

Perhaps the Government have at least managed to issue stakeholder pensions to 62,000 people in their target group. However, that is not the end of the story, because there is another group. We know that 15 per cent. of stakeholder pensions have been taken out on behalf of children, usually by their grandparents, accounting for another 37,000 pensions. In fact, a generous assessment of how the Government are doing is that they have managed to issue, perhaps, 37,000 stakeholder pensions to their target group of 5 million. Mr. John Jory of Building and Civil Engineering Insurance, the company which is selling stakeholder pensions to people in the construction industry, said:

"we are probably the only provider selling to the target market."

It may be that nobody else is selling to the target group. I suspect that the number of stakeholder pensions sold by the Government to the target group may be lower than the number of life peers created by the Prime Minister—248 at the last count and, of course, rising fast. We want to hear from the Minister tonight what he has been doing to meet his target of 5 million people who do not have funded pensions, which is the target group for stakeholder pensions.

What have the Government been doing? First, as we would expect from them, they have been spinning—redefining the target group. There has been an elaborate debate about whether the target group are people on low to moderate earnings, or on moderate to high earnings. I will not detain the House with the various prevarications of the Secretary of State and his colleagues about that. Suffice it to say that we can at least be clear, because it has been said time and again, and it is the basis on which the state second pension is constructed, that the target group are those with incomes of £10,000 to £20,000 a year who do not have an occupational pension.

It is no good the Government spinning themselves out of trouble by claiming that that is not the target group. They have regularly identified it as the target group. The Government will be spinning for the rest of their life. "Spinning their way out of trouble" will be their epitaph, but it will not do.

The other great recourse of a Labour Government in trouble is to an advertising campaign. It cost £6.5 million—three times as much as the entire Department of Social Security advertising budget in the previous year. The Government have tried to tempt people from the target group into stakeholder pensions by increasing awareness of them. I congratulate the Secretary of State. His advertising campaign has clearly worked. The Government have succeeded. During the period of the advertising campaign, between February and June 2001, people's awareness of stakeholder pensions rose by 15 per cent. That was, in part at least, because of the Government's advertising campaign.

Good news, so far, but there has been one problem: the more people have grown aware of stakeholder pensions as a result of the Government's advertising campaign, the more confused they have become about pensions in general. The IFA promotion chief executive, David Elms, said:

"The worrying trend is that as people are becoming increasingly aware of stakeholder pensions, they are becoming more and more bewildered."

The only thing the advertising campaign has succeeded in doing is making people more confused about stakeholders and pensions than they were before it started. There has been a 10 per cent. increase in the number of people who describe themselves as being in the dark about retirement planning since the Government's advertising campaign began, so the only effect of the campaign has been to spread more confusion about the best way of saving for a pension.

I want the Secretary of State to offer the House this evening an account of who is buying stakeholder pensions, whether that is compatible with the Government's objective for the target group, and what he will do to meet the objectives that he has laid before the House for the marketing of stakeholder pensions.

Why have stakeholder pensions proved such an extraordinary flop, after all the publicity, the expenditure on advertising, and the effort that the Government have put in over the past five years? I suggest that there are three reasons. The first is that as means testing spreads further and further up the income scale, fewer and fewer people can be confident that they will be better off if they have a stakeholder pension.

We hear from the Government Benches all the time about the problems of pensions mis-selling, but it would be mis-selling a stakeholder pension if people took one out, perhaps saving out of their modest earnings, and at the end of the day found that they were hardly better off, despite having put aside a few thousand pounds of their hard-earned savings. We have repeatedly asked Ministers to answer the $64,000 question: how much money do people need to have in a stakeholder pension fund in order to be confident that the money that they will receive when they retire will float them above means-tested benefits? The answer could well be $64,000. It could be more than that, but we have never had a figure from Ministers. That is why they run the risk of mis-selling their own stakeholder pension.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies warned that

"the increase in the rate of the minimum income guarantee over the next few years will unambiguously discourage saving."

The Secretary of State has a problem of his own creation as he spreads means testing up the income scale.

Secondly, the Government have imposed new taxes on funded pensions. They have increased the burden of taxation on people who save for their retirement. The Prime Minister told the House last year that we should not worry about the burden of extra taxation. He said that

"because of rises in the stock market since the election, those sums"—

the sums that we were quoting for the increase in taxation—

"are entirely illusory."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2000; Vol. 355, c. 704.]

However, the sums that we were quoting for the cost of those tax increases were very real. It was the stock market gains that the Prime Minister claimed in defence of his policy that were illusory. It is no good the Government saying that they want to encourage people into funded pensions, if they then tax them more heavily.

The third way the Government have made the problem worse is by failing to respond to the widespread demand from all parts of the House, to be expressed in a private Member's Bill promoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), for reform of annuity law. The present position, whereby someone is obliged to buy an annuity at the age of 75, is a further disincentive to people taking out a stakeholder pension or other forms of personal pension provision. For many people, the obligation to purchase an annuity at the age of 75 is an extremely unattractive proposition. There are proposals on the table to tackle that. It is a source of genuine amazement to me that the Government have still not acted on a manifest problem.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Is not the problem the fact that the Budget Book states that the Government are engaged in discussion and in reviews and analysis of the situation, yet Ministers make it clear that they have no intention of making any progress? We have one half of Government disagreeing with the other half.

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is right. The Government have set out an objective for more funded pension provision, an objective which I wholeheartedly endorse. One of the Secretary of State's own documents states:

"Currently about 60 per cent. of total spending comes from the State and 40 per cent. from the private sector. Over time, we expect this balance to change so that 40 per cent. will come from the State and 60 per cent. from the private sector."

What does "over time" mean? How long will we have to wait to achieve that? Is the right hon. Gentleman taking any steps towards the achievement of that objective? The danger is that we are going in the opposite direction. The danger is that in Britain, after years of success in building up funded pensions, we may now be going backwards.

The gentleman who has just become the chairman of the National Association of Pension Funds says that stakeholders may force pension take-up down. He says that pension provision may fall with the introduction of stakeholders, if one of the effects of stakeholders is that people can move into inferior pension provision compared with what they currently have.

Marks and Spencer Financial Services has warned of this in its "Stakeholder Barometer", which states:

"Only a quarter, 27 per cent., of companies planning to set up stakeholder pension schemes will contribute to an employee's pension, with the remaining 73 per cent. just offering access. This is in stark contrast to the existing situation where more than half, 52 per cent., of the employers with a group personal pension set up already, have decided to actively contribute to some or all of the pensions set up by their employees."

That is hard evidence which I hope the Secretary of State will take into account.

The danger is not only that are we failing to make any progress towards the objective shared in all parts of the House of more funded pension provision relative to state provision; the danger is that we may be going backwards.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): One policy project is to change a decision made by the Government that the hon. Gentleman supported on annuities at the age of 75. What will be his Government's policy, if they are elected at some future date? Will they abolish the stakeholder pension, or will they reform it? If they reform it, how will they do so?

Mr. Willetts: We are in favour of encouraging more funded pension provision. The purpose of the debate tonight is to establish what the Government are doing to meet their objectives for funded pension provision. I observe around the world a fascinating debate on how to encourage more funded pension provision. Our last manifesto contained proposals on that to encourage people to build up a funded alternative to the basic state pension, and on annuities. I support the initiative to simplify the regime for the regulation of pensions. I do not want to embarrass the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), but his ideas for encouraging more funded pension provision are the sort of thing that we should be considering. Why are the Government doing nothing whatever to encourage more funded pension provision?

In an attempt to persuade the Minister for Pensions in particular of the power of our arguments, I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the notification that came across my desk of a conference which took place last week entitled "China's Pension System: Crisis and Challenge", on how China should move towards more funded pensions—*[Interruption.]* No, I am afraid I did not go.

For the Minister's benefit in particular I quote a resolution of the third plenary session of the 14th central committee of the Communist party of China calling for more funded pensions. It calls for the integration of

"social pooling with individual accounts"

for funded pensions. We have now reached the stage where throughout the world there is a more radical debate about moving to more funded pensions than the Government are willing to tolerate in Britain.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: No, I want to come rapidly to a conclusion because many other hon. Members wish to speak.

Throughout the world there is a debate about how to encourage more funded pension provision, an objective to which the Government have signed up. Why are they completely failing to meet their objectives?

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): If the hon. Gentleman wants to encourage more people in the target

[Lynne Jones]

earning group of £10,000 to £20,000 a year to take out funded pension schemes, what policies would he introduce to ensure that they are not caught in the means-tested trap which would make them little better off?

Mr. Willetts: One of the policies that we proposed at the last election was to enable people to build up bigger pension pots by making it possible to opt out from the basic state pension, which would increase their chance to build up a fund that would be worth so much that they would be floated off means-tested benefits.

I want to quote three organisations that have put clearly the points that we have tried to make this evening. First, Age Concern says that the crucial question is:

"Will stakeholder pensions ensure the delivery of an adequate retirement income for people on lower income levels? On current information, Age Concern believes they are not on course to deliver."

Does the Secretary of State disagree with Age Concern? Nick Timmins, writing in the *Financial Times*, said:

"The Government's pension policy is in a mess . . . makes the present course look increasingly unsustainable . . . something in the current arrangements is going to have to give."

From the Secretary of State's own side comes the friendly fire of the Institute for Public Policy Research, which says:

"There is concern from a number of quarters . . . that the government's strategy is unravelling."

It refers to

"doubts about Stakeholder pensions reaching their target group"

suggesting the need for a reassessment.

Tonight we ask the Secretary of State to come clean with the House about the take-up of stakeholder pensions and the reasons why they are manifestly failing to reach the target group who he has repeatedly assured the House are the people he expects to take out stakeholder pensions. In addition, we ask him to reflect on the fact that one of our nation's achievements was to build up more funded pensions as a proportion of our national income than just about any other advanced western country. That great achievement is now being frittered away, and stakeholder pensions are the latest example of that failure.

7.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the Government's reformed framework for pensions, which ensures that today's pensioners share in the country's rising prosperity and that tomorrow's pensioners are encouraged to save for their retirement, building on the foundation of the basic state pension; believes that pensioner poverty must be tackled through the minimum income guarantee; supports the reform of SERPS to create the State Second Pension which will give more help to low paid earners and people with broken work records, such as carers and disabled people; further supports stakeholder pensions which provide a low cost, flexible option for moderate or higher earners who do not have access to a good occupational scheme; welcomes the Government's plans to ensure that pensioners with modest savings or a small occupational pension are rewarded for their thrift through the new pension credit; and supports the need for an effective system of financial regulation through the FSA and other measures to build public confidence.'.

I listened to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) make his second speech in the House since the general election. It is the second speech in which he has spoken at some length without at any point saying what his alternative approach might be, in this case on pension reform. I take with a pinch of salt his criticism of our policies. He is in the unusual position of having, in the previous Parliament, been responsible for not just one but two failed pension policies.

In May 2000, the Conservative party announced that it would get rid of the winter fuel payment and the free television licence, referring to them as gimmicks. In September 2000, the Conservatives said that they would consolidate the Government's "gimmicks" and redirect their savings into the basic state pension.

That is interesting because, when it comes to consistency, which is important in pension planning, I see from the Conservative party's website that its policy is to keep the winter fuel allowance and other special payments. It says:

"We would keep the Winter Fuel Allowance, free TV licences and the Christmas Bonus. And we would extend payments to people in care homes, to over 75s without a TV and to pensioners abroad."

Having moved from scrapping those gimmicks, they will now pay winter fuel payments to pensioners who live abroad and give free television licences to pensioners without televisions. That appears to be the sum total of the Conservatives' present policy.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to his second policy—it too encountered some difficulty during the election campaign—to scrap the basic state pension and encourage young people to opt out of it into a funded pension—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should be aware of the policies on which they fought the last election.

The difficulty is that the pension policy on which the hon. Gentleman fought the last election would have resulted in a young man having to save £10 a week from the age of 16 just to buy back the basic state pension that the Conservatives had taken away. The other difficulty, which is where the Conservatives got into real trouble at the election, is that the policy of moving everybody into a funded pension would have given rise to a black hole of some £6 billion. During the election campaign, they could not say where they could find that money, which is why, I think in week two, they stopped talking about their pension policy altogether.

The only thing that seems to have survived—at the moment anyway—is their savings policy, referred to in the motion, where 85 per cent. of the gain goes to the richest 20 per cent. of Conservatives. That should not be a surprise; nothing much has changed there.

I intend to deal with all the points that the hon. Gentleman made, but when we talk about the pension reforms that we put in place we have to bear in mind the problems that we encountered when we took office.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): The right hon. Gentleman should be ashamed.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman talks about shame, but he should reflect on what we had to clear up. There was the mis-selling of pensions, which cost the industry millions of pounds. Hundreds of thousands of people lost out as a result of what the Conservative Government did.

They halved the value of the state earnings related pension scheme and presided over a growing gap between the poorest pensioners and those who were better off. They left 2 million pensioners in poverty and did nothing to help the low paid or those in part-time work. They did nothing for disabled people and nothing for women to enable them to save for their pension. They failed to plan for the future. Moreover, critical to the subject we are debating tonight, they left a system riddled with disincentives so that those who did save for their retirement saw no advantage from their thrift and effort. That is what we inherited and what we had to clear up.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Is it not the case that the right hon. Gentleman inherited a substantially larger savings ratio than the one that prevails now, that savings under this Government have utterly collapsed, and that the Government have no credible policy to return to anything like the savings ratio that they inherited?

Mr. Darling: The savings ratio was at its lowest level ever in 1991, when the hon. Gentleman's party was in government.

I should like now to set out for the House the changes that we have made to pension policy for those on low incomes and also for those on moderate and high incomes. Our reforms are based on the clear principle that those who can save have a clear responsibility to do so. Yes, we want to get more people into funded pensions. In return, we need to ensure that the Government support those who cannot afford to save. Here we part company with the Conservative party, because we do not think that low-paid people should be put into funded pensions, because they are not good value for them. We also want to ensure that when people save for their retirement, they are rewarded for their thrift, and that the pension system is properly regulated and supervised so that we avoid the mis-selling problems that arose under the previous Government.

For today's pensioners, our first priority is to tackle the pensioner poverty that we inherited. More than 2 million pensioners live in poverty. In that respect, I want to deal with the first point made by the hon. Member for Havant, which he has also made on other occasions. When he speaks about means-testing, he makes clear over and over again his distaste for it, but he does not say what he would introduce in its place. The fact is that the only way of tackling poverty and getting more money to the people who need it most is to identify pensioners on low incomes. It is impossible to do that without an assessment of income, unless one takes the view that a universal increase should be given to everyone to take care of those on the lowest incomes. I do not believe that that is Conservative party policy today or that it will be at any time in future.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): The Secretary of State speaks about targeting help. When Lord Rooker, a former social security Minister, was a Member of this House, he clearly identified the target group for stakeholder pensions, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) referred. How many of the 416,000 stakeholder pensions have gone to people in the target group? Will he answer the question?

Mr. Darling: I shall deal further with stakeholder pensions in a moment. I thought that the hon. Gentleman might have been able to tell us the answer as to what exactly the Conservatives' policy is towards those poorer pensioners. Of course, Opposition Members do not like talking about poor pensioners, because they did nothing to help them tackle poverty in all the time they were in office. Indeed, when they were in government, they expected a single pensioner to live on £68 a week. Today, the same pensioners, under our policy, get £92 a week, which is £18 more than the Conservatives gave them.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: No, not just now.

When the Conservative party says that it is against means-testing, it really means that it is against a policy that resulted in Britain's poorest pensioners getting, in some cases, £18 a week more than they would have received under a Conservative Government. That is what the Tories oppose.

Mr. Goodman: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: No, I shall not do so just now. If the hon. Gentleman is patient, I might just give way to him at some stage later. However, if he stands up again in the immediate future, I shall not do so.

If the Conservative party is going to maintain its line that it is against means-testing, which presumably means that it would get rid of it, the inevitable conclusion must be that it would end up taking away money from some of the poorest pensioners in this country—pensioners who, for one reason or another, did not or could not save enough for their retirement. The difference between us and the Tories is clear. When they were in power, a pensioner aged between 60 and 74 was expected to live on £68.80 a week. Today, that same pensioner gets £18 more. I am more than happy to defend that policy on any occasion, because I cannot see how pensioner poverty can be tackled other than by ensuring that money goes to those pensioners who need it most.

In the past few months—and, indeed, over the past couple of years—we have heard time and again criticisms from the Conservatives about our policy, but they have never once referred to their alternative. Given all the criticism that they make, we can only assume that they would remove the minimum income guarantee, which would mean that a large number of pensioners would be substantially worse off if the Conservatives were ever returned to office. This is not the first occasion when the Government have talked about pensioners on low incomes, but there has been absolute silence on the Conservative Benches, because they have nothing to say.

I now turn to the policies that we have put in place and to the long-term reforms that are designed to ensure that we encourage additional saving by people who can afford it—people on moderate and higher earnings, who, as I have said before, should be encouraged to save for their retirement. We have a twin-track approach. We believe that those on lower incomes are better off in state provision. *[Interruption.]* It is said that that is all right, then—a comment that was made rather smugly, if I may say so.

[Mr. Darling]

As I said, there is a big difference between the two parties. I believe that it is wrong for people on low incomes to go into funded pensions and I do not believe that any political party should encourage them to do so. Such pensions are not good value for people on low incomes. That is why we reformed the state earnings-related pension scheme and replaced it with the state second pension. After the changes that we have made, some 18 million people on low earnings, including those who are disabled or have taken career breaks, can get an increased pension. Again, the Conservatives did nothing about that during the 18 years they were in government.

Our policy for people on low earnings is first to deal with pensioner poverty today through the minimum income guarantee. For people of working age who are likely to be on low earnings or who are on career breaks, the state second pension will mean that far more help is given than they would ever before have received. We do not believe that people in that position should be encouraged to opt for funded pensions, because they would lose much of their contribution through administrative costs. I cannot believe that it is a sensible policy to force people on low earnings into funded pensions, although it is a policy that the Conservatives, at least, adopted at the election.

As I said, we believe that those on moderate and higher earnings should be in funded pensions, so we have sought to expand the choices that are available in the funded sector. That is why we launched the stakeholder pension: to give a choice to people who could not access occupational pensions or who were on personal private pensions, but for whom such pensions were inappropriate. That is why stakeholder pensions were introduced.

Reference has been made to the target, but it is clearly set out in the pensions Green Paper that was published in December 1998. It contains numerous references to the targets, and the target group is people on moderate and higher earnings. That is printed in the document in black and white for anybody who cares to see it. The target has not changed one jot since the pensions were launched.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I shall certainly give way to the Conservatives who are now desperate to intervene, but I want first to put something to them. I see that the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) is in his place. I remain confused about the Conservative attitude to stakeholder pensions. The hon. Member for Havant, who now speaks for the Opposition on these matters, was vague, but in February this year, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden gave an informative interview in the *Financial Adviser*, a splendid publication with which I am sure all hon. Members who are present are familiar. He said:

"I would be more than surprised if a future Tory government even contemplated abolishing stakeholder pensions".

He went on to say:

"Stakeholder pensions should give savers more bang for their buck. Savers should see less of their contributions absorbed by costs and more being invested in assets which, other things being equal, will mean higher pensions when they retire."

On this occasion, I could not disagree with him.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) *rose—*

Mr. Darling: As I have mentioned the right hon. Gentleman, I shall give way to him, after which I shall come to the other Opposition Members who wish to intervene.

Mr. Lilley: The right hon. Gentleman is correct that, before stakeholder pensions were introduced, I expressed my hope that they would be a success. I did so because I would like any measure that is designed to increase private funded provision for pensioners to succeed. He did not, however, mention that I expressed my fear that stakeholder pensions would, at best, make a small contribution to increasing funded provision and that, at worst, they would undermine that provision. Have his assiduous officials drawn his attention to my remarks to the same audience a few days ago, in which I expressed my disappointment that stakeholder pensions had been such a flop and my belief that, in the light of that lack of success, the only way in which the Government could make them work would be to move to compulsion? Will he confirm that that is now on his agenda?

Mr. Darling: I appreciate that Conservative Members sometimes have to perform heroic acrobatic feats to get from what they said at one point to what they now wish to say. The framework and design of stakeholder pensions were very clear when the right hon. Gentleman gave his interview earlier this year, and at no point did he say anything other than that he would be surprised if the Tories ever sought to get rid of them. He was extremely complimentary.

Mr. Lilley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: No, please let me finish. I have just read out what I believe to be an accurate quote of what the right hon. Gentleman said. He may not like it, but that is what I have done. I have not quoted what he said three days ago, because I have not seen what he said three days ago.

Mr. Lilley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: I will not give way to the right hon. Gentleman now, but I will in a moment because he obviously feels very strongly about this. I have quoted what he said in his interview with the *Financial Adviser* and, no matter what he is now trying to do, he was extremely complimentary about stakeholder pensions a few months ago. I am bound to wonder what has changed now. He is clearly embarrassing his own Front Benchers.

Mr. Lilley: In the article in the *Financial Adviser* in February, I also said:

"I have emphasised the danger that the introduction of stakeholder pensions may undermine existing company defined benefits schemes, accelerate the pace of closures and lead to mis-buying by members leaving such schemes . . . even reducing overall pension provision."

Mr. Darling: One day, I am sure that we shall have plenty of time to go through the right hon. Gentleman's

entire interview, and all his speeches during his life and times here. He does not disagree with a word that I quoted from the *Financial Adviser*, so I am afraid that he cannot get away with that.

Stakeholder pensions are filling a crucial gap in the market. They are good value. The 1 per cent. cap on management fees is now being reflected across other pension products.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I have promised that I shall give way in a moment.

Stakeholder pensions are portable, and can be taken from job to job. That is important when one recalls that the average worker now moves employer six times. People are flexible; they do not need to be earning to benefit. If people take career breaks, they ought to be able to contribute. They also allow people to contribute to a stakeholder and to an occupational scheme.

Given that the Government's—and, I think, the Opposition's—objective is to encourage people to save for their retirement, it is encouraging that, over the past few months, the sales of pensions in general, as well as stakeholder pensions in particular, have been extremely buoyant. More people are taking out pensions. Some of that may be attributable to advertising; I do not know. The advertising was general, not geared to one particular product. The evidence is that more people have been taking out pension products in the last few months.

The impact of stakeholder pensions, in relation to the cap on administrative charges and the other features, such as their flexibility and portability, that make them more attractive, will now and in the longer term have a wholly beneficial effect on the pensions industry. I will now give way to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman), as he has been straining at the leash for so long.

Mr. Goodman: I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. Will he now answer directly the question put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne)? How many of the 416,000 stakeholder pensions sold have been sold to people in the target group?

Mr. Darling: Some 400,000 stakeholder pensions have been sold. Frankly, nobody is in a position, at this stage, to say who exactly has bought them. Nobody knows that yet. I make that point because I am now beginning to see why Conservative Members have called this debate now, rather than in a few months' time, when there might be further evidence. This product has been on the market for just over six months. Pensions are not something that people just go out and buy on a whim; they think about it, and take time to build up to it.

There is an analogy here with individual savings accounts. I remember Conservative Members saying that ISAs would not take off, and that they would not be sold. In fact, what happened was that, after a slow start, sales of ISAs increased year by year. To be fair, exactly the same thing happened with PEPs and TESSAs; it took some time before they became extremely popular. That is not uncommon in financial products.

I understand that the professor who speaks for the Liberal Democrats—the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb)—has some research that he is going to tell the House about shortly. I am sure that he has been a professor for a long time; I notice that his name is now prefaced with that title. No doubt he will tell us exactly what that research shows.

At this early stage, we know that more than 400,000 stakeholder pensions have been bought. I am sure that that figure will increase over time, but at the moment there is no empirical research to show exactly who has bought them. It is more important to consider the amount of money that has been invested in pensions this year. Investment in all forms of pensions has increased by some 50 per cent., which is a significant part of our drive to increase the number of people holding funded pensions.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Given the Secretary of State's confidence in the potential success of these schemes, will he rule out the need to make them compulsory in future?

Mr. Darling: I did not realise that the Conservatives' policy was further to extend compulsion. The hon. Gentleman wants to rule it out, while the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden wants to rule it in. It is worth bearing it in mind that it is compulsory, at the moment, for anyone who is employed to contribute to a pension scheme—either to the state second pension or to a funded pension, if the individual contracts out.

Stakeholder pensions are new on the market; they have been on the market for just six months, and it is encouraging that some 400,000 have been sold. If there are people who were in personal private pensions who should not have been, and who transfer to stakeholder pensions because they find them better value, I shall not criticise that. Some people may be in pension schemes that close down or change, and they may go into stakeholder pensions. That is precisely why we developed stakeholder pensions: to ensure that those options were there. As for the idea that we should criticise people who start making pension or savings provision for their children or grandchildren, I thought that that was something that the Conservatives used to encourage. Now they seem to be condemning it.

Lynne Jones: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Darling: I will give way in a moment.

One has to remember that, in the last few months, the sale of pensions has increased by some 55 per cent., the sale of single premium pensions is up by some 192 per cent., and group personal pension sales are up. One also has to bear it in mind that, last year, the overall amount contributed to non-state pensions was the highest ever—a real-terms increase of some £19 billion since we came to power in 1997. What we are seeing in the funded pension sector is encouraging, and it is wholly in line with our stated aim in the Green Paper to encourage more people to take out funded pensions.

Lynne Jones *rose—*

Mr. Willetts *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones), and then come back to the hon. Member for Havant.

Lynne Jones: Is not my right hon. Friend concerned at the evidence that many of the people taking out

[Lynne Jones]

stakeholder pensions are among the most affluent? They are benefiting from generous tax reliefs of up to £792 a year at the basic rate and more at the higher rates, while people in the target group cannot afford to take out pensions or, if they do, are scarcely better off. I understand him not wanting to take lessons on pensions from the Conservatives, but will he listen more closely to groups such as the pensions provision group and the Institute for Public Policy Research, which has said that it is looking into the subject of pensions and that the Government's policy is in danger of unravelling? Will he study its report when it is produced early in the new year?

Mr. Darling: The report has not yet been produced. I have spoken to the IPPR, as my hon. Friend might imagine. My answer to her is exactly the same as the answer that I gave to Conservative Members. At this stage, we know that just over 400,000 stakeholder pensions have been sold, but nobody is yet in a position to give an accurate breakdown of who exactly has bought them. In any event, to judge stakeholder pensions or any other financial product after only six months would be fraught with difficulties. It is not possible to reach a judgment after a very short period.

It is not surprising that people who are transferring from personal private pensions, or people who have got the cash and want to make provision for people, will be first in the queue. However, a more accurate picture of stakeholder pensions will grow over a period of time. The Government's objective, as we set out in the Green Paper some three years ago, is to ensure that more people go into funded pensions. The figures that I referred to are encouraging, because more people are taking out funded pension provision. That is wholly desirable.

Mr. Willetts *rose—*

Mr. Darling: Before the hon. Gentleman intervenes, I must say that it would be nice if he were to tell us exactly what is his policy on stakeholder pensions. He referred to the Association of British Insurers report as if it somehow supports his argument, but it is in no way critical of stakeholder pensions. Neither is the research that it commissioned, which accompanied the letter circulated to hon. Members. The ABI report refers to the fact that stakeholder pensions are new. It is too early to reach a judgment, which is what he wants to do, but I am not surprised by that in the absence of a Conservative pensions policy. He has two failures under his belt already, so it is not surprising that he has to content himself with criticising our policies.

Mr. Willetts: The Secretary of State and his fellow Ministers have regularly referred to the target group for stakeholder pensions. All we ask is that he tell the House whether he is hitting his target, what his target is, when we will know whether he is hitting it and how we will measure that. For 25 minutes, he has danced around the point. How can he be judged against the objectives he has set himself? That is all that the debate is about and he has failed to answer.

Mr. Darling: If the hon. Gentleman refers to the pensions Green Paper, which we published in December 1998, he will see the targets clearly set out first at paragraph 27 and then at paragraph 10 on page 49. The target group is people on moderate and higher earnings. It has been the target since 1998, it remains the target today and it will be the target tomorrow and in future years.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Darling: Not at the moment. Before moving on, I want to make a point to the Liberals. The hon. Member for Northavon—the professor—will no doubt speak, but I notice that he refers to what he perceives as the deficiency of the scheme in the press release published on his website, which states:

"An element of compulsory saving is essential".

A very Liberal word that—an "element". No one is sure how much or how little. Is the figure 1, 2 or 3 per cent?

We will be fascinated to hear from the hon. Gentleman on two points. First, I believe that he has a paper from a pensions company. If he quotes from it, he must provide it to all Members of the House if he wants any credibility. Let us have a look at it; let us see what this pension company has to say. Secondly, if indeed we need an element of compulsory saving, as he puts it, perhaps he will tell us what that element will be. If he has time, he should also tell us how he would fund his pension plans, which cost some £3 billion. There must be a limit to how much the Liberals' tax proposals can cover in respect of education, health, transport and pensions.

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Mr. Djanogly *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I have given way to the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker), so I give way to the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly).

Mr. Djanogly: The Secretary of State has frequently referred to the fact that stakeholder pensions are for medium and higher earners. If that is the case, why have the Government spent £6 million advertising them to the great mass of the population? Why have the Government put in place a system whereby companies can be prosecuted for not introducing stakeholder pensions? The system that he describes is for mass pensions, not pensions for a small percentage of the population, and it has failed.

Mr. Darling: It is a long time since I have heard such a daft observation. The Government's objective, which I would have thought both sides of the House shared, is to encourage people who can save to do so. The objective of the Government's advertising campaign is to get people to think about their pension provision in retirement. That is not all we are doing. As the hon. Gentleman may be aware, over the next five years, people will receive an annual forecast of what their pension will be on retirement. I would have thought that most hon. Members would have considered that wholly beneficial.

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Richard Ottaway *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I will not give way at the moment; I have not finished with this intervention. Good heavens, surely Conservative Members want me to deal with one of them at a time.

The hon. Member for Huntingdon got one thing right. He has at last understood that the target audience is moderate and higher earners. If one mounts a television advertising campaign, it is not possible to blank out the screens of people on low earnings. It is necessary to show the same advertisements on screens up and down the country, so that people who can save have it drawn to their attention that they need to save for their retirement. That brings me to the third element.

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Richard Ottaway *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I will not give way, because I am conscious of the fact that this is a half-day debate. Other Members on both sides of the House want to speak.

The third element of our reform, which is crucial, is to deal with a point raised by the hon. Member for Havant—the incentives to save. Under successive Labour and Tory Governments there has always been a tension between their desire to ensure that there is a floor beneath which pensioner incomes should not fall—even the Conservatives paid income support, although it was substantially lower than the minimum income guarantee—and encouraging people to save. That is why we are introducing the pension credit, which is designed to help people who lose out under the current system because they have done what successive Governments told them to do—put a bit of money aside for retirement.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Darling: Not at the moment.

The pension credit will ensure that someone who has saved money receives a reward for having done so. That is essential if we are to encourage people to save. Interestingly, many big pension providers welcomed the announcement of the pension credit in November last year as vital if we are to encourage people to save. It is necessary to continue to ensure that we have a system that boosts the income of the poorest pensioners while building in an incentive to save so that if people save through a stakeholder pension, an occupational pension or other means, they receive a reward for it.

Richard Ottaway *rose—*

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I will not give way at the moment. I want to finish the point.

I opened my remarks by drawing attention to the fact that, at one stage in his career, the hon. Member for Havant was in favour of scrapping winter fuel payments. He then discovered that those sitting behind him were rather nervous about knocking on pensioners' doors to say, "Vote Conservative, it will cost you 200 quid." I would be intrigued to hear how he will persuade his party to say at the next election, "If we are returned to power, we will take away the pension credit."

The pension credit will benefit more than 5 million pensioners on low and modest earnings. If it is Conservative party policy to remove the pension credit and take money from more than 5 million pensioners, I very much look forward to Conservatives arguing the case. They will have some difficulty doing so.

Mr. Butterfill *rose—*

Richard Ottaway *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I give way, for the last time, to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). I must conclude.

Mr. Butterfill: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has read the observations on the pension credit submitted by the pensions provision group, which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) mentioned. Paragraph 5 of that excellent report says:

"As ever, attempts to use means-tested benefits to target help on today's pensioners can also discourage today's workers from saving for their retirement. The Pension Credit scheme would be no exception."

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is being somewhat selective in what he quotes. The pensions provision group supports the introduction of the pension credit. It would like the credit to be more generous and we could argue about that, but it is not against the credit. Indeed, most pension providers—most independent observers—welcome the pension credit. The fundamental wrong in respect of the social security system that has been in place for the best part of 50 years is that it acts as a disincentive to saving. I would have thought the reform long overdue. My recollection is that one of my Conservative predecessors who is no longer a Member of the House welcomed the reform, because it is necessary for us to reward thrift and effort, not penalise them.

I look forward to hearing what the Conservatives have to say when the Bill comes before the House. I would have thought that any measure that encourages thrift and rewards effort ought to be supported, not criticised.

Mr. Butterfill *indicated assent.*

Mr. Darling: I am delighted that I seem to have won one convert on the other side of the House, if no other.

Richard Ottaway: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Darling: No, I want to conclude.

Over the past four years, we have recovered some of the damage that we inherited. We have tackled pensioner poverty. We have put in place long-term pension reform to ensure two things. The first is that people on low earnings, people with broken work records, the disabled and women who take time off to look after children have access to a good second pension through the state second pension. In some cases, that will double the amount of benefit that they get. Secondly, we have made reforms to long-term pension provision, by introducing stakeholder pensions, in order to provide more options. Stakeholder pensions are complementary to the existing provision of occupational and personal pensions. Finally, we shall shortly bring before Parliament proposals to implement the pension credit, which will ensure that we not only alleviate poverty but reward thrift.

[Mr. Darling]

It is a pity that, on an Opposition day on pensions, which is an important matter, we do not know the Opposition's position. We know that they still have a savings policy in which 85 per cent. of the gain goes to the richest 20 per cent. of pensioners. We know that they do not agree that 2 million pensioners are at least £15 a week better off. We know that they oppose the pension credit, which will benefit more than 5 million pensioners. It is a courageous decision to be against that. We know that they have nothing to say to people on low incomes who want to save.

We have no idea where the Opposition stand on stakeholder pensions. All that we know is that sitting opposite me is a man who wants to be remembered for giving free television licences to pensioners without televisions. The hon. Member for Havant, who now speaks for the Conservatives on this matter, wrote the last Conservative manifesto. On tonight's performance, I very much hope that he will write the next one as well.

8.21 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): It has rightly been pointed out that if a Government set themselves a target, it is appropriate to measure their performance against that target. Our difficulty is that when the Government realise that they are not hitting the target, they attempt to move it.

The Secretary of State read from the 1998 Green Paper, but he seems to forget that, subsequent to that Green Paper, his pensions Minister, now Lord Rooker, told this House in July 2000 that the target group was not the same as the market for stakeholder pensions; they were separate entities. He said:

"The target group is those on moderate earnings"—

not moderate or high earnings, which is what the Department has said in all its written answers since the election—*[Interruption.]* Is the Secretary of State saying that his pensions Minister was wrong to say that? He went on to say that the White Paper defined that as between £10,000 and £20,000 a year. He could not have been more explicit.

Either the Secretary of State is saying that the pensions Minister did not know what the target group was or, more likely, written answers now talk about moderate and higher earners because the Government know that they are missing the target of only moderate earners.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is a professor, and I thought that professors looked at all the evidence. Should not he look at the Green Paper that set out our policy, rather than take isolated quotes from Ministers? If he looks at the Green Paper, he will see what the target is.

Mr. Webb: The status of Ministers' statements is somewhat doubtful.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): If the target were £10,000, which is a reasonable working assumption in view of what the hon. Gentleman has told us, it would be about half average earnings, so it would be a relatively low income by any standards.

Mr. Webb: Yes; there is no sense in which the £10,000 to £20,000 range, which was explicitly mentioned by the then pensions Minister, is anything other than a moderate income, or perhaps even low to moderate. It is certainly not a high income.

The Secretary of State seems to imply that his policy is frozen in aspic from the time of the Green Paper in 1998. In February 2000, the same pensions Minister told the House that the Government would measure the success of the stakeholder pension scheme by the number of people on moderate earnings without a second pension—those in the target group who take up a second pension. He could not have been more explicit. However, the Government know that they are not hitting the target, so they try to move it.

Surely, if a Government set themselves a target, they should make inquiries as to whether they are hitting it. I presume that the Secretary of State, being a responsible Minister, will have talked to those who know who buys stakeholder pensions. Who has that information? Those who sell them. I therefore presume that the Secretary of State has been in touch with the sellers and has asked them—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) prompts the Secretary of State to ignore my question. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Mr. Webb: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Either the Secretary of State has asked the industry, knows the answer and is covering up or, worse still, has not asked the industry. We have asked the industry and I shall tell the House what a major provider—

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Name it.

Mr. Webb: I shall deal with that in a moment. A major provider has given us commercially sensitive information and has asked not to be named. I am happy to respect that confidence.

Let me give the Secretary of State some information that he apparently does not have. The major provider said:

"We analysed the stakeholder business in the first few months . . . and used standard classifications to look at who was buying."

Four groups of people were buying stakeholder pensions: 11 per cent. are children. I do not have a problem with grandchildren being bought pensions by their grandparents. We need to crack pensioner poverty in 2060, so I am pleased that the Government are making headway on that—never let it be said that they are short-termist.

Some 58 per cent. of policyholders fall into what is described as four of the wealthiest classes. I wonder whether Conservative Members recognise any of the categories. They are: wealthy equity holders; affluent mortgage holders; comfortable investors; and prosperous savers.

Mr. Barker: And professors.

Mr. Webb: Indeed. None of those categories is the target market. As ever, I shall be more generous than Conservative Members and name those who fall into the categories who might be regarded as the Government's target market. This information comes from a provider that sells the product, so it should know. It says that 26 per cent., or one in four, of the products goes to the

five categories that form the target market: better-off borrowers; younger spenders; working families; thrifty singles; and middle-aged assured. Thus roughly a quarter of the product goes to the target market.

The final category, 13 per cent., is the older classes: settled pensioners—Lord Rooker—and older cash users. That 13 per cent. is important and I hope that the Minister will address this matter when he responds. There seems to be a good reason for thinking that some of the 13 per cent. are using the stakeholder pension as a tax dodge. Those people have some capital, they put it into a stakeholder pension one day and then, extremely quickly, they retire and take the money out of the stakeholder pension. They have benefited from tax relief when taking out the pension; they take a quarter of the pot as a lump sum and buy an investment product with the balance, and they have a fantastic return on a very short-term investment.

I hope that the Secretary of State will not tell us that that is what stakeholder pensions were for. Those people form a whole category. The final 3 per cent. form a category called "other", but I could not quite work out who those were.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): The hon. Gentleman has given all sorts of percentages. What was the size of the sample from which the mysterious pension provider was working? How many pensions has it sold, so that we can gauge what the percentages mean in terms of numbers?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that if I tell him how many products were sold, he will be able to work out which company sold them. As I have promised to respect that confidence, he must realise that I cannot give that information. If he doubts the percentages, why does not the Secretary of State ring the various companies tomorrow and see whether he gets a different answer? The BBC expressed an interest in the figures and it rang round the other providers, apart from the one that I have mentioned, and they all told the same story. If that survey is not accurate, let the Secretary of State tell us what is, which he has signally failed to do.

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Can the hon. Gentleman answer a question, just in case I have to deal with the matter later? If the BBC rang every other one, he must have told the BBC who that pension provider was.

Mr. Webb: The BBC—

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Webb: Let me respond to the intervention.

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) must respond to the intervention.

Mr. Webb: Indeed. The BBC rang a sample of providers. Obviously, it did not ring all of them. I made a slip of the tongue. I accept that. I do not know whether the BBC rang that provider or not, because I of course, did not tell the BBC.

Mr. Butterfill: I am a little puzzled by the hon. Gentleman's example of a tax fiddle. He said that someone took out a stakeholder pension, promptly retired, took his 25 per cent. and put the money into some other investment. There is only one other investment into which that could be put at the moment: an annuity, which is a singularly bad investment. Does he really think that that is likely?

Mr. Webb: If the hon. Gentleman reads the personal finance columns of a weekend as assiduously as I do, he will find that people are being recommended to take capital, put it into a stakeholder pension, on which they can get tax relief at the higher rate immediately, which is a fantastic rate of return, and take a quarter of that out tax free, which is another fantastic rate of return. The combined effect of the tax relief on the way in and the tax-free lump sum more than compensates for the relatively modest return on annuities, even if they buy the best annuity that is going.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman made a statement to the House that he was maintaining a confidence and had not informed anyone else of the information. He went on boldly and clearly to tell the House that the BBC had phoned everyone else. He must answer the point clearly. If that is the case, he must have informed the BBC. If he has informed the BBC, he should inform the House.

Mr. Webb: The complete absence of a response on the substance of the issue is demonstrated by that line of questioning. I said, as the record will show, that it was a slip of the tongue to refer to the other providers. Let me make the position clear. The BBC knows the figures that I just gave. It does not know the name of the company. It rang pension providers and all of them said the same thing. The substantial question is: are they right or are they wrong? Do the Government know? If they do know, the Minister should have brought that information to the House this evening. If they do not know, they have been negligent. That is the situation.

I look at the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) with some respect because it is rather difficult to draw up a motion in the absence of any policy whatever on pensions, with the exception of the annuity policy. The motion says:

"this House regrets the Government's failure to deliver stakeholder pensions to its target group".

We have provided evidence of that; the Government have provided no counter-evidence. The motion

"condemns the failure to reform the obligation to purchase an annuity at age 75".

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) pursued that matter in the previous Parliament. It has been taken up by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) in a private Member's Bill, which I will support. The House will find that there is a Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment to relax the annuity rule, so we support that element of the proposal.

The motion then

"regrets the spread of means-testing".

There are two reasons why means-testing has spread. One is because the money has gone into the minimum income guarantee. The other is because the pension rise has been so small.

[Mr. Webb]

While the Secretary of State was speaking, he was heckled by Conservative Members with that memorable phrase, "75p." When the House was invited to divide on the issue of whether 75p was inadequate, only one party said that it was: the Liberal Democrats. *[Interruption.]* When the Conservatives had the chance to put their money where their mouth was—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Please allow the hon. Member to continue.

Mr. Webb: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Willetts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: I will.

Mr. Willetts: I remind the hon. Gentleman that that was perhaps not his finest parliamentary moment because his voting would have stopped any increase whatever in the basic state pension. Voting for no uprating was less than smart.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman chooses to forget the two occasions on which the House voted on 75p. He may remember the Liberal Democrat early-day motion that said succinctly, as ever, that 75p on the basic state pension would be inadequate. During a Liberal Democrat Opposition day, we put that to a vote, and the Conservative party abstained. Voting for that motion would have had no effect on upratings, but it would have indicated Conservative opposition. Indeed, I recall intervening on the hon. Gentleman to ask whether he would have put it up by 75p. In his characteristically honest manner, because he is nothing if not honest, he said, "I probably would have done the same myself." So while it is true that the growth in means-testing is regrettable, it is clearly not true that Conservative Members would have done anything about the basic state pension other than to make matters worse.

The Opposition motion also mentions

"the burdens on company pension schemes . . . causing employers to close them to new members".

I suspect that all hon. Members should exercise some caution on that issue. Although it is true that the Government took £5 billion out of occupational pensions, no party—not one—promised in its general election manifesto to replace that money. Therefore, although it is fair enough for Conservative Members to say that they, like Liberal Democrat Members, voted against the proposal at the time, that money is gone and we have to look forward to what will replace it.

The pièce de résistance of the Conservative motion is in the final line, where the once great Conservative party—which I am told is Britain's lead Opposition party—issues a radical call to arms to Britain's pensioners. Conservative Members call

"on the Government to review its pension policies".

They do not demand that the Government do anything in particular, they simply call on Ministers to have a review.

I recall when, in 1997, we were newly elected, the Government hit the ground reviewing and it was one review after another. The number of reviews was mocked widely by the Opposition. Five years later, however, Conservative Members have reached the pinnacle of demanding just a review. I hope that we get far more than a review. I hope that we get a decent pensions policy.

In his speech, the Secretary of State pre-empted some of my comments and asked me questions on the Liberal Democrats' approach to pensions policy. I think that it would be in order if I were very briefly to reply to those questions and distinguish our policy from that of Conservative Members.

We believe that means-testing, which was mentioned in the official Opposition motion, will be diminished only when there is a decent basic state pension. That is the heart of our approach. Although the Government amendment to the motion describes the basic state pension as a "foundation", it is a sinking foundation. When the pension credit is introduced, half of all pensioners will receive it and the pension level will not affect their standard of living at all. The pension level will affect only their credit. Moreover, the other half of pensioners will be the richest half, to whom pension levels will increasingly not matter. Therefore, the Government's policy is effectively to phase out the pension entirely. That is the direction of their policy.

We believe that the pension needs to be rescued and that the priority group are those—the old elderly—who have seen the real value of their pension decline for the past 20 years. At the previous general election, the Liberal Democrats pledged a 50 per cent. income tax rate on those earning more than £100,000 annually. In written answers, the Chancellor told us how much money that rate would raise. It would be more than enough to pay £15 weekly in the pensions of the over-80s, who are the poorest pensioners in the land.

The Secretary of State said that pension increases must be either means-tested or paid across the board, but it is possible to have intelligent targeting. We can target increases on the old elderly, who are the poor elderly. They are the priority group.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: In a moment.

We have to put the pension beyond the realm of means testing. The critical point is that no one will save if means testing is the reward for saving. If we can increase the pension particularly for older pensioners to the level of the means test, every pound that they save thereafter will be pure gain—not 40 per cent. or 60 per cent. gain, but 100 per cent. gain. When we reach that point, we shall have decent levels of funded pensions. Until we have a decent basic state pension, neither the Government's nor the official Opposition's proposals will succeed.

8.38 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I should like first to emphasise the aspects of the Government's policy that I welcome, and then to draw some different conclusions from the figures that were presented by the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). Although I am relieved that so few of the target group have bought a stakeholder pension, the already significant number of those who have bought one should give the Government a very important lesson—that the stakeholder is a real success if one has an adequate first-tier pension. Although one would not

expect the Government to be thinking on the Floor of the House about how their pensions policy will develop, I hope that, before the end of this Parliament, Ministers will introduce serious proposals on how to implement an adequate first-tier pension for everyone in the United Kingdom. In addressing that issue, I should also like to touch on the reform proposals that were recently made by the pensions reform group, of which I am a member.

I welcome two huge successes in the Government's pension policy. The first is that the stakeholder has reduced significantly, and will continue to reduce significantly, the charges faced by pension savers. We need only consult *Pensions Weekly* to see how much further there is to go. This week's issue gives the example of someone beginning late in the day to save substantial sums towards retirement, and ending up paying contributions of nearly a quarter of a million pounds to the provider, although the pension is marketed as a stakeholder pension. Real progress has been made in reducing charges, and the Government should be congratulated on that. They also deserve our thanks for the efforts significantly to increase workers' access to low-cost pensions. That, too, was part of the stakeholder pension reform. I doubt that any Member will deny that we should applaud the Government's moves on both fronts.

The difficulty arises when we look at the target group, and at the figures presented by both the hon. Member for Havant and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). If we think about stakeholder pensions in terms of the target group, some disappointment must be expressed in the target group's take-up—although I would say that its refusal to touch the product shows a lot of common sense. Let me explain why many in the target group should not touch the product, and why I am pleased that there are so few take-ups. If we continue our efforts to achieve a high take-up among the lower half of the target group, we—as a Government—may open ourselves to the mis-selling of pensions. That would be more serious than our having to say that our reforms had helped groups other than the one that we had targeted, that we were pleased about that, and that we would proceed to further pensions reform to help the original target group.

The problem arises from the fact that, in their entirely proper desire to help poorer pensioners now, the Government have holed below the water line their long-term reform of stakeholder pensions if they are targeting those with between £10,000 and £20,000 a year. We know already that about half of them cannot save to make themselves better off than they would be if they spent all their money and took advantage of the minimum income guarantee. Some of our constituents complain that, having saved, they are not as well off as they thought they would be, given what people are picking up on the MIG. The error may be compounded when the pension credit is introduced.

My worry is that one or two of the big companies that are making a big song and dance about stakeholder pensions are selling them on the basis that the two reforms will be with us for the long term. I wonder whether that is true. Let us consider the cost of linking the MIG to earnings and continuing to link the state pension to prices. Not only do more and more pensioners become eligible for the MIG over the years; because they do, and because one benefit increases so much more quickly than the other, the cost will escalate. Indeed, it is already escalating.

In fact, I wonder whether the two reforms will be in place at the end of the day. I congratulate my constituents who have not bought stakeholder pensions on the basis that they will be in place; the chances are that they will not. As if that were not difficult enough for the Government, the Chancellor has introduced two other savings products making it even more difficult for anyone who might want to take up a stakeholder pension to decide to do so. Would someone with modest to low earnings, seeing what the Chancellor is offering on individual savings accounts, lock up his or her savings in a long-term pensions product, or go for an ISA? Clearly, most people would go for the ISA.

We are now told that there will be a savings gateway. All who go through the gateway will have a pound added to every pound that they save. Which of our constituents in the target group will sign up to a stakeholder pension when, by going through the savings gateway, they can double their savings immediately for three years? Moreover, as with all schemes that encourage saving—good to start, more difficult to stop—there will presumably be an extension of the scheme.

Given that we do not yet know the details of the pension credit, and that half of the target group can make themselves better off by not saving and relying on the minimum income guarantee than they can by saving, should we be surprised at the figures produced by the hon. Members for Havant and for Northavon? I am not surprised at them—in fact, I am relieved, and I hope that this debate helps to spread the message about the stakeholder pension.

The stakeholder pension is a useful new product. The lesson for politicians is that all those who receive or will receive an adequate first-tier pension are plumping for the stakeholder pension. They are pleased with what the Government have done, and about the significant reduction in costs. They can see those costs falling still further, and they are putting their money where the Government's mouth has been. They are wise to do so.

Although we should naturally celebrate the successes achieved by the Government's pensions reform programme, my third theme is that at some stage we will have to examine how we propose to ensure that everyone—rather than merely some people—in the country has an adequate first-tier pension. If that pension were to be aimed above means-tested levels, many of the problems identified in the debate would fall by the wayside. There would not be a problem with the mis-selling of stakeholder pensions, as everyone would know that they would keep every penny that they saved if they had an adequate first-tier pension.

Moreover, an adequate first-tier pension would mean that there would be no problem with annuities. Annuities exist only because we taxpayers pay substantial sums to encourage people to save towards their retirement. It is reasonable, therefore, to expect that people do not spend those savings foolishly, as that would allow them to draw on taxpayer's money for a second time by claiming means-tested assistance. However, people with adequate first-tier pensions will be free, if they wish, to buy annuities with their other pension products. Some will do so, and others—especially in the current climate—might consider that rather a poor deal.

Finally, I commend for discussion a proposal from the all-party pensions reform group. It has proposed that an adequate first-tier pension could be ensured by combining

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[Mr. Frank Field]

the existing national insurance pension with funded provision. That combination would be compulsory, but the guarantee would be given—as far as any such guarantee is possible—that people who pay their way and pay their whack will end up with a pension above means-tested assistance levels.

Hardly any of us can buy such a guarantee in the private market. People as rich as Mr. Branson might be able to, but they do not need to. For almost all of us, therefore, such a guarantee would be very valuable.

The proposed scheme is quite open about the element of redistribution that it contains, which would ensure that people who cannot pay but who are decent citizens would have their contributions paid up front. In that respect, I disagree with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I consider that, in schemes that contain an element of redistribution, it is better for people on lower pay to be funded than it is for them to rely on credits and promises that future taxpayers may not meet.

The pensions reform group does not try to duck the fact that such a scheme would come at a price. It accepts that we will have to pay more if we want adequate pensions. Clearly, the way in which those new contributions are introduced is a matter of importance.

A number of hon. Members have expressed interest in the idea. The pensions reform group is an all-party group, and its members include the hon. Members for Northavon and for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight). Many financial institutions outside the House have played their part in working up the proposals. We have six months in which to examine the aspects that need further work, to ascertain whether the scheme is a starter.

I hope that at the end of our debate we shall record in the Lobby our pleasure at the real movement that the Government have made in beginning to change how pensions are sold and in ensuring that those pensions offer a good deal for people who save. However, I stress that the Government's keenness to help the poorest pensioners through means testing stores up real problems for modest income groups. Such people feel that the system has now turned against them and that what they thought of doing as decent citizens is not rewarded but penalised.

We shall always have the dilemma of how to help the poorest, unless we get down to debating, at some stage during this Parliament, how we ensure an adequate first provision for everybody in the country. The hon. Member for Havant helped that debate along this evening by giving us figures showing that all those who currently have basic pension cover have been the biggest takers of stakeholder pensions. They have sent a clear message to Members on the Treasury Bench.

8.51 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I certainly approach stakeholder pensions not as their enemy but as someone who, as the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pointed out, wishes them to succeed. I have always supported measures to improve the amount and extent of privately funded pension provision. I supported the concept of stakeholder pensions and I am extremely disappointed that they have been such a failure.

I am disappointed but not surprised. It was mistaken of the Secretary of State to try to suggest that I had ever given a blank cheque to the concept of stakeholder pensions. When they were introduced, I pointed out that they were at best likely to make only a modest contribution to increasing funded provision, and that they were rather more likely to undermine the existing provision.

The Government set themselves four objectives for stakeholder pensions. The first was to reduce the costs that absorbed the amount of money people put in, so that more would go into investments for their retirement. The second was to require employers to offer access to stakeholder pensions and to encourage them to make contributions to those funds for their employees. The third was to encourage those people in the target group—earning between £10,000 and £20,000 a year—to opt out of the state unfunded, pay-as-you-go scheme and into funded private provision, and to save more in those schemes than they do at present. Finally, the overall intention was to shift the balance of provision for pensions from 40 per cent. privately funded and 60 per cent. pay-as-you-go to the reverse: 60 per cent. funded and 40 per cent. pay-as-you-go by 2050.

There is half a century to go. All we asked of the Secretary of State was that he give some indication of how each of those four objectives was being achieved. What indication was there from the early results—the first six months—of how they were being achieved? It was sad and significant that the right hon. Gentleman did not try to address his objectives or to assess the results of the early months.

On the low-cost target, the decision to require providers of stakeholders to charge within a structure that set a maximum percentage cost related to the funds invested certainly means that, compared with the previous systems—which often included a high up-front premium absorbed in commission, and a commission charge that was not reduced relative to the amount put in—those who save limited amounts and who save only intermittently will gain. At first sight, that is an improvement. The 1 per cent. level of charge at first seems quite tight. Actually, over a lifetime's savings, that represents a large gain to the providers. The Australian system starts off with a slightly higher proportion of premiums absorbed in costs—1.29 per cent at present. However, that is set to fall as the system matures. It is calculated that by the time the average amount of savings for each individual in the Australian system has reached just US$30,000, the costs absorbed by the system will be just 0.5 per cent. That might not seem much of a difference, but because of the effect of compound interest, the result over a lifetime of saving can be a net pension that is up to 15 per cent. higher than if the high level of costs had been absorbed. I hope that the Secretary of State will look at that.

Another target was to require employers to give access. We have not had much mention of that today, but we know from the Association of British Insurers that, at the end of September—just a few days before the scheme became compulsory—about one third of employers were not actually meeting that requirement. A very high proportion were not giving access to their employees by the target date. It was extraordinary that the Secretary of State chose to say nothing about that. He gave no warning, or encouragement, to those who have not met their legal obligations, nor did he warn them of the hefty fines that they could face under the present rules.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the situation is even more worrying, because a significant minority of employers are not even aware of their obligations?

Mr. Lilley: Indeed. A study by Axa Sun Life has shown that of those who had not put such schemes in place—we are talking here of employers with turnover of £1 million or more—about 90 per cent. did not realise that they had to do so. That is worrying. It is sad that the Secretary of State did not use this opportunity to publicise the scheme. In due course, the law will have its way and employers will do so.

The more interesting question is how many employers will voluntarily make contributions to their employees through those funds. One hopes that some will, but studies suggest that only about 10 per cent. of employers who do not do so at present are planning to do so. That may be offset by the effect on pensions provision of the availability of stakeholder pensions, encouraging employers to wind up existing schemes and move to a less generous scheme than they had previously. Again, we heard nothing about that from the Secretary of State.

The key aim of the Secretary of State has been to encourage the target group, about which there is no doubt. The Library brief makes it clear that the target group comprises those earning between about £10,000 and £20,000 a year. It is hoped that they will opt out of the state scheme and save their rebates from that and, if possible, more than that. We know that, in its first six months, the scheme is sadly failing with that target group. The vast majority of the rather small number of policies sold simply represent transfers from approved personal pensions and additional voluntary contributions into stakeholders on stakeholder terms. There is no net increase in the number of people saving or of the amount of saving as a result.

We know also that the pensions providers have been focusing on people outside the target group—essentially the tax-advantaged saving of high-income earners via their wives and children, or those exploiting the concurrency rules who already have occupational pensions themselves. If their income in any one year falls below £30,000, they can, for the next five years, put up to £3,600 in a tax-advantaged stakeholder in addition to their occupational pension. HSBC, Norwich Union, Halifax, Legal and General, Scottish Widows and the Virgin group have all sold more pensions to those tax-advantaged groups than to the target group. The Secretary of State has not acknowledged that. If he refutes it, and if he has evidence to rebut it, let him tell us. Or is he going to try to convince his supporters on the Back Benches that the whole purpose of the operation was to provide a new tax-advantageous savings scheme for higher income groups?

The Secretary of State claimed that there was some counter-evidence that there was a boost in personal pension provision, if not strictly in stakeholder provision, over the past few months and that the figures showed that. Actually, that boost is very largely the result of people moving out of Equitable Life and similar with-profits schemes into personal pensions and similar schemes. It is misleading to suggest to the House that it is the result of the success of his scheme; it is the result of the failure of his regulation.

Mr. Boswell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if there was to have been such an improvement, and very plausibly for the reason that he has just given us, it would be in complete distinction to the inexorable decline in the number of participants in occupational pension schemes in the past three years?

Mr. Lilley: That is absolutely correct. I have read that there are about 800,000 fewer people in occupational schemes than there were when the Conservatives left office.

The fourth objective—the overall objective of increasing the proportion of pensions provision in this country that is privately funded—is extremely desirable. This country, unlike the bulk of continental countries, has encouraged people to build up funded private provision, so we do not have to rely on a rising burden falling on the taxpayer as the population ages, in the way that most continental countries do.

We have more funded private provision for pension liabilities in this country not just than any other country in Europe, but than all the other countries in the European Community put together, because people have bothered to save and invest for the future. As the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) pointed out when he was Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security, that is a reason why we should be very cautious about merging our financial future with that of those who have not made such provision for the future.

We want to make further progress towards that objective and I am glad that the Labour party has reversed its position and now wants to build on our success, but to encourage more people to opt out of the state scheme or to save more requires either persuasion or compulsion.

Persuasion is costly. It is simply not possible, under the 1 per cent. cap, for people to devote the time and effort needed to persuade people on modest incomes to opt out of the state scheme, and still less to save more than their rebates if they do opt out. The former will therefore devote their attention only to those on high earnings, who make it profitable for them. So either the Secretary of State will have to amend that 1 per cent. cap, and perhaps allow some extra amount to be spent for advice or persuasion if people save more than the rebate when they opt out of the state scheme, or he will have to consider compulsion. There simply are no other options available to him to meet his objective.

However, it is important that we be clear in our mind as to what compulsion means with second pensions. There is already a compulsory state second pension. Everyone in the country who is in employment must put money into the state earnings-related pension scheme, soon to be the state second pension, or, if they opt out of that, put the equivalent amount of money, via a rebate, into an approved private scheme or stakeholder scheme, or company pension.

Additional compulsion, therefore, must take the form either of extending that obligation to the self-employed, which is desirable in principle but impractical in practice—even the Australians have not extended their scheme to the self-employed—or of compelling people to

[Mr. Lilley]

opt out of the state second pension and into private schemes. That was obviously the Government's intention when they were preparing their Green Paper. Famously—on page 123, I believe—it contains a reference to when it is compulsory to opt out of the state second pension, which they had failed to proof-read.

As I understand it, it is in due course the intention to make the state second pension a flat-rate pension, while keeping graduated rebates for those who opt out. I would be grateful if the Minister confirmed that that remains the Government's intention. I hope that he will explain how it can be other than mis-selling to provide people with a state second pension when they could get larger than the equivalent sum if they opted out and bought a better than equivalent pension by so doing. In such circumstances, it is both sensible and in line with the Government's original intentions that they compel people to opt out of the state second pension and into private funded pensions; if they do not do so, they will be guilty of mis-selling. Will the Minister tell us whether that is the Government's long-term intention?

The third way of introducing additional compulsion into the system would be to require employers to make a contribution—say, the 3 per cent. of income that is required to make personal pensions equivalent to stakeholder pensions in the eyes of the regulator—and to make it compulsory for all employers to pay such moneys into their employees' scheme. Is the Minister considering doing that? If he is, how will he differentiate such a requirement from a simple increase in tax in the eyes of employers or employees?

I make no bones about the fact that I would like there to be some way in which to require the self-employed to save more, but I cannot see how that could be practicable. It is not right at this stage to require employers to make additional contributions over and above those necessary to fund the state second pension. However, it is reasonable to consider the possibility of requiring people to opt out in due course from the state second pension and into funded pension provision—as we already allow them to do from SERPS—and thereby over time improving their position, enhancing their exposure to this country's growth and prosperity, and generating an increased flow of funds into industry, which will strengthen the economy and benefit us all when we retire.

It is sad that the Secretary of State has not risen to the occasion today and that he has not talked about his targets and the evidence so far. It is sad, too, that he is manifestly failing to achieve the aims and targets of which we all approve. I hope that in winding up the Minister for Pensions will do better than his colleague did in his opening speech.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way just before the end of his speech. Does he agree that the people who will benefit most from opting out of the state system and perhaps from being compelled to opt out of the state second pension are the youngest members of our work force? If in getting people to opt out of the state second pension we started with the youngest people—who by a compounding effect have the most to gain from having a private pension—it would be the beginnings of establishing the second, private pension as a norm.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is correct. His suggestion bears a startling similarity to the proposal I made before the 1997 general election—the basic pension plus—which I acknowledge bore a similarity to proposals in a paper that was published by my hon. Friend, which I subsequently saw. I hope that Ministers will learn as much from him and me as we have learned from each other.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate is a short one and little time remains. If hon. Members keep their remarks brief, all may be able to catch my eye.

9.8 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I shall be brief, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Stakeholder pensions began in April. On 8 October, about a third of a million employers were required to designate a stakeholder scheme. Some more relevant changes, such as the new pensions service and SERPS becoming the state second pension, are due to be introduced in April 2002. It strikes me as unreasonable of people to leap to judgment as they have tonight, and to use words like "flop" and "failure" so soon. However great the desire to carry out assessment and evaluation, it is reasonable to allow more than six months and to complete the development of the policy first. That is my answer to the criticisms that have been made so far.

On a more constructive note, my message is that, other than the defence of the nation, it is difficult to think of a public policy area where long-term consensus among political parties would be more useful than pensions provision. I think of the young workers of today, considering whether to make an investment in a pension for their retirement decades hence. They will be thinking of the number of general elections between now and when they retire and the changes in the law on pensions that could take place within that time. They will be thinking of historical events that might put people off having a pension.

Being as neutral as I can and not seeking to attribute blame to any political party, I could list many events such as pensions mis-selling, the attack on SERPS and more recently the problems of Equitable Life, not to mention the changes in our economy, with times of high interest rates and inflation and today's low interest rate environment and the effect that that has had on rates for annuities. People will bear all those things in mind when they decide whether to make that investment in a pension.

To put the stakeholder pension in its place in present public policy, the Government want the basic state pension as the foundation—with all the criticisms that the Liberal Democrats would heap on the sturdiness of that foundation—and they want to build on that with the second tier of pensions and provide sufficient diversity of choice for people to have no excuse that they cannot find a pension that suits them. As many hon. Members have said, the stakeholder pension is one choice that might suit some people. That is a sensible policy.

Stakeholder pensions are designed in particular for people on modest incomes, although no one is excluded from the entitlement to take out such a pension. Many hon. Members have commented on the desirability of the standard features of stakeholder pensions and the limits on management charges. Those pensions make an important contribution to the second tier.

Surely it is in the interests of all hon. Members and of the entire population that people be encouraged to save for their retirement and that they save enough to build up sufficient funds and receive an adequate income in retirement. Surely those are the goals that we all want to achieve. The best way to achieve those goals is through stability—stability of public policy, which is where the requirement for consensus among politicians comes in. I also believe that it means the stability of public-private partnership. Labour has accepted, although it has been painful, that there is a role for private provision. I appeal to Conservative Members to accept the painful truth that there is also a role for public provision and that the two must go together to make a successful whole pension policy.

Stability of regulation is also required. The critics of regulation should bear in mind the fact that the Financial Services Authority will not have all its statutory powers until the end of this month. We also need stability in the economy. Most rational politicians think that an independent Bank of England and inflation target are useful contributors to a stable economy.

We need stability of pension rules. It is vital when we try to persuade people to take out pensions that they are confident that as much as possible of their investment will accrue to their pension fund throughout their working life, and that they will not be robbed of great chunks of their investment every time they change from one scheme or one job to another.

The public policy tools that politicians have are the basic state pension, the pension credit, regulation and partnership with the private sector. Importantly, the new second state pension allows credits for carers. That is a vital feature that must be retained whatever changes are made. A strong and diverse second pension provision market is also a tool.

There ought to be a concordat between political parties individually—never mind just the one party in government—and the providers; there is also an important role for employers. Research by the Association of British Insurers shows that the proportion of the target work force for stakeholder pensions who would be willing to take out a pension would rise from one third to one half if employers contributed. We need willing employers to be partners in that enterprise.

There must be a willingness to confront the obstacles to public policy that will crop up from time to time. The present problem with annuities is one such obstacle and we should all find a solution to it. We need less of the party political bickering and more of a unified message from politicians and providers, so that from now on we put the welfare of pensioners at the centre of pensions policy.

9.14 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I shall be as brief as possible in dealing with this important subject. I am afraid that the Government missed a tremendous opportunity when they first reviewed pensions by not building on the work of the pensions reform group, the all-party group that I chair and the retirement income working party, and completely restructuring pensions in a way suggested by hon. Members on both sides of the House. An element of compulsion is necessary. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) suggested that there could not be compulsion on employers. Of course there could, just as one could hypothecate part of the employer's national insurance contribution. One could do something similar with the self-employed, who would be compelled via an increased contribution or, to avoid that, by showing that they were making private provision.

The stakeholder pension has only one merit—to drive down costs—which I accept is vital, as costs were far too high. However, looking at the target group, I believe there is a grave danger of mis-selling. In previous debates in the House, I have said that it is difficult to envisage how any independent financial adviser could recommend a stakeholder pension to someone in the target group without being at risk of mis-selling. The Secretary of State said that that problem would be overcome by the pensions credit. He should read the full response of the pension provision group, which states in a summary:

"We are concerned at the limited amount of information in the Consultation Document about the intended design of the Pension Credit scheme, how it would be implemented and the implications for other benefits such as Housing and Council Tax Benefits.

We are surprised that the Government has declined to publish fairly basic information, such as the number of people who stand to gain and the additional amounts they would receive from the Pension Credit scheme and the expected total cost of the proposals.

We greatly regret the lack of clarity. This seems a serious step backward from the extent of detail and information the Government gave in the 1998 . . . Green Paper.

We are also concerned about the possible negative impact this uncertainty could have on people's willingness to join the new Stakeholder Pension Schemes which are about to be launched and on the ability of financial advisers to offer informed advice on the decisions people will need to take."

That problem is compounded by annuities. The fact that annuities are low makes it difficult for people in lower income groups to benefit. If annuities were abolished, as recommended by the retirement income working party, and a limited platform equal to the minimum income guarantee were introduced, people would be free to do what they liked with the rest of their money, subject to certain constraints, and much of the problem would be overcome.

We are faced, however, with a dichotomy within Government. The Inland Revenue is resisting annuity reform. A press release issued after a meeting with a Treasury only yesterday said that reform could

"lead to unsustainable tax leakage owing to increases in income tax rebates on contributions once the 'disincentive of buying an annuity' had been removed".

In other words, part of the Government is saying that a disincentive is needed for people to buy pensions. It believes that the annuity is a disincentive, hence it must be kept so that excessive tax relief does not have to be given. What nonsense; I thought that it was Government policy to increase the incentives for people to buy personal pensions.

[Mr. John Butterfill]

The press release also says that pensions schemes could lead to the very rich having

"a mechanism to avoid inheritance tax."

At the moment, if the very rich put everything in a trust, they have to arrange to die before 75. Inconveniently, that does not always happen so, once the 75-year rule is removed, they could use that as an inheritance mechanism. There is a simple way of dealing with that; all the Government have to do is legislate to cap contributions from the rich, and the whole problem disappears. Yet the Government retain that antique device, and one must ask why. Perhaps one of the reasons is that by forcing people to buy annuities, they force them to buy Government bonds at ever reducing rates. The Government are therefore forcing retiring pensioners to fund Government debt.

9.20 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): In the interests of brevity, I have cut out a significant proportion of my speech. I keep coming to Opposition day debates, unlike many Opposition Members. At least there are sufficient Conservative Members to oblige them, if they were a small company—unlike the Liberal Democrats—to have a stakeholder pension.

I have been waiting for the cut and thrust of debate—that explosion of ideas that is supposed to characterise Parliament, with the Government being robustly and precisely examined by a defiant Opposition. Each day in debates I wait with excited anticipation for an onslaught from the official Opposition, but all we get is the occasional Back-Bench cameo.

I could compare the situation to a game of Bagatelle that I once received. Hon. Members may recall those traditional Bagatelle games. When one fires the spring, the ball bearing spins around with a "ping". The one I got was one of those badly made Bagatelle games; as one drew the spring back, the sound was less of a "ping" and more of a "boing", as the ball bearing trickled slowly up the game and lamentably cascaded downwards. When I listen to those on the Opposition Front Bench, I hear no "ping" today.

For 18 years, during which I first started paying in, I had to deal with the raiding of pension funds by employers when I advised pension fund trustees. During those 18 years, I had to watch as members of my family without occupational pension funds retired into poverty pensions. With all the brains available to the Government, after 18 years there was still no sustainable, effective pensions policy. Instead, there was the legacy of the pensions time bomb facing us now.

I want to ask my right hon. Friend the Minister about the role of the trade unions in stakeholder pension funds. The occupational pensions that we have are the legacy of effective collective bargaining by working people through their trade unions—bargaining to get the employer to make a serious contribution to an occupational pension. In persuading employers to take up and develop stakeholder pension funds, and in bargaining beyond stakeholder pensions into occupational pension funds, an opportunity is being missed by the trade unions which should be a rightful part of their historic role and, more importantly, a critical part of their future development as organisations representing working people. They should seize the opportunities provided by the stakeholder pension funds and run with them, both for their members and in terms of their interaction with employers.

I would liken the stakeholder pension to a game of cricket. The stakeholder pension is, so to speak, the first pair at the wicket still batting, but what is required is a solid team performance to take the team through to a long-term win. It is far too soon to draw conclusions from the early returns that we have, especially as so little information has been provided. A natural caution on the part of the public when faced with the question of where to invest money for their future is understandable, particularly when one considers the target group at which stakeholder pensions are aimed. I would go further and say of my constituents, who are most prudent and financially cautious people, that it is laudable that they have waited to see how the legislation pans out before committing themselves to anything.

In the stakeholder pension, the Government have succeeded in beginning to create access to a low-charge pension scheme for those who previously had no means of securing their future. In the long term, it is the beginning of the process of providing security for those people's future. I congratulate the Government on the measure. It is a "ping" in the right direction.

9.25 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The Government came to office promising great things of the stakeholder pension: high standards of value for money, flexibility and security. Things started to go wrong when they used the expression "low-cost pension" to describe it. As has rightly been said, the intent is to drive down the cost of a pension, but there is no such thing as a low-cost pension. Pensions are extremely expensive and large amounts have to be found to build up a fund if there are to be good pensions. I see that as a result of my declared interest as a trustee of a pension fund.

Do stakeholder pensions work and are they worth while? One problem that has not been mentioned is that they were introduced through employers and made compulsory for those with more than five qualifying employees. That was an acrimonious point. It means that about 15 per cent. of the target population who work for smaller employers are excluded to start with.

A second point is that the scheme is voluntary, not compulsory. I do not believe that it will be possible to have a viable scheme unless it is made compulsory, which will drive down costs. Only 416,000 people have taken out stakeholder pensions.

I was baffled by the Secretary of State's insistence that stakeholder pensions are for moderate and higher earners. If they are, why did he tell the House on 23 February 1999, at column 229, that the target was "middle and lower ranges" of income? Why did Lord Rooker, the then Minister of State, say that stakeholder pensions were intended for

"those with moderate incomes of between £10,000 and £20,000"?—[*Official Report*, 3 April 2000; Vol. 347, c. 719.]

During the debate, I came to the conclusion that the Secretary of State had missed the goal the first time around and was therefore moving the goalposts nearer to the current situation. Only 36 per cent. of those who have

taken out stakeholder pensions are in the main target area of income of £11,500 to £20,000 and a quarter have incomes of more than £20,000. We all know a lot of advertising seeks to attract richer people to take advantage of the stakeholder tax breaks on behalf of other members of their family.

Could there be a better use of the money by people taking out stakeholder pensions? In many cases there could. The state second pension scheme, which takes over from SERPS in April 2002, may be a better investment for many because of the low level of contracting-out rebates. It has not been noted during the debate that many of those in the stakeholder pension target area have personal debt of some kind on which they are often paying a large amount of interest. The best investment that they could possibly make would be to pay off their private borrowings, on some of which they are paying well over 20 per cent.

The real reason why I oppose the system put forward by the Government is the level of means-testing, which does not just concern me but makes me angry. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, addressing the Labour party conference in 1993, said that the next Labour Government would

"achieve what in 50 years of the welfare state has never been achieved—the end of means tests for our elderly people."

Between 1979 and 1997, the number of pensioners means-tested fell from 57 to 38 per cent., but it is now due to rise to between 56 and 59 per cent. by 2003. The minimum income guarantee linked to wages means that there is a growing gap between the basic state pension and the guaranteed minimum income. The greater that gap becomes, the greater the means-testing, the effort that has to be made to bridge the gap and the extent to which a saver on modest earnings is wasting his or her money by throwing it away and spending it where state benefits are otherwise available.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Viggers: I am sorry; I cannot.

Someone on the minimum income guarantee will have housing benefit and council tax relief. That means that a person who has made prudent, but modest, provision for retirement can be worse off than someone who has never done anything in that regard. This is a widening gap and there is increasing and justified resentment about it.

When I make that point to the Secretary of State—I have done so several times—he simply asks whether I would not allow some extra relief for those on the lowest incomes. I understand the point, but does he understand that there is a deepening sense of resentment among those who have made prudent provision for their retirement about the fact that some people who have made no provision are better off than them? Of course, the pension credit that is to be introduced would increase the amount of means-testing to about 65 per cent. Does the Minister think it is acceptable for 65 per cent. of pensioners to be on means-tested benefits? I submit that it is not.

I cannot let this debate go without making two more points. First, I thank the Secretary of State for being present throughout the debate, which is unusual among Cabinet Ministers these days. His presence is a great compliment to the House, for which I thank him.

On the second point, I shall make my last comments in very rapid succession. This Government have introduced the greatest of all stealth taxes in damaging pensions by abolishing advance corporation tax relief for pension funds. That is a devastating blow of some £5 billion a year that is only now being felt. It is estimated that a 30-year-old will now need to pay an extra £200 a year to maintain his pension at the previous level. Tesco has increased contributions to its pension fund by 15 per cent. to pay for the change. Some 17 per cent. of those on final pension schemes are now in schemes that are being closed to new members. That is a devastating indication of the damage done to the pensions industry by the abolition of the tax relief. The result is that 9,000 new pension schemes were formed in 1997, 5,000 were formed in 1998 and only 3,000 were formed in 1999. What would I do? I would not mislead people by talking about low-cost pensions, but increase the basic retirement pension, introduce compulsory contributions to an adequate scheme and so reduce means-testing and increase self-respect for our pensioners.

9.32 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I am aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you want this contribution to be no more than three minutes long, so I shall do my best to confine my remarks to that time.

With regard to the previous speech, I must say that pensioners in my constituency are glad that there is a large gap between the basic pension and the minimum income guarantee. That £20 gap for single pensioners corresponds to £20 more that they have to spend, or £20 for a better standard of living. If the previous speaker the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) was trying to suggest that that is demeaning because it is based on means-testing, all I can say is that it is real money that has a role to play in improving the quality of those people's lives. I am also glad that we have this Government and that they are pursuing that policy, and that the Conservatives are not in government, as they seem to want to remove it.

My main point is to emphasise to my right hon. Friend the Minister that it is important to take on board the remarks made today, such as those of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), about the interface between the arrangements for the stakeholder pension and the pension credit. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), I do not feel that I would want a stakeholder pension if I were earning, say, £13,000 a year. That seems a pretty bad deal. Even if one were to build up painfully over many years a fund that was four times one's income, at £50,000 or so, it would provide an income of about £80 a week, on current annuity rates. When that amount is added to the basic pension of £70-odd, one is left with about 150 quid. One would probably then be just at the edge of the taper for the figures that we have seen in respect of the pension credit and would not, perhaps, get many of the benefits that would be available if one was on the minimum income guarantee as well. One would also be taxed, and various other matters could be relevant. If one was eligible for housing benefit, one would be removed from it and so on. One's quality of life might still end up poorer than it would have been under the minimum income guarantee, even with a pension credit, if the credit was not generous. That calculation is based on the indicative figures that we have seen for the pension credit.

[Mr. Tony McWalter]

We must think much more carefully about the relationship between the stakeholder pension, the pension credit and the associated systems of benefits, so that in the end there can be a clear incentive for people earning £13,000 a year or thereabouts to make the real sacrifices that they would have to make to build up a fund of quadruple their current income level. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will say that he is going to rethink some of the arrangements relating to the pension credit to ensure that there is a real incentive for people to buy into this scheme.

9.36 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): This interesting debate has taken place against a background of two wider economic considerations, both of which are disturbing, and both of which have been created by this Government alone. The first is the alarming overall decline in the savings ratio, which has halved over the almost five years of this Government, from more than 10 per cent. in 1997 to 5 per cent. in the early quarters of this year. It is entirely characteristic of the Labour Government that they concentrate on one vital part of the scene—pensions, which we all accept are vital—while neglecting others.

The general message that the Government are putting out is one of a disincentive to save. It is hardly surprising that that disincentive generates the conclusion that the annual savings gap caused by these policies is now measured in tens of billions of pounds, and is currently estimated by the Association of British Insurers at £27 billion a year.

Secondly—this is quintessential new Labour—the Government offer inducements in one direction, for stakeholders, while at the same time damaging the market prospects in others. At an early stage of the last Parliament, I was more directly involved in the many debates about the Government's abolition of advance corporation tax and payable tax credits. Those measures took more than £5 billion from pensions every year and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) has just said, effectively take £200 a year from the average 30-year-old.

Those figures should inform our general concerns in this debate. It has been an interesting one, and it belied the bland comment that I have just received in a written answer from the Minister for Pensions who said, heroically, that stakeholder pensions were designed to be simple. They may be simple enough, but the conclusions for policy are far from simple.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) provided a masterly dissection of the subject, emulated, if only in part, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) and by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). My hon. Friend the Member for Havant received admirable assistance and many thoughtful comments from my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) and for Gosport. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) helped to twist the knife in the Secretary of State, and there were further contributions from the hon. Members for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter).

Everyone has made a genuine contribution, although perhaps the least convincing or cogent was that of the Secretary of State. He went to great lengths not to answer the questions that were put to him. He said that he did not know the answers, but I am not sure whether ignorance is an excuse. When Ministers of the Crown set up a new policy, they ought to be able to answer our questions. Even if they are not yet able to do so, they ought at least to have established the machinery by which their policies can be tested, and on which they can report. I know that he is uneasy about that, as is every Member who has spoken.

The argument is not about motives, as we all want to increase the proportion of income being put aside for the retirement years. We have little option on that. We must also offer a fair deal to those making the saving, and we need to see whether the current arrangements, much hyped by the Government, are working.

The first conclusion that I have to draw is that there is and remains a radical confusion at the heart of the Government as to the target group for stakeholder pensions. One of my hon. Friends referred to the Secretary of State's original statement in February 1999 that people in the middle and lower ranges were the target group.

The former Minister of State, Lord Rooker, has been mentioned several times and, in particular, he referred to the target group as those on moderate incomes of between £10,000 and £20,000 a year. That is 5 million people. By definition, almost all those persons will be on below average earnings.

The Government's new definition, set out in their amendment to our motion, defines the target group as "moderate or higher earners". On the formula that they have given, that means anybody earning £10,000 a year or more, and the sky is the limit. In new Labourspeak, lower means higher or, if it means that someone can meet a target, the target changes to meet the concept of the day. I knew someone who consumed an inordinate amount of mothballs. When the shopkeeper asked why he had been back to the shop four times in a week, he said, "You can't hit them every time."

Secondly, the stakeholder scheme, by any standard, is hardly selling like hot cakes. Let us take first the employer gatekeepers. Remember, they are under a legal obligation to designate schemes for any business with more than five employees, yet on the statutory date of 8 October it was estimated that at least a third fell at the first fence as they had not registered by the deadline.

The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority is responsible for policing those defaulters and Ministers must hope in their hearts that it does not feel too many collars, because it could be overwhelmed. That would send a disturbing signal to those Ministers who want to pose as the friends of business.

The Minister of State and I have debated employment law, and I am interested in whether an individual employee with a grievance about non-designation could pursue a case through the already overloaded employment tribunal system because he had not received his rights. I am not sure whether that has ever been clarified.

It is hardly surprising that take-up is relatively disappointing, with only 416,000 stakeholder policies sold to date. Many were no doubt transferred from other schemes. I am interested in a written answer received last week by the hon. Member for Northavon, although he did not refer to it. Despite all the effort and expense involved in advertising in the first place, Ministers now say that they are not specifically advertising stakeholder policies. That is not a ringing endorsement.

Figures on stakeholder pension charges published last week by the Financial Services Authority show a wide disparity between providers. In many cases, a personal pension still offers better value, although that of course depends on the circumstances. I do not know whether it suits the Government to say that they have targeted the workers by hand and by brain, but they have a achieved a position—I have to say that I have no interest to declare—whereby the rational purchaser of a stakeholder pension is me. I have a brand new granddaughter, and I can make provision for her 60 years down the track. Therefore, Government policies could succeed only if they operate as outdoor tax relief for the financially sophisticated. All that is of a piece with the Government's other failures in pensions policy. Like other private pension holders, stakeholders will have to go through the annuity hoop referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West and others. There is a strong Treasury interest in trying to secure public funds at minimal cost.

Then there is the whole issue of the minimum income guarantee. That has been just as much a flop in practice as the stakeholder pension, with a take-up of only one fifth of the target group to date. Of course, Ministers pray in aid their forthcoming pension credit. They should ask themselves whether they are absolutely sure that those changes can be financed with no losers, and with significant beneficiaries but at no Treasury cost. Even if they can achieve that, are they happy about subjecting more than half of pensioners to the inevitable means-testing?

Last but not least, the overall number of pensioners in occupational schemes has fallen year on year under this Government. Many also face a retreat from quality, having to move to less generous schemes. It is no accident that the IPPR—not normally a friend of those on the Conservative Benches—concluded in August:

"The Government's pension policy is basically in a muddle. It is unravelling and something needs to be done about it and needs to be done quickly."

Age Concern echoes some of those concerns. If Ministers are still not in the mood to listen, hon. Members must make a modest start in the House tonight by voting for our motion.

9.46 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): I shall try to deal with hon. Members' questions as I go along but if, by the end of the debate, I have not done so I shall write to them and place my letters in the Library so that those who have taken part in the debate can see the answers.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) for taking part in the debate. It has given us an opportunity to set out the four key stages of the Government's policy: saving the basic state pension from the Conservatives, who would have liked to have privatised it; reforming SERPS by creating a second state pension to help the low paid and the carers of disabled people for the first time ever; the creation of the pension credit so that it pays to save; and giving people a choice through the stakeholder pension, with a second tier for those on moderate and higher earnings.

When I listened to Conservative Members in this debate I felt astonished, because for 18 years they failed virtually every pensioner organisation in Britain. They left us with a complete mess and were contemptuous of older people. Hon. Members will remember what those in charge of Conservative policy thought about pensioner poverty and treating people with dignity. Edwina Currie, the former Health Minister, told pensioners:

"Buy long johns, check your hot water bottles, knit gloves and scarves and get your grandchildren to give you a woolly night-cap."

That was the Tory strategy for pensioners in Britain; and it got worse.

Mr. Boswell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: Why?

Mr. Boswell: I simply want to ask the Minister a question—it does not refer to the former colleague to whom he has just referred. Will he tell the House whether pensioner incomes rose or fell under the Conservative Government?

Mr. McCartney: When the Conservatives left office there was the biggest gap in equality of pensioner incomes in the history of this country.

Mr. Barker: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: No. The hon. Gentleman has been jumping up and down like a jack-in-the-box. He and the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) have been like Pinky and Perky.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State highlighted, in our first four years we cleared up the sorry trail of misery created by the Tories over 18 years. We simply rolled up our sleeves and put right the injustices of our inheritance. We tackled the legacy of pensioner poverty; dealt with the inherited SERPS debacle; and put right the mis-selling scandal, ensuring that compensation was paid to the thousands of people who were conned by Tory Members into leaving their occupational scheme.

Put simply, the Tories failed those who needed help most. At least 2 million pensioners were living on or below woefully inadequate levels of income support. Many more were living in fuel poverty. That was the reality of the 18 years of Tory rule. The Tories did nothing for women who stayed at home to look after their children or elderly relatives. Those women could not build up decent pensions and were left to be in poverty when they retired. They deserved better and the Tories did nothing for them.

The Tories left us with a system where there were huge disincentives to save. Why should people have saved for retirement when all they would have found was that they were no better off, or in some cases worse off? People saved for nothing under the Tories. Nor was a framework in place to offer good-value alternatives if individuals could not access an occupational pension scheme.

In the teeth of Tory opposition, we were not prepared to ignore those issues and to condemn many pensioners to a life of poverty. That is why during our first term in office we reviewed the pension system to replace it with one that is modern, inclusive and fair to everyone. Our strategy is simple: we want to ensure that all pensioners

[Mr. McCartney]

have a decent income in retirement. Therefore, we have taken action to help all pensioners, while giving priority to the least well-off.

The basic state pension will remain the foundation of income in retirement. Nothing the Conservatives said today showed that they would commit themselves to that, too. It is an essential building block of pensioner income, but we should not look at it wistfully through rose-coloured glasses. It provides a basic income in retirement—nothing more, nothing less. That has always been the case.

The system has flaws. That is why we are modernising it. In the process of modernisation, we want to take steps to ensure that we do not penalise married women who paid the reduced stamp, and that low-paid workers who did not earn enough to pay national insurance get access to the second state pension. We want to ensure that we have a system where people retire with dignity and a guarantee of income.

That is why we introduced above-inflation increases in retirement pension this year and next—£5 a week for single people, £8 a week for a couple—and from April 2002, there will be further increases of £3 a week for single people and £4.80 for couples. We introduced the minimum income guarantee for the poorest pensioners in our society, free television licences for the over-75s worth £104, and winter fuel payments worth £200. All those were opposed by Conservatives.

Mr. Lilley: Will the Minister confirm that the value of the extra money paid to pensioners is less than the £5,000 million a year that the Government are extracting from pension funds, so that pensioners overall are net losers from the Government?

Mr. McCartney: That is absolute nonsense. Furthermore, the right hon. Gentleman is one of the most culpable because he was the Secretary of State for a long period during the last Conservative Government, who extended means-testing while putting more people below the poverty line. He stood back and watched as community after community faced high unemployment and 50-year-olds were put out of work. As well as losing their job, they lost the opportunity in that part of their earning life to have a decent pension in retirement. He should hang his head in shame for what he did as a Minister.

Mr. Goodman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: Can the hon. Gentleman sit down for a moment? He phased me—I thought Mr. Bean was standing up in front of me. I apologise. I will get back to him.

We are spending nearly £3 billion a year more on pensioners than it would have cost to restore the earnings link in April 1998. This year, 2001–02, we are spending around £4.5 billion extra a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of policies since 1997. In 2002–03, that will rise to £5.5 billion extra a year, to answer the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley).

I give some examples of how that additional money has been spent. At April, nearly 2 million of the poorest pensioner households will be at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of the measures that we have taken since 1997. Our policies are helping those who are most in need of that extra spending. A total of £2 billion is going to the poorest third of pensioners, five times more than the earnings link would have given them. That approach is narrowing the gap between rich and poor.

It was a rough-and-ready solution to a real problem, but it has worked. In the three years since the introduction of the minimum income guarantee, we have paid £12 billion to the poorest pensioners in our society. I refuse to apologise for such a policy.

Mr. Goodman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: I will give way later. Be quiet. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. McCartney: I have never in my life been frightened of a Conservative, however big.

In this debate, Conservative Members have placed great emphasis on the means test. Either they want to cut the minimum income guarantee and reduce income by £15 per week for the poorest pensioners, or they want to make a huge increase in the basic state pension. However, the latter option is not Tory party policy. What is their policy? Are they going to cut pensions by £15 per week for the poorest pensioners? It is just another example of Tory Members thrashing around on policy.

We shall soon be publishing our proposals on the pension credit, which will remove stigma and needless complexity, combat poverty and promote security—which is critical. Half of all pensioner households will be entitled to the credit, which will signal the end of the weekly means test. We shall modernise the way in which we deliver help to pensioners, simplify the rules and significantly reduce the information that they have to provide initially. We shall enable pensioners to receive their entitlement with much less intrusion and hassle.

The pension credit is the next stage of our strategy to deal with disincentives for people to save. Introduction of the credit will reward people for saving for their retirement. The credit will provide a guaranteed income level below which no pensioner should fall. It should be worth, in 2003, about £100 for single pensioners and £154 for couples. This is the first time that people with modest savings will not be penalised for thrift. Those who qualify for the pension credit will receive a cash top-up for the pounds that they save. When they were in government, Conservative Members' priority was to tax moderate and small second pensions at a rate of 100 per cent. and give tax rebates to the most wealthy in society. That is not our priority.

There was a gap in the market for low-cost, secure, flexible and good quality pensions. Consequently, we introduced the stakeholder pension, which has been widely welcomed, even by the Tory house magazine. The personal finance editor of "The Sunday Torygraph" said:

"There is absolutely nothing wrong with stakeholders. For those who can afford to put money away to fund their retirement they are a jolly good idea."

Last year, there was no facility for people in the target group to have such a pension. Two thirds of employers are now on board, and hundreds of thousands of individuals who did not have appropriate pension cover now have it. The policy is a success, and it will continue to be a success.

We have a continuing monitoring and evaluation plan to assess the impact of stakeholder pensions as well as information from the pensions industry. We shall continue that assessment. Conservative Members have said nothing today to change my mind that stakeholder pensions were the right policy to introduce, or to make me doubt that the policy will ensure that, in the next few years, hundreds of thousands of people who had no access to pensions under the Tories have such access.

Despite the Opposition's attempt to rubbish our pensions strategy, it is clear that it is their policies, not ours, that are in disarray. Their policies are unworkable, unattainable, unsustainable and very unpopular, even among Conservative Members. Their policies are a continuing catalogue of disaster.

There is no confusion about where the Government stand on pensions. Pensioner poverty increased under the Tories, but the Government are reducing it. The Tories mis-sold pensions, but we ensured that their victims were compensated. The Tories had the state earnings-related pension scheme, but we are modernising it. The Tories tried to cheat widows by not allowing them to inherit SERPS, but we have put that right. The Tories wanted to abolish winter fuel payments, but we have increased them to £200. The Tories wanted to deny over-75s a free television licence, but we have introduced a scheme to provide them with one. The Tories introduced charges for pensioner eye tests, but we abolished the charges. The Tories increased VAT on fuel, but we reduced it to the lowest possible level. The Tories also opposed the pension credit.

Worst of all, the Tories coldly condemned millions of older workers to the dole. They abandoned them. They rejected them. They threw them on the scrap heap. The Government are against age discrimination, and we shall legislate against it.

David Maclean (Penrith and The Border) *rose—*

Mr. McCartney: I ask the House to reject the Tory motion.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I take it that the Minister has finished.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 194, Noes 328.

Division No. 59] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*

Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris

Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 324, Noes 194.

Division No. 60] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob

Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Morrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*

Tyler, Paul	Willetts, David
Tyrie, Andrew	Willis, Phil
Viggers, Peter	Wilshire, David
Walter, Robert	Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Waterson, Nigel	Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Watkinson, Angela	Yeo, Tim
Webb, Steve	Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Whittingdale, John	Younger-Ross, Richard
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Wiggin, Bill	**Dr. Julian Lewis and**
Wilkinson, John	**Mrs. Cheryl Gillan.**

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's reformed framework for pensions, which ensures that today's pensioners share in the country's rising prosperity and that tomorrow's pensioners are encouraged to save for their retirement, building on the foundation of the basic state pension; believes that pensioner poverty must be tackled through the minimum income guarantee; supports the reform of SERPS to create the State Second Pension which will give more help to low paid earners and people with broken work records, such as carers and disabled people; further supports stakeholder pensions which provide a low cost, flexible option for moderate or higher earners who do not have access to a good occupational scheme; welcomes the Government's plans to ensure that pensioners with modest savings or a small occupational pension are rewarded for their thrift through the new pension credit; and supports the need for an effective system of financial regulation through the FSA and other measures to build public confidence.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, in respect of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, notices of amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 88) (HC 305) on Special Grant for Activities Undertaken by Beacon Councils, which was laid before this House on 25th October, be approved.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Question agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 81) (HC 276) on 2001–02 Special Grant for Gypsy Sites Refurbishment, which was laid before this House on 29th October, be approved.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Mr. Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 14 November, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001].

PETITIONS

Road Safety

10.31 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I have the honour to present a petition from Mrs. Jonete Coates, of Redmain cottage, Tollerton road, Huby, Yorkshire and 100 other residents of Huby or neighbouring villages, objecting to excessive speeds on country roads in and around Huby.

The petition states:

The Petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to introduce measures which will ensure that the Tollerton Road is made safer for both users of the road and local residents.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

East Gloucestershire NHS Trust

10.33 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I have the honour to present a petition from 7,238 petitioners out of a total readership of 18,000 of the *Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Standard.*

The petition reads as follows:

To the House of Commons,

The Petition of the readers of the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard newspaper, Cirencester. Declares that the decision by the East Gloucestershire NHS Trust to take junior doctors away from Cirencester Hospital casts serious doubts over the future of health provision in Cirencester and the Cotswolds, especially with regard to the Accident and Emergency facility.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons resolves that Her Majesty's Government instructs Gloucestershire Health Authority and the East Gloucestershire NHS Trust to maintain the present level of quality of NHS provision at Cirencester Hospital.

And the Petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Domestic Violence

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. McNulty.*]

10.34 pm

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I congratulate the Department of Health on its guidance to health care professionals working on domestic violence. Its manual, which is a key resource for health care workers on domestic violence, is a model to be proud of. I welcome the fact that, over the past few years, it has been increasingly recognised by health professionals and the Department that health services play a critical role in providing access to help and protection for abused women and children and are a front-line point of contact for anyone experiencing domestic violence.

Until recently, the health service has tended to disregard all but the immediate medical needs of people experiencing domestic violence. Any refuge relying on the support of GPs and health visitors will confirm that that has been a mixed experience, subject to the resources and understanding of the staff who work with it. Recent initiatives by the royal colleges and the crime reduction programme have undoubtedly improved responses to domestic violence, as has the welcome funding of a Women's Aid programme to raise awareness of the issue.

However, much more remains to be done. Domestic violence is a key issue for the national health service, so why is it not referred to at all in the NHS plan? We need a more systematic approach across front-line health services to training; we also need to enable domestic violence survivors to access safely help that they may desperately need. In particular, we need clear measures to show how health trusts and, more importantly, primary care groups and trusts are implementing the guidance. A recent survey by Women's Aid shows that performance is patchy and the measurement of outcomes almost non-existent. General practitioners, dentists, health visitors, nursing maternity services, psychiatric and mental health care, general medicine, surgery and accident and emergency departments all need to be provided with training and confidence to identify and provide guidance.

Survivors should not have to rely on enlightened health care professionals; they should be sure that help is available wherever and whenever it is needed. Domestic violence, particularly violence against women, is a problem in all countries, whether rich or poor. According to the British Medical Association, in this country it affects about one in four women, regardless of ethnic origin or status. The BMA found that about one in nine women using the health services have been hurt by someone they know or live with. The Department's own 1997 publication, "On the State of the Public Health", acknowledged that

> "the health and social costs and consequences of domestic violence are extensive and serious enough to constitute a major public health issue."

Research has shown that health care services are often the first point of contact for women living with violent men. Women fleeing domestic violence are most likely to attend accident and emergency departments because of their 24-hour access and the anonymity that they provide.

According to a 1996 study, domestic abuse is a common cause of significant injury, mental health difficulties and chronic health problems in women. It is estimated that 50 per cent. of women being treated for mental illness have a history of domestic violence. It has been well documented that psychiatric illness, particularly depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, is greater in women who have experienced domestic violence. Many women do not talk about their abuse because of fear or shame. Often, a partner will not let a woman out of his sight, so a visit to a GP, often because of the illness of a child, may be her only way to communicate the problem. She may not know how to seek help, so an appointment at the doctor's or the hospital may be the only time when she is alone and able to talk.

Violence and abuse are a public health scourge and their effects on health and well-being should never be underestimated. Many health professionals see patients whom they suspect of being abused at home, but may be unsure about to how to deal with the issue. That was the depressing finding of a recent Women's Aid report. Health care professionals have to engage with those embroiled in violent situations to deliver the appropriate care. Research has found that, in some cases, health professionals are seeing abused women as many as eight times before action on domestic violence is taken. It can be difficult for someone to acknowledge that the abuse that she is experiencing is domestic violence. That is not helped by professionals who do not recognise the seriousness of the matter.

In the online consultation between parliamentarians and survivors of domestic violence, Womenspeak, one survivor stated:

> "None of the help I received whilst still married was of any use. I got told that as it wasn't happening every day, I should count myself lucky. I knew nothing about the help I could have received and no one told me. I also did not realise at this stage that the abuse I was receiving was domestic violence. It must have been obvious to the police, solicitor and staff of the hospital but no one said a word."

Recognition of the abuse is often the first step to seeking help, so any agency responding to a domestic violence situation must, at the very least, offer the victim adequate support and supply relevant information about support available in the local area. The Womenspeak consultation found that that rarely happens in some areas.

In another contribution from the consultation, a woman reported:

> "For six of those years I had no help from the police until I was admitted into hospital. While I was at the hospital I was given no advice on the help I could get, even though the nurse and doctor who treated me knew that I had been attacked by my partner. It was only when a police officer came to take a statement from me the following day that he gave me the number of the Domestic Violence Officer, who in turn gave me the number of a refuge for women. This was the first I knew that there was any help for myself and my son."

Research in 1999 found that women experiencing domestic violence present frequently to health services and require wide-ranging health interventions, so a variety of health professionals have daily contact with patients whose health may be at risk or is already damaged by domestic violence, often over many occasions, yet only 6 per cent. of abused women were accurately identified in emergency departments.

It is an appalling fact that violence against women is more likely during pregnancy and early parenthood. The extent and level of abuse was well illustrated by a midwife who recently confessed that she had little idea about the

problem until a woman whom she had cared for and whose baby she had delivered just 48 hours before was readmitted for care because her husband had cut away her perinatal sutures in order to have intercourse.

Pregnant women in violent circumstances look to midwives to help them confront the issues and receive support. It is a sad fact that maternal morbidity and pre-natal morbidity and mortality are significantly higher in women who live in violent and disadvantaged circumstances, and the numbers have been increasing. For the first time, domestic violence is included as one of the causes of death in the last maternity mortality report, "Why Women Die".

The recently produced Department of Health midwifery action plan includes a clear steer for midwives towards developing their public health role. It acknowledges the need for midwives to be skilled in recognising the emotional, sexual or the often more evident physical abuse which take place against women, and to be able to act in the best interests of the woman and baby who are the primary focus of midwives' care. Sadly, that is not the norm throughout the national health service. I can cite an example from my constituency, where a GP told a woman who came to him after being set on fire by her husband to go home and not to annoy her husband again.

That approach is reflected in a recent survey by Women's Aid, which found that only 27 per cent. of health authorities had a written practice or protocol for dealing with domestic violence. Fewer than a quarter collect information on the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence, and about half included the issue in their health improvement programme, which might simply mean the inclusion of a sentence on the subject and might not mean much action in practice.

The survey reveals a similar or worse picture of practice among health trusts, yet health care professionals working in trusts are in an ideal position to encourage disclosure of abuse and to record it in order to highlight the scale of the problem and the need for relevant services. The report concludes that most trusts seem to ignore that.

In areas such as mine, there has been a large increase in the reporting of domestic violence, with about 250 incidents reported a month. Increasingly, those reporting are women from ethnic minorities, but as is the case in many trusts, little or no information about domestic violence is available in ethnic languages. Like many primary care trusts, the focus of what training exists is on health visitors alone. In Luton primary care trust health visitors have, in the past, attended training sessions set up by Women's Refuge and have updated training. Like other primary care trusts, it relies on one identified health visitor with experience in domestic violence who is a resource for her colleagues. But what happens when she leaves?

As for general practitioners, once again the picture is pretty desperate for those seeking help with domestic violence. General practitioners do not have formal training, either as junior doctors or as postgraduates. Locally, Luton primary care trust has encouraged GPs to be involved with training undertaken by health visitors, but it is not compulsory. Nationally, less than 9 per cent. of primary care trusts have a domestic violence policy and less than a quarter have a member of staff with some responsibility for domestic violence issues.

It is clear from the survey that most senior staff in primary care trusts have given the matter relatively little or no thought. Where they have, they have cited difficulties of developing and implementing a policy throughout the various independent GP practices and other primary care services.

Despite the increasing importance of primary care groups and trusts as the front line of resources and contact for survivors, the picture does not look good. Many respondents felt that the only way to effect change was for domestic violence to become one of the designated priority care groups and have their performance measured.

As one health authority acknowledged:

"Domestic violence is not properly recognised as a priority. It is very difficult to raise any form of interest except in a small minority of already committed and interested informed people."

Another primary care group said:

"Having read the questionnaire it is apparent that the vast majority of issues covered do not apply to the services we commission nor has the topic been identified as a priority for the primary care group."

What hope, then, for the woman who seeks help from her GP? She may find little or no literature or training, and little or no network to point her towards support and assistance.

Worryingly, there is still no systematic monitoring of the extent to which women experiencing domestic violence make use of the health service, nor of the outcomes when they do, and very few health authorities collect their own data on incidents or referrals.

Responding to domestic violence is the responsibility of all agencies, not just the police or Women's Aid. The health service has a pivotal role to play in the identification, assessment and responses to domestic violence, not only because of the impact and cost of domestic violence to women's health, but because of the cost to the health service itself. For example, the financial cost of domestic violence for health agencies in Hackney in 1996 was estimated at £580,000, and that did not include hospitalisation and medicine.

It is essential that health professionals are sensitive to signs and indicators that might suggest domestic violence. Women may find it hard to make the first step by disclosing domestic violence, but they may hope that the health professional will notice that something is wrong and put them in touch with support.

What can the NHS do? I urge the Minister to take action on reinforcing the guidelines, particularly to primary care groups and trusts where their involvement is so vital. We need systems which monitor how or whether the guidelines are being used throughout the health service, but especially among front-line provision such as GPs and accident and emergency services.

We need training on domestic violence issues to be included within the initial professional education of all health care staff and as a regular part of on-going training. For the national health service effectively to respond to the needs of those experiencing domestic violence it needs to ensure that it is raising awareness among staff of domestic violence and its effects; to instigate compulsory training; to create a safe environment which encourages disclosure by those experiencing domestic violence; to develop safe protocols for helping those in this situation; to develop good referral systems as part of a multi-agency response; to ensure that women health professionals are

[Margaret Moran]

available where necessary; to seek to empower those experiencing domestic violence to make their own informed decisions; to provide options and information; and to respect confidentiality. It needs to display information and to work with refuges, helplines and outreach and advocacy services for women and children, and also to develop referral and support networks recognising the role and skills of other agencies.

It is clear that, unless responses to domestic violence are included among the criteria against which the performance of health care providers is measured, many will continue to ignore the issue. The health service may be a lifeline for women whose contact with the outside world is restricted by a violent partner. For them, access to front-line health services that recognise and respond to their needs may be a matter of life and death.

10.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I am delighted to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) on securing this very important debate. I am aware of her tremendous record of raising these issues in the House in relation to almost every single Department. By her personal endeavours, she has raised the matter way up the agenda. I am also personally aware of the online consultation that she was responsible for organising, which gave women the opportunity to respond through the internet and to tell their own stories about their experience of domestic violence. There is nothing more moving than to read and understand the real experiences of women in the community and the impact of domestic violence not on only them, but on their families. I commend that consultation to all hon. Members who have not had the opportunity to hear and understand the views that have been expressed, which are extremely powerful and have been a great aid to us all in understanding the complexity of some of the issues that are involved.

The facts about domestic violence are shocking to all of us. About one in four women will experience domestic violence at some time in their lives. Although we have heard predominantly about women in this debate, there is a clear recognition that domestic violence sometimes involves men as its victims, and we must not forget that. More than 1 million incidents of domestic violence are recorded by the police every year. One in four of all assaults involve such violence. Two in every five women who are murdered are killed by a partner or ex-partner. Certainly, domestic violence is very rarely a one-off episode. More often, the experience is one of repeated and intensifying assault. On average, a woman experiences 35 incidents of domestic violence before seeking help. That is the extent of the problem.

About a third of domestic violence starts in pregnancy. Often, when there is domestic violence in a family, it escalates during pregnancy, when women are at their most vulnerable. Women with unwanted pregnancies often carry the greatest risk. Domestic violence is clearly associated with miscarriages, premature birth and labour, low birth weight, and foetal injury and death.

Almost all women will have contact with the health service by being registered with a GP. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that the health service is ideally placed to pick up and monitor cases and, it is to be hoped, to take action in this very important area. A recent study showed that approximately 80 per cent. of women in a violent relationship had sought help from the health service on at least one occasion.

The issue is one for the Government as a whole and not just the NHS. The policy document "Living Without Fear", published in 1999, set out the Government's initiatives across all Departments, as well as good practice and our commitment to tackling domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. It is important that we consider not only the women who are involved, but the children, who can suffer if they live in households where there is regular domestic violence. It has been shown that such violence can have a serious impact on children's development and well-being.

The health service has a particular role to play in trying to counter domestic violence. Health professionals are most likely, out of those in all agencies, to come into contact with its victims. They are also the most likely people to be perceived as non-judgmental, which is a very important issue for women in these circumstances. Many women simply want the abuse to end, but they may be concerned that their children will be taken away from them once the agencies start to intervene. There is a genuine fear that, once social services become involved, the consequences can sometimes be dire for the whole family. Women's trust in health professionals whom they do not see as threatening or judgmental can therefore be vital in giving them the self-confidence to disclose what has been going on.

Health professionals have a key role to play in helping women to tell them what is happening in their homes, in providing support and practical advice about the available options, which is what many women are looking for, and in demonstrating a continuing understanding and a source of help or referral. Whatever decision the woman initially makes, the health service professional will be there to support her, to help her through the system and to help her to take advantage of the choices on offer.

My hon. Friend referred to the NHS resource manual for health professionals that was developed in March last year. I am grateful that she thinks that it is a valuable resource. The manual builds on and consolidates guidelines that have been issued by the various royal colleges. It provides greater clarity to stimulate the debate and to inform the development of good practice throughout the health service. It is aimed primarily at health care professionals, to try to increase their knowledge and understanding of the issues, to highlight the nature of domestic violence that takes place in a range of settings, and to show how it is likely to be evident among the patients for whom they care. They will then be able to see the warning signs and the symptoms, and be ready to intervene and to take action.

The manual is to be used as a resource that provides a starting point for health authorities and trusts to review their own policies and practices. I accept that it needs to be supplemented with information and data that will support local implementation, because the manual will only be good when it is keyed into what is happening in local communities and used as a source of practical help on the ground, providing real information to assist people.

It is essential that front-line workers be supported by their managers in implementing and developing the protocols to tackle domestic violence. There needs to be

better monitoring and much more extensive information gathering, so that we can be aware of the full extent of the problem. My hon. Friend is right to say that if we can measure progress, things tend to get done. Unless we do so, this issue could slip down the agenda, which is certainly not what we want.

The resource manual has been widely taken up, right across the health service. The first print run of 10,000 copies has already gone, and the second print run is going well. We are trying to push it out into every part of the NHS.

We are also moving on from there. We are funding the Women's Aid Federation of England in a three-year project to raise awareness of domestic violence in the health service. The federation carried out an initial survey, the findings of which were published last year, as my hon. Friend mentioned. She is right to say that not enough health authorities or trusts have their own written policies, or an accurate way of monitoring the extent of the problem in their communities. We at the centre need to ensure that, as the primary care trusts begin to develop their commissioning policies, they take this matter seriously. The federation's survey has been tremendously useful in showing us what action is being taken on the ground, where the gaps are, and where we need to do even more.

The Women's Aid Federation will undertake a second survey next year to gauge how successful the manual and its awareness project have been. We intend to measure and monitor these processes and to ensure that they happen. The federation has also published a practice directory, a very useful document giving examples of new health care initiatives in tackling domestic violence. One of the challenges for the NHS is to try to spread good practice. There are pockets of excellence everywhere in this country, and it is sometimes frustrating that we try to reinvent the wheel rather than learn from each other and spread the good ideas across the country. The directory of good practice will be a useful tool for the whole NHS to use.

We have also considered domestic violence in relation to NHS Direct. If women telephone the service, they can get immediate advice, signposting and referral to appropriate support services in their community. The telephone number of NHS Direct is becoming much more widely known, and the service has now been rolled out nationally. In the east midlands, NHS Direct has been piloting a domestic violence protocol for use with callers to the service. It will report on the pilot, and if it is successful it will be rolled out to other areas of the country.

Although tackling domestic violence is important to the NHS, it is also important for us to respond to these problems on a cross-government, multi-agency basis. The Home Office has been active in supporting a whole range of initiatives under the crime reduction process. I want to highlight two examples in which the health service, eduction services and local authorities have been able to do really practical work in tackling these issues. The first is in north Devon and Torridge, which is a rural area. Often, support services for women suffering from domestic violence are particularly difficult to access in such areas, because they are concentrated in urban communities. The project provides services in the local accident and emergency department, which is where many women immediately go when they experience domestic violence.

It is hoped that the project will expand in its second phase to encompass every health centre and doctor's surgery in the district and two small local hospitals. It aims to provide advice from Women's Aid and legal advice from solicitors and to ensure that 24-hour victim support is available on the spot to help women—and, indeed, men if they are victims of domestic violence—through the health service. We can all learn from the project, and we should evaluate it to judge how successful it is. We must ensure that there is support in the community to help people in that situation, whatever the time of day or night. The project is extremely interesting.

The other example I want to highlight is supported by the health action zone project in Leeds. It is entirely different, but just as valuable. Three local schools and a mixed-sex group of boys and girls aged eight and nine are involved. The aim is to ensure that they are aware of the problems of domestic violence from a very early age, to extend awareness and to ensure that domestic violence is on their agenda.

I hope that, when we raise the next generation, we will not duplicate the problems that exist in so many families. Again, a multi-agency approach is involved—raising awareness and ensuring that we can support those young people if they happen to be in families where domestic violence unfortunately occurs, as well as giving them the self-confidence and self-esteem to tackle it themselves.

Those are two of about 22 projects being funded this year. There were 200 bids for support from a £10.7 million programme, which is making a tremendous impact on tackling domestic violence in communities. There is a great deal going on, but I would not claim to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South that we do not have a lot more to do on the issue. It is widespread and it infiltrates so many families in our community.

All Members of the House want to ensure that we send a clear message that there is never any excuse for domestic violence. It is a crime like any other. It turns people's lives into tragedies for themselves, their children and the rest of us. The Government have to put practical support in place so that we give people choices. Domestic violence is dreadful, because it traps many women and victims generally in a situation in which they feel there is no hope and nobody there to help. There is nobody they can turn to, and they are isolated and alone.

We must ensure that we put in place in our community support networks that give people the chance to live the kind of life that almost all of us take for granted. We are making progress, but we have a long way to go. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has again raised the issue in the House and ensured that we all have it at the forefront of our minds when we develop policy in this extremely important area. I congratulate her again on raising it in the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 14 November 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Transport

1. **Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): What discussions he has had with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales on transport in Wales. [12466]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I meet the First Minister of the National Assembly regularly to discuss wide-ranging current issues affecting Wales, including transport. Transport generally is a matter for the National Assembly, although railways, air transport and ports remain, generally, the responsibility of central Government, working closely with the Assembly on matters affecting Wales. I am keen to continue dialogue with the Assembly and Cabinet colleagues to determine how best to meet the transport needs of Wales.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful for that reply. Does the Secretary of State agree with the director of the Confederation of British Industry of Wales, who said that we cannot continue to grow the economy at the speed that we would wish while 70 per cent. of the population is served by a two-lane motorway? What plans has the right hon. Gentleman to increase road capacity in Wales?

Mr. Murphy: As I said, the matter of roads is for the Assembly to consider. However, the hon. Gentleman knows that the last spending review was an extremely good one for Wales. It meant that much more money could be spent on roads in Wales, including the £25 million that was announced only last week for all the local authorities in Wales.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): When my right hon. Friend meets the First Minister, will he raise the serious overcrowding on the bus service between Llandogo and Monmouth? Sixty to 70 children a day have to travel on a scheduled bus service run by Stagecoach, which refuses to put on an extra service unless it is paid for by the county council, even though it already receives two subsidies for the service. Does he accept that the three-for-two rule allows unacceptable overcrowding for pupils under the age of 14?

Mr. Murphy: I am very much aware of my hon. Friend's campaign on the matter. I know that he raised it in an Adjournment debate in the House, and that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is raising it with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in Wales, Jane Davidson. I am sure that my hon. Friend knows that local education authorities are obliged to provide transport that is non-stressful, because if it were stressful, it could interfere with children's education.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Can the Secretary of State tell the House why Railtrack is not progressing with the essential improvements to the Cambrian line and Cambrian coast railways, even though, as his colleague in the National Assembly must have told him, the Assembly is allocating a substantial sum to those improvements? Why are people in Wales getting such a bad deal from the Government over railways?

Mr. Murphy: I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree that the people of Wales got a bad deal from the previous Government when they privatised the railways. The Cambrian line upgrade has not been scrapped. The investment has been provided by the Assembly and the Strategic Rail Authority. It is scheduled for the period 2002 to 2006. Because Railtrack is in administration, it cannot make a decision about when the work will be carried out, but the investment will be forthcoming.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): Does my right hon. Friend welcome the announcement by P&O that it will move its main Ireland ferry service from Liverpool to Mostyn docks and the part played by the National Assembly for Wales in that excellent move?

Mr. Murphy: I certainly welcome the fact that the National Assembly put some £17 million into Mostyn docks. I know that my hon. Friend is particularly interested in those improvements to the economy of north-east Wales. Developments at Mostyn docks over the past few months and in the future will make an enormous difference to the economy of his constituency and to north Wales in general.

Flooding

2. **Mr. Gregory Barker** (Bexhill and Battle): What discussions he has had with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on measures to assist people who live in flood-prone areas within Wales. [12467]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and those discussions cover floods and related matters. I have had recent discussions with colleagues on flood defence matters. I also represent Wales on the rural taskforce.

Mr. Barker: I thank the Minister for that answer. Is he aware that up to 120,000 homes along the Welsh coastline are still at risk from flooding if there is a repeat this winter

of last year's heavy rainfall? Furthermore, up to 50 per cent. of the families in those homes are unaware of that risk. Given that, will he admit that the paltry £14 million that has so far been made available to Welsh flood committees is totally inadequate? What plans has he to make further immediate provision?

Mr. Touhig: The unprecedented flooding last October was the worst for half a century or more. My colleague Ministers in the National Assembly provided £6.5 million to local authorities to help clear-up operations and to make damaged services secure again. An additional £15 million is being made available to local authorities to carry out major repairs and improvements over the next four years. Last autumn's flooding provided a severe test of the flood warning arrangements, but they proved to be robust, having just been upgraded. The system did very well in the circumstances. Most importantly, not a single life was lost, and we are all thankful for that. Some 10,000 homes throughout England and Wales were affected by flooding, but as a result of good flood defence measures, 300,000 homes were protected.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): Is my hon. Friend aware of the considerable work that is being done in my constituency to combat flooding? Flintshire county council in particular has made the issue a priority. However, does he agree that the need remains for greater co-operation between local authorities, water companies and the Environment Agency to deal with the matter effectively?

Mr. Touhig: It is essential that there is very close co-operation between the statutory and local authorities. I am aware that there have been problems in my hon. Friend's constituency, but I believe that the measures that are being implemented and the funding that is being provided will help to overcome them. If he is concerned about a specific problem, I ask him to write to me about it, and I shall take it up on his behalf.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Is the Minister aware of the despair, upset and sheer emotional distress that many home owners feel when their homes are flooded? Does he accept that his policy has so far been woefully inadequate? Is he aware that the Institution of Civil Engineers concluded last week that spending on flooding needed to be doubled and went on to describe Government policy in this area as piecemeal and short term? Ministers are fond of bleating about how advantageous our membership of the European Union is, so why will he not claim some of the money that is available from the European Union to member states for this purpose, thereby helping to alleviate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Touhig: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment to his Front-Bench position. It is not for me to comment on the length of his questions, but he has certainly shortened the winter. I do not accept the view that the Government have not done a great deal to overcome the problems that we faced last year. There is a short-term programme of repairs and renewals to ensure that we avoid the problems this year. There is also a long-term programme of initiatives, which includes the carrying out in England and Wales of a DEFRA-led flood defence review. My colleagues in the Assembly are taking part in that consultation and we expect to have the results by Christmas.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): May I remind the Minister that despite his assurances about the unusual floods that we had in October, the town of Ruthin has suffered severe floods twice since then? I witnessed them. Even the Welsh Local Government Association, which is friendly to him, says that £50 million of new money is required to put things right in Wales. So far, there has been £15 million, plus the £6 million. That is not even halfway, so will he please redouble his efforts and ensure that we protect these societies and the people in them?

Mr. Touhig: I note the hon. Gentleman's point. It is in all our interests to help communities such as Ruthin, which were blighted by the events of last October. I believe that the Assembly is working very progressively with local authorities. As I said, it has provided £15 million to fund schemes for the next four years. I think that that will make an important contribution. There is never enough money to do all the work because there is always a problem: when the crisis is staunched in one area, problems can arise in another. I believe that the discussions between my friends in the Assembly and local authorities mean that steps are being made in the right direction. We will do everything that we can to ensure that if there are difficulties this winter, we have the resources in place to overcome them.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): The Minister will know that many rivers have their sources in Powys, including the Usk, the Severn and the Wye. Is he aware that, a couple of years ago, the Secretary of State for Wales and I held a meeting with the Environment Agency to reduce water levels in the Clywedog dam and thus reduce the risk of overflow at peak times? That reduced flooding. Is he willing to facilitate further such meetings to extend that successful scheme to other reservoirs in the interests of reducing flooding both in Wales and in parts of England?

Mr. Touhig: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I would be most willing to use my services to facilitate such a meeting.

Dee Estuary

3. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the effects of devolution on the administration of the Dee estuary. [12468]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): As my hon. Friend and I discussed when we met recently to consider the Dee estuary, its administration raises interesting and unique cross-border management issues, which I shall raise with my ministerial colleagues.

Mr. Chapman: I thank my right hon. Friend for the steps that have been taken so far. Does he agree that, following devolution, cross-border, environmentally sensitive matters merit special consideration, which might

xtend to core funding for the estuary strategy and better o-operation between the environment and development gencies in England and Wales?

Mr. Murphy: I could not agree more. I have raised the natter with the First Minister and the Minister for the Environment in the Assembly. I agree that there should e good co-operation between the environment agencies nd, as my hon. Friend said, the development agencies. shall keep in touch with him, and I hope to visit the stuary soon.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's answer. Will he discuss vith the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food nd Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who is responsible for fisheries, he exploitation of mollusc beds in the Dee estuary by nlicensed people? That activity is to the great detriment f the Inland Revenue and is environmentally degrading n important stock.

Mr. Murphy: Yes, of course I shall do that. When I discussed the matter with my hon. Friend some weeks go, he mentioned the cockle beds in the Dee estuary. It s important for both environment agencies to tackle the problem. I assure him that I shall discuss the matter with ny hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Crime

4. **Mr. John Smith** (Vale of Glamorgan): If he will make a statement on the measures taken by the Government to tackle crime in Wales. [12470]

6. **Mr. Dai Havard** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): If he will make a statement on the measures taken by the Government to tackle crime in Wales. [12472]

7. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): If he will make a statement on the measures taken by the Government to tackle crime in Wales. [12473]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): The Government's partnership approach to fighting crime is making a significant difference in communities throughout Wales. With funding running into millions of pounds, local crime and disorder reduction partnerships are implementing projects targeted at crime hotspots, domestic violence and drug-related crime. Much of the funding is being channelled specifically into the most deprived communities and is going a long way towards building safer and more inclusive communities.

Mr. Smith: Does my right hon. Friend know that recorded crimes in the Vale of Glamorgan division of the South Wales police area have decreased from 15,000 a year in 1995 to 10,000 a year? That has transformed towns such as Barry, including the seaside resort of Barry Island, from being among the most crime-ridden communities to being among the safest in the country. Will he join me in paying tribute to Superintendent Colin Jones and his officers for that magnificent achievement?

Hon. Members: Answer

Mr. Touhig: Tough one that.

Burglaries in the Vale of Glamorgan police division have fallen by 31 per cent. in the past year. A similar reduction has occurred in the theft of motor vehicles, and there has been a reduction of 19 per cent. in thefts from vehicles. That is down to good policing and providing resources, to which the Government are committed. I congratulate Superintendent Colin Jones on the way in which he leads his force in the Vale of Glamorgan police division. I understand that the Prime Minister congratulated him in No. 10 Downing street.

Mr. Havard: Does my right hon. Friend know that the change to deprivation funding by the Youth Justice Board means a significant increase in the money available for its valuable and successful work in my constituency? The community intelligence-led approach to policing in Merthyr Tydfil and the safer Merthyr homes scheme have received United Kingdom recognition. The community warden scheme is being extended to other parts of the UK. What plans does he have to work with other Departments, the National Assembly for Wales and all relevant agencies to ensure sustained funding for the successful initiatives that have done so much to decrease crime rates and improve safety in my constituency?

Mr. Touhig: Since my appointment to this office in June, I have made three visits to my hon. Friend's constituency, and I have been impressed by the range of initiatives aimed at building stronger communities. I am aware of the well established neighbourhood and warden schemes in Pen-y-darren and Bedlinog, which offer good examples of what can be achieved with communities working together. I also welcome the award of £70,000 earlier this year under the crime reduction programme. I understand that the community warden scheme to which he referred has been extended into Dowlais ward, and significant progress has already been made in building a stronger and better community as a result.

Mr. David: I thank my hon. Friend for his response. Will he give the House more specific information about the measures that the police in Wales are likely to introduce to reduce antisocial behaviour?

Mr. Touhig: Like most hon. Members, I represent communities that have been blighted by problems of antisocial behaviour. My hon. Friend and I share the same borough and police division, and I can tell him that the Government have introduced a number of measures to address antisocial behaviour, including antisocial behaviour orders. Such orders, which seek to curb the activities of individuals who make the lives of others a misery, start as civilian orders but can become criminal orders if their conditions are breached. Two hundred such orders have been approved in England and Wales.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs recently took part in a seminar in Cardiff promoting the use of antisocial behaviour orders, and I hope that, as a result of that, more police authorities will take up their use.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I hope that you will excuse me, Mr. Speaker, if I inject an air of realism into these questions on law and order.

What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Home Secretary to prioritise violent crime as an issue that needs urgent action? The number of crimes of violence against the person in Wales in 1997 was 17,386; the figure today is 38,230. The total figure for violent crime in 1997 was 20,071; today it is 40,880. When are we going to have some urgent action to tackle violent crime in Wales?

Mr. Touhig: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the Government have launched an action plan to combat violent crime. Indeed, detection rates for violent crime in the South Wales police area stand at 86 per cent. Violent crime figures in that area have risen slightly, but not by anything like the national average. Most violent offences are committed in public areas—for example, brawls outside pubs and clubs—and initiatives have been put in place to combat them. I am pleased with the initiatives taken by the South Wales police to tackle violent crime, which have significantly increased detection rates.

Mr. Evans: I am glad that the Minister is satisfied, but I suspect that the people of Wales are not. He knows that violent crime has gone up, while the number of special constables who assist the regular constabulary has gone down. In 1997, there were 1,142 specials in Wales; today, there are 811. Will he undertake to have urgent talks with the Home Secretary about increasing the number of specials in Wales? Will he also give his full support to the police in Wales? Last year, 715 police were injured in assaults in the line of duty in Wales. Will he give his full backing to the campaign to ensure that, next year, the police get the Queen's golden jubilee medal, which they so richly deserve?

Mr. Touhig: I shall take the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question first. I am sure my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will have taken note of his point but, if not, I shall draw it to his attention.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Touhig: Indeed, my right hon. Friend has.

I take the hon. Gentleman's point about specials, but he ignores the fact that, in the last year, the number of police officers on the beat in Wales has increased by 241. Indeed, there will be a further increase of 259 police officers on the beat in Wales in the coming year. That contrasts sharply with the reduction in the number of officers on the beat when his party was in government.

Security

5. **Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn): What recent discussions he has had with the appropriate Government Ministers and Departments relating to increased security measures at ports, RAF bases and nuclear installations in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [12471]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I am in regular contact with Cabinet colleagues through the civil contingencies committee, of which the First Minister and I are both members.

The Government have taken all prudent measures to protect infrastructure installations including those to which my hon. Friend refers.

Albert Owen: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. He will be aware of the concerns of my constituents in Ynys Môn, an area with a major ferry port, an RAF training base and a nuclear power station. He will further be aware of the cost implications of additional security measures for the two companies in the port. Has he raised with the Cabinet the possibility of grant aid? If so, what was the response?

Mr. Murphy: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns, but I assure him that the Government are doing all in their power to safeguard the people of Anglesey. I understand that Stena has raised the matter with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which is considering the request, but I cannot prejudge the decision to be taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

In respect of Wylfa, our civil nuclear sites apply stringent security measures, regulated by the Office of Civil Nuclear Security, and work with the Health and Safety Executive. Both bodies have reviewed their precautions in the light of 11 September and are making recommendations to the Government. Clearly, it would be wrong for me to go into further detail, including the details to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Given that many of the military personnel who may soon see active service in Afghanistan were trained in my constituency on the Brecon Beacons and the Epynt training range, will the Secretary of State ensure that the Secretary of State for Defence enhances security at the military bases at Brecon and Sennybridge to safeguard the security of the soldiers and communities that live and work in that area?

Mr. Murphy: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point and shall pass it on to the Secretary of State for Defence. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that I cannot comment on individual security details.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): While I accept the need to increase security at nuclear installations, does the Secretary of State accept that that is only a short-term measure and that the real answer is to bring an end to our nuclear role, thereby removing the risk of terrorist attack on such targets?

Mr. Murphy: I note what my hon. Friend has said.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Following the recent terrorist outrages, will the Secretary of State ask the performance and innovation unit's energy review group to extend its remit to report on the security of nuclear power stations?

Mr. Murphy: We take all those points into account but, as I have said, at these difficult times it would not be

right for me to go into detail on the recommendations that have been made to the Department of Trade and Industry. The House will have heard the hon. Gentleman and taken his remarks into account.

Miners' Compensation

9. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry concerning the progress of settlements of claims in the miners' compensation scheme in north-east Wales. [12475]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy recently attended the Welsh coal health claims monitoring group to discuss the operation of the scheme in Wales, following which he and I then met volunteer workers with the National Union of Mineworkers. My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales established the Welsh monitoring group specifically to address coal health issues in Wales. I am convinced that the measures discussed, and the actions taken so far by the monitoring group will further speed the process of paying out claims to miners and their widows.

Ian Lucas: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. While I recognise that this is the largest legal claim in British history and appreciate my hon. Friend's commitment to the issue, does he accept that practical difficulties remain? They include the case of my constituent, Mr. Thomas Evans, who has been waiting two years for a spirometry test. Will my hon. Friend assure me that he will do everything in his power to ensure that the Wrexham assessment centre operates at full capacity in future?

Mr. Touhig: I am aware of the case to which my hon. Friend referred. Mr. Evans had a spirometry test in October 1999; in December 2000, the test was declared invalid and he was given the option of being re-tested. He declined the offer and, as a result, went on to apply for the full second-phase test, the MAP test. I am given to understand by IRISC, the Government's claim handlers, that it wrote to Mr. Evans's solicitors in July asking for a claims pack to be completed and is still awaiting its return. I shall do anything I can to help my hon. Friend speed up that claim. The monitoring group is fully aware of the problems that have been causing difficulties with the operation of the Wrexham testing centre, but we are satisfied that everything is being done to provide the necessary respiratory consultants to carry out all the tests required. If he wishes, I shall look into the case further. I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy will also reply to him directly.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): We have already heard how bad the situation is in north-east Wales. However, according to the Government's own figures, only 3 per cent. of claims in Carmarthenshire have been fully and finally settled. After all the representations that the Secretary of State has had on the issue from Welsh Members, why does Wales still have the slowest processing rate for full and final claims?

Mr. Touhig: May I, in the friendliest possible way, warn the hon. Gentleman to be wary of statistics? There are various reasons for the comparative figures that he gave on full and final settlements in Wales and the United Kingdom. Although it is true that 7 per cent. of claims in Wales have been settled fully and finally, there are reasons for the delays. There can, for example, be delays because of the number of claimants and the difficulty in collecting evidence and the work records of older claimants—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman would like to listen I shall give him an answer. There have, of course, also been difficulties in collecting hospital records.

In the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and in the two postcode areas to which he referred in his interview in this morning's newspapers, 1,620 claimants have submitted claims and have received £2 million in interim and in full and final settlements. Additionally, a further 613 claimants have made claims under the vibration white finger scheme and have received £1 million. Therefore, about 30 per cent. of all claimants in his parliamentary constituency have received funding—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The reply is too long.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [12496] **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 14 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I attended a seminar on primary care trusts and the national health service. I also spoke to President Bush and Chancellor Schröder on the current international crisis. Later today, in addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further meetings with ministerial colleagues.

Mr. Turner: Given that, on 4 July, the Prime Minister promised concessionary travel for pensioners on long-distance coach services, does he sympathise with pensioners on the Isle of Wight who have to cross the most expensive stretch of water in the country to board those coach services? Will he provide similar concessions on ferries?

The Prime Minister: That is a good constituency question. I am afraid that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman that commitment, but I hope that he will join me in supporting concessionary bus fares for pensioners. Such a scheme was rejected for many years under the previous, Conservative Government, but it has been delivered under the current one.

Dr. Hywel Francis (Aberavon): The House will know of the terrible explosion that occurred last Thursday in the No. 5 blast furnace in Port Talbot in my constituency. I am sure that the Prime Minister will wish to join me and the whole House in sending our deepest condolences to the families of the three men who died and to the families of the 13 men who were injured and remain in Morriston hospital. May I also invite the Prime Minister to join me

in thanking the emergency services for the tremendous work that they did, and particularly the burns unit in Morriston hospital for the continuing work that it is doing for the injured? Finally, may I also ask him to join me in urging the press and all parties concerned to respect the privacy of the families and the work force in their hour of need and to allow the various inquiries to continue their vital work?

The Prime Minister: First, I know that my hon. Friend has spoken for the whole House in extending the sympathies of both sides of the House to the families of the victims of this terrible tragedy. I certainly join him in congratulating the emergency services on the work that they have done. I know that the Health and Safety Executive is investigating the incident, and it is too early to speculate on the exact causes. I am sure that that investigation should be allowed to continue, and I hope very much that those parts of the media that are reporting on the issue will have heard my hon. Friend's comments.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I associate the Opposition with the Prime Minister's condolences expressed to the constituents of the hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) who suffered in that tragic accident?

In the light of today's increases in unemployment, will the Prime Minister confirm that the International Labour Organisation's figures show that the number of manufacturing jobs in this country has fallen to the lowest level since its records began?

The Prime Minister: Of course the fall in employment, the rise in unemployment, is deeply regrettable, but, as I think the right hon. Gentleman will know, these are economic circumstances that are affecting the entire world at present. There have been rises in unemployment in virtually every one of the major western European and American countries. I think most people accept that as a result of low inflation, low interest rates, strong public finances and a huge reduction in unemployment over the past few years, Britain is probably as well placed as any major economy to weather the storms that we are experiencing.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Everyone would accept the existence of difficulties arising from 11 September, but should not the Prime Minister recognise that these latest figures show a fall in manufacturing employment of more than 120,000 in the year to September—before the events of 11 September? Even his own Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said:

"before 11th September, thousands of manufacturing workers were losing their jobs."

She went on to say:

"There is real pain in our manufacturing industry."

She was right, but British business does not need a Government who feel its pain; it needs a Government who recognise that red tape and stealth taxes are stopping British people from keeping their jobs.

The Prime Minister: Of course it is true that manufacturing industry has been through very difficult times, and indeed was going through difficult times before 11 September. That is happening in many parts of the world at present, for obvious reasons—not just those associated with 11 September, but because of events before then, when growth rates were predicted to fall in most of the European economies and, indeed, the American economy. Manufacturing also had a very tough time because of the weakness of the euro and the strength of the pound.

I totally disagree with the right hon. Gentleman's claim that this is to do with issues involving tax or regulation. In fact, what has happened in this country is that, since this Government came to power, we have the lowest interest rates we have had for 40 years, the lowest inflation in Europe, and the highest employment of any major European country. If we are talking about the pain of manufacturing, I think that what most parts of manufacturing remember are the early 1990s, when we lost more than a million jobs, output fell by 7 per cent. and interest rates were at 15 per cent.

Mr. Duncan Smith: But this Government have imposed more than £10 billion in extra costs on British business. That is why the director general of the Confederation of British Industry said last week:

"You are a regulatory government . . . You are a Government that last year brought in 3,800 regulations in 365 days".

Is it not time for the Prime Minister to admit that this Government are damaging British business, and to instruct his Chancellor to give business a break?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman is a little unwise to quote the CBI director general. He did not quote all that the director general said last week. The director general also said that the United Kingdom had

"low interest rates, low inflation, low unemployment—the most successful economy in Western Europe."

As for the bits of regulation that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, the figure of more than 3,000 relates to statutory instruments. It is true that there have been more than 3,000 statutory instruments; there were during the last years of the last Government. That is because 60 per cent. are to do with local matters, and nothing to do with regulation. *[Interruption.]* No, they have absolutely nothing to do with it.

As for the right hon. Gentleman's £10 billion figure, I will itemise how it is broken down by some parts of business. The vast majority relates to the minimum wage. *[Interruption.]* We are in favour of it, and I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was. The vast majority of the rest is to do with the working time directive, which, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, was agreed by the last Government and implemented by us.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the quest for a sustainable future for Afghanistan, the role of the United Nations will become increasingly important in securing both international and internal acceptance for a future Administration? Will he give every co-operation that he can to ensure that the UN can indeed find a stable future for that country?

The Prime Minister: I can assure my right hon. Friend that we will do everything that we can to support the United Nations in its work. As he rightly says, we require

a broad-based regime in Afghanistan, and the people to lead the process are undoubtedly the United Nations. We have to demonstrate to the people of Afghanistan that the whole of the world community stands behind a broad-based Government and reconstruction in Afghanistan over a period of time. We remain totally committed to both those objectives.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I share the Prime Minister's desire to fight terrorism in Britain, but does he agree that we should not do so by unduly undermining our existing human and democratic rights here? In that context, will he reconsider the proposed part of the new anti-terrorism legislation that would remove the right to judicial review for special immigration appeal cases? Would not that removal run the risk of sending quite the wrong signal?

The Prime Minister: No, I am afraid that I cannot agree with the right hon. Gentleman, for this reason: it is important that we have the power to detain suspected terrorists whom we cannot deport to another country, for reasons connected with the current state of the law, as he knows. If we do not have that power, there is a severe gap in the legislation. We take this power reluctantly and after careful consideration, but in the present circumstances I do not believe that it would be responsible, for the protection of citizens here, not to have it, although it will be exercised, of course, in a very small number of cases.

Mr. Kennedy: Will the Prime Minister therefore acknowledge that, with our having so recently incorporated the European convention, that reluctance must extend to the Government's feeling that, because of events, we have to opt out of one of its provisions? Can he at least give the House a guarantee that, at the first practicable moment, he will restore article 5, because it would be perverse in the extreme for us to remove civil rights in our own country at the very moment when we are, quite properly, campaigning for them on the international stage?

The Prime Minister: We are not opting out of the European convention. We have the power within the convention, in certain specific circumstances, to ensure that we can exercise particular powers. We have taken those powers to ourselves for this reason: we were in a situation in which suspected terrorists were coming into this country and we were unable to deport them to another country because, for example, that country might have executed them. So, we had a gap in the power and those people were allowed to stay and could not be detained, and they are a threat to our national security. There are not many of them, but they are a threat.

It is very important in these circumstances, particularly when we know that the threat posed by the terrorist network still exists, that we have the powers that we need. However, there are two very important safeguards. First, when we detain, the case is taken to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission. People can present their case there, but we can also present our confidential security evidence. There are also appeals on points of law in respect of the commission's decisions. Secondly, we have made it clear—and we will abide by this—that the legislation must be reviewed and renewed annually. That is what we will do. Those are proper safeguards.

The provisions will apply only in a small number of cases, but I can only imagine the position in the House if we failed to take the powers and ended up with people whom we knew to be suspected terrorists being at liberty in this country to cause difficulty either here or abroad.

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the millions of people in Afghanistan who were facing the prospect of starvation this winter will now be secure in the knowledge that aid and food will be given to them, so they can face the winter with peace and security, knowing that their children will not starve to death?

The Prime Minister: We are now able, as I will explain, to get substantially more food and aid into Afghanistan and, most important of all, ensure that it is directed at the people who really need it. We will give every support and help to that programme. That is far easier to do now that the Taliban regime is collapsing.

Q2. [12497] **Sir Robert Smith** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Last year, 547 sub-post offices closed, but anyone thinking of investing in re-opening one of them would be completely unclear about how the universal bank and the card account will affect that business. Will the Prime Minister therefore ensure that his Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Trade and Industry get together to end that uncertainty, otherwise, his promise that pensions can be collected from a sub-post office will be a hollow one?

The Prime Minister: They still can be, at present, and we need to ensure that the new arrangements are in place by the time the new system comes in. We will ensure that that is done. Of course, we must ensure that the details of the universal bank—exactly how it will work—are properly worked out in practice. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree.

Q3. [12498] **Dr. Richard Taylor** (Wyre Forest): As one of the 39 old-age pensioners in the House, I declare an interest in my question. Does the Prime Minister agree with the 2,000 pensioners who visited Westminster on 6 November that it is morally indefensible to ask elderly patients, who have carefully saved for years, to pay for parts of their health care that will be free in Scotland soon?

The Prime Minister: As a result of the changes that we have introduced, pensioners will not have to pay for nursing care that they used to have to pay for. The question is whether we should go further and spend what amounts to £1 billion on personal care. *[Interruption.]* When we talk about spending money, the Liberal Democrats say yes before even doing the sums or before it is stated what the money is to be spent on. The fact is we do not believe that that is the best use of money.

In respect of different parts of health care, including the amount that will be spent on the hon. Gentleman's constituency, we have to choose priorities. Our belief is that we are making changes in paying for nursing care, but the £1 billion is spent in better ways in other parts of our national health service, and every penny we spend always has to be paid for.

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): Is the Prime Minister aware of the carpet of lilies campaign currently being run by the Haemophilia Society on behalf of those haemophiliacs who have been infected with hepatitis C or AIDS as a result of contaminated blood products? Can he give an assurance that the Government will consider the society's requests for action and, in particular, the availability of the blood treatment product, recombinant, throughout the UK, and not just in Wales and Scotland?

The Prime Minister: We are prepared to look at the blood treatment product and how we can help people in that situation. What I cannot offer my hon. Friend is support for the entire range of demands made by that campaign. We sympathise with it and we understand the problems that people face, but she will know that successive Governments have made it clear that there is a limit to the amount of compensation that we can pay.

Q4. [12499] **Matthew Green** (Ludlow): Is the Prime Minister aware that there is strong public support for a West Mercia health authority, linking Shropshire with Herefordshire and Worcestershire? The Government, however, are consulting on four options. The first three options link Staffordshire with Shropshire and, surprisingly, option No. 4 links Staffordshire with Shropshire. Is that the Prime Minister's preferred method of consultation?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the options were put forward after consulting many people about them, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will have heard the representations that he has just made.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): On Sunday in my constituency, a moving speech was made by the Rev. Shirley Bench, a Methodist minister from California, at the Kilsyth war memorial. Will the Prime Minister accept her thanks and those of millions of Americans for his support in the successful campaign and will he give the House details of how we will assist in delivering aid to Afghanistan to restore Afghan society as quickly as possible?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, in my statement later I will provide details of the humanitarian help that we will give, but the strength and solidarity that many people in this country have shown with the United States of America has not just been of enormous comfort to people in America, but has shown the strength of the bilateral relations between our two countries. I am sure that what happened in my hon. Friend's constituency was replicated in many constituencies up and down the country.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the Prime Minister tell us whether the number of patients waiting more than 12 months for in-patient treatment has fallen or risen since he has been Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: Overall, in-patient lists have gone down by around 100,000. It is true that there are certain categories where waiting times have risen, but overall they are down by over 100,000.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister did not answer the question, which is no great surprise, and gave us anything but the facts. My question was: has the number of patients from his lists of those waiting more than 12 months fallen or risen?

The Prime Minister: I said it is correct that the numbers of patients in certain categories of waiting have risen, but overall the numbers of people waiting have fallen. Since our first year in government, when in-patient and out-patient lists went up as we were still abiding by the same financing regime as the previous Government, in-patient and out-patient lists have fallen.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister did not want to answer that question because the reality is that the number waiting a year has not just risen, but risen by more than 13,000. Even that does not tell the whole story, however. If we look around the country, we see that in Leeds there has been a fivefold increase, in Birmingham a 17-fold increase and in west Devon a 68-fold increase in the numbers waiting. The British Medical Association has already said that the Government will fail on the waiting lists initiative, and today even one of his Ministers said:

"I think Labour are going to fail on health".

Is not the reason why they will fail simply that, as ever, he and his colleagues put dogma before the needs of patients?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman cited various constituencies and I am surprised that he did not mention his own, but I will do that. In-patient waiting lists are down by almost 4,000 in his health authority area. The right hon. Gentleman was correct in what he said about people waiting more than 12 months, but overall the numbers of people waiting for in-patient treatment have fallen by more than 100,000 and that meets our manifesto commitment. The only reason for that fall and for the fact that there are half a million more operations taking place in the health service today, the new hospital-building programme and the additional nurses and doctors is the extra spending that the Government are putting into the health service. What is the position of the Conservative party in relation to this extra spending? It opposes it. Yes, it is true that the BMA may criticise us over the health service, but the one group of people—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There must be no shouting.

The Prime Minister: The BMA certainly can criticise us, but the one group of people who cannot is the Conservative party. The Conservatives are opposed to the very investment that can make the health service better.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Should not there now be an end to the bombing in Afghanistan, as many of the military objectives must have been achieved? The areas that are still dominated by the Taliban include many anti-Taliban forces and it must not

be easy to distinguish between the two operations. We are also approaching Ramadan and it would be of great benefit to the Islamic world to have a pause at this time.

The Prime Minister: I can honestly tell my hon. Friend that the trouble with the point he is making is that its credibility would have been improved had he not been saying the same thing a week ago. Had we not carried on with the campaign to make sure that we targeted the front-line Taliban troops, we would not be in the position that we are in today where we can improve the humanitarian situation and set about the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It is important that we carry on until our objectives are delivered, but of course as the situation changes, we change the military package. That is precisely what we should do, but had we stopped when my hon. Friend first asked me to stop, we would not be in the position that we are in today, which is an important one to be in.

Q5. [12500] **Mr. Adrian Sanders** (Torbay): Will the Prime Minister congratulate his constituent Brian Hunter, who was one of this morning's winners of the Lilly outstanding achievement awards for diabetes? Today is world diabetes day, so will the right hon. Gentleman explain why the national health service framework for diabetes is not now going ahead as planned in 2002?

The Prime Minister: I certainly join in the congratulations to my constituent, and I am delighted that he has received that award. Because of certain points put to the Government in representations from doctors and others, we are still in conversation with them about what is the best type of framework. The hon. Gentleman will know that we now have national health service frameworks operating across a range of different areas of disease. Those frameworks are very good and people welcome them, but they impose an additional work load on doctors. We are in discussion and consultation with GPs about the best way to proceed with the framework for diabetes. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would want us to do that in such a way that the framework gains the support of the medical profession, whose members, after all, are the people who have to implement it.

Q6. [12501] **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): Now that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues are sorting out Railtrack—*[Interruption.]* May I ask that the Government now turn their attention to such operating companies as Virgin, which provides a deplorable service between London and north Wales? The service is getting worse week by week because of poor management and worn-out trains.

The Prime Minister: Of course, that is precisely why it is important that we make the necessary changes in the structure of Railtrack. We must also make sure that any additional money we put into the railways gets to the front-line provision of better railways, in my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere.

Conservative Members shouted out a moment or two ago, but their transport spokeswoman was asked what a Conservative Government would do, and whether they would agree to put in the extra money that Railtrack wanted. She said:

"it's difficult at the moment to actually know exactly what it is that Railtrack was asking for".

It is not difficult at all. Railtrack was asking for at least £1.7 billion extra. In effect, it was asking for a blank cheque from the Government. The difference between the Government and the Conservatives is that we believe that that money should go to the better provision of railways, and they believe that it should go in a subsidy to shareholders.

Q7. [12502] **Mr. Andrew MacKay** (Bracknell): In light of the unfortunate and confused statements by the Minister for Europe, will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to reaffirm the 1969 pledge that the constitutional status of Gibraltar will not be altered without the consent of the people who live there?

The Prime Minister: The Government have reaffirmed that pledge, and so has my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman is wrong to imply otherwise. Indeed, I reaffirmed it at the press conference held with Prime Minister Aznar on Friday. However, it is important that the Brussels process should go forward. There are genuine political and practical problems that we should discuss with Spain. We hope very much that the Chief Minister of Gibraltar will participate. I think that it is in the interests of the people of Gibraltar that he does. That process should go forward because it is right for the interests of this country and of the people of Gibraltar.

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Afghanistan has the second-highest rate of maternal mortality in the world? More that 50 Afghani women die every day from complications in pregnancy and childbirth, and one in four Afghani children die before they reach their fifth birthday. Now, only 5 per cent. of Afghani women can read and write. The Taliban did not allow women doctors, lawyers and teachers to work or girls to attend school. Will my right hon. Friend give the House an assurance that he will do everything that he can to ensure that Afghani women are represented at every level in discussions on the social, economic and political reconstruction of their country?

The Prime Minister: The point that my hon. Friend makes is quite right. Of course the women of Afghanistan should be involved in the discussions that will take place. I do not think that there is any group of people in Afghanistan with more to celebrate at the departure of the Taliban regime than Afghan women, who have been subject to brutal oppression over a long period of time. That is one reason among many others why it is good that the Taliban regime's days are numbered.

Q8. [12503] **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh): Following on from his very unconvincing answer a few minutes ago, can the Prime Minister explain why waiting times in accident and emergency units are longer than they were four years ago?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that at all. Money is going in to accident and emergency departments—

indeed, virtually every accident and emergency department in the country has received special dedicated funds. That extra money is making a difference. Of course, it is Conservative policy to oppose the extra investment. They have learned absolutely nothing from the last Parliament, when they called continually for tax cuts on the one hand and extra investment on the other. At some point, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will have to choose.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Prime Minister rehearse for a few more moments what he had to say on unemployment at the beginning of these exchanges? Is he aware that there would be more jobs knocking about if some of these Tories who have 400 jobs between them, moonlighting, spread them around? Is it not significant that the very day that the Leader of the Opposition opens his trap on this issue, it is the very week that the last Leader of the Opposition has just taken two more jobs?

The Prime Minister: Not for the first time, I think what a loss my hon. Friend is to the Dispatch Box.

International Coalition Against Terrorism

3.32 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on events in Afghanistan.

It is now clear that the Taliban regime is in a state of collapse across Afghanistan. Carefully targeted coalition bombing of its front lines opened the way for the Northern Alliance to advance. The fall of Mazar-i-Sharif on 9 November was the key to the north. It accelerated defections from the Taliban, and allowed General Dostam and Mohammed Atta of the Northern Alliance to cut the lines of communication of the remaining Taliban and al-Qaeda troops in the north-east.

One after another, Taliban positions folded: Taloqan, Baghlan, Bamiyan. The major city in the west, Herat, fell without a fight, to Ismail Khan. Now we see that the strategy that we have pursued is equally successful in the Pushtun south of the country.

Kabul fell without serious resistance on Monday night. Key cities in the Pushtun south have followed Kabul swiftly, including Jalalabad. It is clear that support for the Taliban is evaporating. Although there may be pockets of resistance, the idea that this has been some kind of tactical retreat is just the latest Taliban lie. They are in total collapse.

There are reports today that senior Taliban figures in Gardez—including Borders Minister Haqqani and intelligence Chief Ahmadullah—have surrendered. Kandahar airport has reportedly been taken by anti-Taliban forces. I have to say that regrettable incidents have happened as the liberated people have turned on their oppressors, and they should not happen. I appeal to the Northern Alliance and all other forces in Afghanistan to be restrained, to avoid acts of revenge and to engage with the United Nations.

I believe that the whole House and country should welcome the progress that has been made. Although conflict is never easy or pleasant, to see women and children smiling after years under one of the most brutal and oppressive regimes in the world is finally to understand the true meaning of the word "liberation".

I would like to pay tribute to the outstanding leadership that President Bush has given, and give heartfelt thanks to the British forces involved, now and in the future. There is no greater comfort to the British people than to know that we can call on some of the best armed forces in the world. Their work and their contribution to Britain's strength and international standing is immense.

I also pay tribute to European solidarity, to the countries of the European Union that have stood firm throughout this crisis and to our other coalition partners. However, there remain huge challenges—the military job is not yet done; Osama bin Laden is still at large, and so are his close associates; the diplomatic and political situation remains difficult; and the threat of an humanitarian crisis remains. The United Kingdom will continue to play a full role in the military, diplomatic and humanitarian aspects of this campaign, the objectives of which remain as set out in the document published in the House Library on 16 October.

So far, our forces have been involved in the air strikes using Tomahawk missiles and have provided support to US bombers. On the ground, our forces have been involved in liaising and working with the Northern Alliance, advising them and helping to co-ordinate action.

I can confirm to the House that several thousand of our troops are being put on 48-hour notice to move in case they are required in the area. Those include elements from 3 Commando and 16 Air Assault Brigades, including 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment and 45 Commando Royal Marines, as well as a range of supporting assets including RAF air transport, support helicopters, engineers, logistics teams and explosive ordnance experts.

For obvious reasons, I cannot give the House full details of how those troops may be used. Consultations with the United States and our other coalition partners continue. The main purpose of the troops would be in the context of multinational efforts to make safe the humanitarian supply routes that are now opening up as a result of military progress on the ground. Others may be focused on securing airfields and clearing unexploded ordnance, and on ensuring the safe return of the United Nations and non-governmental organisations to Afghanistan, thereby permitting the construction of the broad-based Government that is so badly needed.

The troops will remain in place for only a strictly limited period, while an international force to work alongside Afghan military commanders is prepared. We cannot, of course, rule out some of our troops being used in offensive front-line operations—40 Commando Royal Marines remain at a high state of readiness for contingency operations.

On the humanitarian front, an average of more than 2,000 tonnes of food a day has been dispatched since 4 November. That is four times the rate at the start of October, when it was about 500 tonnes a day. The World Food Programme is optimistic about reaching its targets: it has dispatched more than 50,000 tonnes of food to Afghanistan since the beginning of October—sufficient for 5 million people for one month. We look forward, however, to the opening of a corridor from the liberated areas to the borders with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In particular, the Friendship Bridge between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan will be made safe for the passage of those supplies.

The UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross should now be able to improve delivery of food, health care and other assistance to 2 million vulnerable people in the northern region of Afghanistan. Plans are now being made for the international staff of the UN, the Red Cross and NGOs to return to Afghanistan. In addition, we will be able to accelerate deliveries to areas in central Afghanistan, which will become harder to access as winter sets in, so that sufficient stockpiles can be built up closer to the people who need them. That will further reduce the suffering of the Afghan people and, I hope, show the rest of Afghanistan that life for the entire nation will be better once the Taliban regime has gone.

The advance of the anti-Taliban forces has been assisted by defections from disillusioned Taliban supporters. It is time for the rest of Afghanistan—particularly the ethnic groups in the south—to join the uprising against the Taliban and throw off their oppressive rule. The sooner they act, the greater the benefit for all the people in Afghanistan.

[The Prime Minister]

The structure of post-Taliban Afghanistan will be for the Afghan people to determine. However, we will provide strong diplomatic and economic support to the aspirations of Afghan parties committed to an inclusive, democratic political structure, committed to the welfare of all Afghan men, women and children, and committed to providing substantial local autonomy.

I spoke to Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, yesterday, and he outlined to me the process that will now be followed. The first step will be an early UN-convened meeting of representatives of the various Afghan anti-Taliban groups—including Pushtuns—under the UN special representative, Mr. Brahimi. This would lead to a transitional Administration. To support that process under Mr. Brahimi, the UN Security Council will be adopting a resolution to underpin the principles on which Mr. Brahimi is working.

The immediate next step is for the UN to establish a presence in Kabul. I am delighted that Mr. Vendrell, UN deputy special representative for Afghanistan, and Mike Sackett, UN humanitarian co-ordinator, plan to travel there on Friday. We plan to have a UK diplomatic presence in Kabul by the weekend. I have also spoken today to President Bush and to Chancellor Schröder. The coalition is as strong today as it has ever been.

In respect of the very basis of this action, we must never forget why we are engaged in it—it is because on 11 September al-Qaeda perpetrated the worst terrorist outrage in history. It is to bring it to justice and to eliminate it as a threat to world affairs that we have been and are acting as we are.

Today, I have put in the Library an updated version of the evidence document first published on 4 October. The new document will be translated into Arabic, Urdu and other languages. The intelligence material now leaves no doubt whatever of the guilt of Osama bin Laden and his associates. On 4 October, we knew that three of the hijackers were linked to the al-Qaeda terrorist network; now we know that the majority were. Indeed, the utterances from the al-Qaeda network and from bin Laden's own mouth leave no doubt: far from hiding their guilt, they gloat about it. On 9 October, one of bin Laden's spokesmen praised the 11 September atrocities as "a good deed", which

"transferred the battle into the US heartland".

He warned that

"the storm of plane attacks will not abate".

On 20 October, bin Laden said in an unbroadcast video tape:

"If avenging the killing of our people is terrorism, let history be a witness that we are terrorists."

They are terrorists, and history will judge them as such.

Before the history books are written, however, we will continue to hunt them down, and we will continue to do so for as long as it takes to bring them to the justice they deserve. They are guilty and they will face justice, and today, thankfully, they have far fewer places to hide and far fewer people who wish to protect them.

As we have made clear from the outset, the campaign against terrorism is much more than a military campaign—it is diplomatic, humanitarian, economic and legal. It has meant changing our laws to protect ourselves at home, and working with others to protect ourselves abroad.

Above all, at this moment, I say to the people of Afghanistan: "As we hunt down those terrorists who committed murder and as we hunt down those who are hiding in your country, they and not you are our enemy. This time, we will not walk away. Your future is in your hands, but our hands are there in friendship to help you to shape that future."

The people of Afghanistan have suffered grievously from a brutal regime, from conflict, from famine and from drought. We want to see a country with a Government representing all the people of Afghanistan, occupying a proud place in the community of nations, growing economically, enriching its people and liberating their potential. Frankly, a country that has suffered so much deserves no less than a fresh start.

Let us be clear—the way that the world embraces and supports the new Afghanistan will be the clearest possible indication that the dreadful events of 11 September have resulted in a triumph for the international community acting together as a force for good, and in the defeat of the evil that is international terrorism. I think that we all know now that a safer world is built, ultimately, out of secure countries representing all their people living in peace with their neighbours. That is how terrorism will eventually be defeated, and that, step by step, must be the new international order that emerges from the worst terrorist outrage in our history.

Whatever the challenges and whatever the setbacks along the way, I believe that is a vision and a world worth fighting for.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): We are grateful to the Prime Minister for responding to our and other requests for a statement this afternoon. May I start by saying that I join the Prime Minister in his warm and quite correct tribute to President Bush for the way that he has led and shaped the coalition?

Clearly, what has happened in Afghanistan during the past few days—as the Prime Minister has made absolutely plain—is a complete vindication of the strategy that has been pursued by the coalition, led to a great degree by the Prime Minister and his Government during the past four weeks. Had we heeded the calls of those who, for whatever reason, demanded a pause in the bombing, we would not have achieved the successes that have been achieved so far; nor would we be any closer to a situation in which effective humanitarian aid can be brought through. That is clear.

I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to the general role of the coalition forces, including, as it appears, our own armed forces. The Opposition support the decision to place British troops on stand-by, ready to be deployed, if necessary, in Afghanistan. If the need arises for them to be deployed in areas such as Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif, we will continue to support the Government in that decision.

I also associate myself totally with what the Prime Minister has said about our armed forces being the best in the world. We are in no doubt that whatever they may be called upon to do, they will do it with their customary professionalism, bravery and effectiveness, and the thoughts of all hon. Members must surely be with them and, moreover, their families, who wait with expectation for what may come.

We welcome the fact that the UN is now able to establish a presence in Kabul, as the Prime Minister said. However, there have been some mixed messages from the UN in recent days about its role or how it saw its role. Does the Prime Minister now feel confident that the UN is clear about its objectives and its role, as that could affect any deployment of our armed forces and the length of time that they may have to spend in Afghanistan?

We have now achieved our first objective—the removal of the Taliban Government from Kabul—yet we cannot afford to be complacent, as the Prime Minister said. The Taliban remain undefeated and dangerous in other parts of Afghanistan. Does the Prime Minister agree that, even as we enter the month of Ramadan, any let up in the coalition forces' campaign would be disastrous? Will he confirm that, beyond defeating the Taliban, our objectives still remain as they were—to bring bin Laden to justice, to dismantle the al-Qaeda terrorist network, to deliver effective aid and to wage war on international terrorism wherever it rears its head?

Having come so far, the last thing that we now need is for a power vacuum to be created in Afghanistan, into which people or groups could begin to take the law into their own hands. As the Prime Minister said, and as I know he is aware, the Northern Alliance is, in essence, an alliance perhaps in name only, and it cannot necessarily fill that vacuum. There is now an urgent need for the formation of a new broadly based Administration who can command widespread support in Afghanistan and who are committed to handing over bin Laden and to dismantling al-Qaeda, as the Prime Minister said.

The Prime Minister is also right, in case there is any doubt, to restate bin Laden's guilt by even adding to the charges that there were already. I must say that I have always been surprised by those who have said that they needed more evidence of his guilt than that already available. He was guilty as charged when we last discussed this issue; whatever else comes simply makes his guilt even more obvious.

The other immediate priority is to deliver aid to those in the refugee camps and others who have been displaced from their homes around the borders. As the key supply routes are opened up, and with the Taliban no longer in control, we have a very narrow window of opportunity to do that before the winter sets in. I hope that the Prime Minister will state, a little more clearly perhaps, some of the aspects of that aid in which we shall engage. We welcome what he has said about humanitarian aid in general. Does he agree that the point has been made that delivering aid was always dependent on defeating the Taliban, without which it would have been nearly impossible?

At the outset, the President of the United States described this as a war against international terrorism, and I have always believed that he was right. Surely one of the lessons of 11 September is that, if we fail to maintain the pressure on terrorism everywhere, we are all at risk. Last night, the US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, said:

"We are clearly in this for the long haul. We need to find the leadership of al-Qaeda and the Taliban leadership to stop them. Then we need to address that network and other networks elsewhere in the world, but it will take time".

I totally agree with him, and I am sure that the Prime Minister does, too. The message must go out loud and clear: terrorism is not being tolerated now and it will not be tolerated in the future. The days of safe havens—wherever they are—are at an end.

No civilised country will any longer be allowed, or should be allowed, to foster groups such as the Taliban and allow them to use terrorism for their own twisted purpose. Therefore, does the Prime Minister agree that our long-term objective has to be the continued prosecution of the international campaign against terrorism, wherever it occurs and wherever it finds shelter?

The Prime Minister: I can be reasonably brief in my response because I think that we agree on all the main points. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the support that he has given for the decision to put our armed forces on standby. I also agree with what he has just said about the importance of making sure that we defeat international terrorism in all its forms.

I wish to deal with two or three of the points that the right hon. Gentleman raised. The first relates to the United Nations being clear about its objectives. Obviously, aspects are still under discussion, but, as I know from my conversations with the UN Secretary-General, the UN wants to do all that it possibly can to help. However, some difficult logistical and practical questions need to be resolved. We are in conversation with the Secretary-General about them, but the decision to hold a broad-based meeting of representatives of the Afghan people, and the decision of Mr. Vendrell and Mr. Sackett to go to Kabul as soon as possible, are an indication that the UN is moving with the necessary rapidity.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman's point about the power vacuum shows precisely why the UN should move with rapidity; we do not want a power vacuum to open up. As I said in an interview with BBC Pushtun radio earlier today, it is important that people understand that the Government in Afghanistan must involve more than simply the Northern Alliance. There is a very clear understanding on that.

The final point relates to the guilt of Osama bin Laden. At the very beginning, there was a thought—not so much in this country, but certainly in other parts of the world—that, because this was a terrible terrorist act and because Osama bin Laden was the best-known terrorist in the world, we had merely decided that we would simply say that he was responsible. In actual fact, it was very clear that the acts of 11 September bore all the hallmarks of Osama bin Laden. It is now also clear that we can trace the majority of the hijackers to the al-Qaeda network. The intelligence evidence is now absolutely convincing about the complicity of al-Qaeda and bin Laden.

The document that we have placed in the Library today is an updated version of the previous document and provides a lot more intelligence detail about what we have discovered. We are now able to provide such detail. I hope that it is read not merely here but throughout the world in any situation where people have any doubt about bin Laden's guilt. Once people believe that he is guilty, we return to the question that has been at the heart of this from the beginning: do we let him get away with it, or do we pursue him? I think that most people—whatever their faith or country and whatever view they have of America, the west, the United Kingdom or any other country—

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will understand that we had no option. Some 6,000 or more people were slaughtered in cold blood in America, so when we knew who was responsible, we had no option but to pursue them. We shall continue to pursue them until they are brought to justice.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I am sure that the House will greet the Prime Minister's statement with a mixture of relief and apprehension given the current fast-moving situation. There is relief that tangible progress is now being made against the Taliban and towards the bringing to justice of bin Laden and the eventual elimination of his al-Qaeda terrorist network. Equally, however, there is apprehension based on the revulsion that many in this country and internationally have expressed about some of the atrocities that have been committed by the Northern Alliance. They have a bearing on the situation into which British forces may find themselves deployed in but a matter of days.

I make it clear on behalf of the Liberal Democrats that if and when British troops are deployed as part of the stabilisation force, they will have our full support in this most difficult and dangerous set of circumstances. Any such troop deployment must surely mark the beginning, not the end, of an integrated campaign on the ground further to isolate and ultimately to capture bin Laden.

May I ask the Prime Minister one or two specific questions about the British troops? Can he clarify under whose command they will be, and can he tell us more about the rules of engagement? For example, will the troops be able to intervene to stop atrocities that are under way, or will they be able to act only in self-defence? Can he also guarantee that all efforts will be made, beyond the UN Security Council resolution to which he referred, to secure a further resolution, so that if our troops are deployed, they are not viewed by the Afghans as taking one side of a civil war? That would lend still greater moral authority to the moral authority that we already possess in the action that we are undertaking.

In the longer term, Britain and the United States will need to maintain pressure on the Northern Alliance, for reasons of common humanity and in terms of strategy towards establishing a broadly based, post-conflict Administration for Afghanistan as a whole. Does the Prime Minister agree that that must go hand in hand with giving support now to the refugee camps on the borders in Pakistan and Iran, and support later to the rebuilding of Afghanistan?

Finally, on wider issues, the Prime Minister is well aware of the pressures in Washington—opinion in the Administration—on President Bush to make the action in Afghanistan part of a wider action. Can the right hon. Gentleman assure us that he will use his influence with the President to stop military action being expanded to include Iraq? In the likely long winter ahead, not least for our troops and the poor people of Afghanistan, all of us must hope that evil and insanity can yet give way to good and stability.

The Prime Minister: I shall work back through those points. In relation to any wider effort, as I have always said, there are two phases: the military action focused on Afghanistan and the need to pursue international terrorism in all its different forms. That is a matter of investigating its financing, how terrorists move across frontiers and how they acquire their weapons. Any action will be the subject of discussion among the coalition.

As I said a few days ago, it is important that we get the military action completed in Afghanistan. I stress to the House that it is not yet complete. We still have many difficult things to do. We will make sure that we get help to the refugee camps in Pakistan and elsewhere. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has pointed out to me, the biggest need is inside Afghanistan, where it is far more difficult to get food and aid to people. That is the real problem. Of course, we want a new UN Security Council resolution which will give the necessary authority to the UN and to people acting under the UN to improve the situation.

In relation to UK troops, it is too early to discuss under whose command they will be or the rules of engagement. That will have to be decided when deployment takes place. Finally, in respect of the Northern Alliance, everyone knows that there are pictures in newspapers today, and so on. It is worth pointing out that in any situation, especially when people have suffered years of repression under the Taliban regime, there will be acts of revenge. I regret them. We do not condone them; we condemn them and ask that they do not happen. However, it is fair to say that many of the more exaggerated fears about what the Northern Alliance would do in Mazar-i-Sharif and in Kabul have not been fulfilled.

We, the Americans and other coalition partners have maintained close links at every level. I stress to the House yet again that the situation is difficult. There could be no more difficult place to undertake military action, to try to put together a new broad-based Government, and to mount a proper humanitarian effort when there are millions of refugees on the move. Those are all very difficult issues. On the military side, we have succeeded to a significant extent, but not yet fully. The political and humanitarian aspects remain immensely difficult, but we will do everything that we can to make sure that they, too, are brought to a successful conclusion.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Has not the lie been exposed—I hope for ever—that the coalition has been conducting an anti-Muslim crusade, bearing in mind how many people in the liberated areas are only too glad to see the end of the Taliban? Would it not be appropriate for the critics, be they in this House or outside, to accept that they were wrong, as they were about Kosovo? It would do no harm if they now recognised the error of their ways.

The Prime Minister: That is a very tempting offer, but in the interests of general harmony I shall refrain from accepting it. However, my hon. Friend makes a valuable point that is worth emphasising. I hope that, not merely in what is happening now but in the humanitarian and political actions that we take in Afghanistan, the whole of the Muslim world can see that we acted against terrorists—people who were abusing the true spirit and teachings of Islam. Of course, as he rightly pointed out, some years ago in Kosovo we were defending Muslims against oppression by a power that happened to be Orthodox Christian. However, the reason we acted then was not that they were Muslim, but that they were people who were suffering an injustice. There are many elements

that we should move forward once the conflict is over, but one of them is a far greater understanding between the different faiths in the world—in particular, a far greater understanding of Islam in the west and, perhaps, a greater understanding in Arab and Muslim countries of why we chose to act in the way in which we did and why we want nothing but friendship and fellowship with the Arab and Muslim world. I hope very much that, when the situation calms, we can get that message across and demonstrate it clearly by our actions as well as our words.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): I join my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition in congratulating the Prime Minister and the Government on the way in which they have handled this matter. Today, a worrying survey has been published about UK Muslims, almost a third of whom have felt themselves to be subject to hostility and abuse. Clearly, it is utterly unacceptable to attack people for being Muslims. However, does he accept that it would be the wrong answer to introduce a new law on incitement to religious hatred and that we should instead concentrate on better enforcement of the laws that we already have?

The Prime Minister: On that last point, the difficulty, as I understand it, has always been that there is a gap in the law, because incitement to racial hatred is an offence but incitement to religious hatred is not. As the two can be very closely linked, it is felt to be right that that is a gap in the law that should be filled. I personally think that some of the objections that are made are very exaggerated in their claims about how great an interference such a law would be. Each case will be considered on its merits, but surely it should and must be unlawful for a Christian to incite the killing of Muslims or vice versa. I would have thought that that would be important. It is important that we fill the gap in the law.

I say to the right hon. Gentleman that there are some legitimate questions about how that poll was conducted. I believe, having talked to many Muslims in different parts of the country in the past few weeks, that many of them understand exactly why we have been acting. The one thing that was a clue from the people who were polled as to why they might hold their view was that more than 60 per cent. of them, I think, said that they were dubious about the guilt of Osama bin Laden. I hope very much that anybody who is doubtful about that will look at the evidence. They can get it perfectly easily; we make it available through our website. People can get that evidence and study it for themselves. Once they are convinced that Osama bin Laden was indeed responsible, most people, unless they are entirely pacifist, which is a perfectly principled position, would accept that we had no option but to act as we did. We acted against bin Laden and in Afghanistan not because the people there were Muslims—far from it—but because the people who committed this atrocity were terrorists. We pursue them as terrorists in exactly the same way in which we pursue terrorists in any part of the world, whatever their religion.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is the leadership of Pakistan comfortable with the continuation of bombing during Ramadan? The Leader of the Opposition used the word "disaster". Would not the real disaster be nuclear devices in Pakistan falling into the wrong hands?

The Prime Minister: I agree that that would be a disaster; we can all agree about that. President Musharraf did not call for a halt to the bombing, as was reported in some newspapers. He said that he wanted the action to be brought to a conclusion as quickly as possible. We all want that. However, he also said that that had to be consistent with fulfilling the objectives.

One can take a principled position against the conflict and any form of action in Afghanistan, but one must accept the consequences: a terrorist network that is based, trains and is funded in Afghanistan, and has slaughtered 6,000 people in cold blood in the middle of the day in America, will be allowed to get away with it. There is no diplomatic solution to the al-Qaeda network; negotiations cannot be held with it.

Let us consider bin Laden's demands: obliterate Israel, kill all Jews, kill all Americans who support Israel, indeed all Americans. The United Kingdom and many other countries are probably also included in the list. Such people hold an extreme position. They also want the overthrow of any Arab regime that does not follow their fundamentalism. We cannot negotiate with them; we can either say that they can do what they want and get away with it or do what we can to prevent that.

We waited several weeks before we began the campaign to make the Taliban, which are an oppressive and hateful regime, choose. They made a choice, and it is increasingly obvious that it was impossible for them to separate themselves from al-Qaeda because they were effectively one and the same. Many people in Afghanistan objected not only to oppression by the Taliban and the terrible things that they did, but to their provision of a haven for people from outside the country from which they could export terrorism, much of it funded through the drugs trade.

Pakistan needs a stable and secure neighbour. It rightly wants a broad-based regime and its own strategic interest to be considered. It will be. President Musharraf has shown enormous courage. He has made the right decision for his people; that can already be demonstrated. I assure him that the commitments that we have made to the Government of Pakistan about the broad base of the regime and taking Pakistan's interests into account will be met in full.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): I commend the Prime Minister for his international coalition building, and for sustaining the coalitions, but does he acknowledge any limit to the maxim,

"My enemy's enemy is my friend"?

The Prime Minister: I do, but if the hon. Gentleman is referring to the Northern Alliance, it was necessary to support it in the way that we did.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): In the hourly changes in Afghanistan, is not it easy to forget that the purpose of being there is to pursue the guilty? Does my right hon. Friend know that Justice Scrivener QC has said that he would not convict a shoplifter on the evidence that we have shown so far? I thank my right hon. Friend for the evidence that he has placed in the Library, but does he believe that my constituents, who have also complained to me about the quality of evidence, will be convinced? On the day of reckoning when we are all held to account in a democracy, is my right hon. Friend convinced that we can say that we pursued the guilty?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend's point deserves an answer. I have not seen the comments to which she

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referred. Let us leave aside the intelligence evidence—people may say that we are simply providing whatever evidence we want, although I believe that anyone who examined it would be convinced. Two other things are important. First, we have now traced the majority of the hijackers to the al-Qaeda terrorist network in Afghanistan. That is where they were trained, where they came out of, and where they were connected to. One would have thought that that was hardly a coincidence.

Secondly, the best evidence since 11 September has increasingly come from what bin Laden and his spokesmen have said. People can read the full transcript of the video recordings of interviews that he has given. One might have thought that, if he was innocent, he would have been proclaiming his innocence and condemning the outrage. However, he has not done any of those things. On the contrary, he has said that it was absolutely the right thing to do, that he welcomed it, that the people who did it were heroes and, what is more, that he wants a lot more of it to happen. With the greatest respect to whoever it was who made the comment about the shoplifter, I think that although there is no convincing those who will not be convinced, if people study this matter, the evidence is clear and plain.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): It may well be necessary to deploy United States and United Kingdom troops as a stabilisation force in Afghanistan, and I will support that. None the less, should not that be a temporary measure, bearing in mind that the United States and the United Kingdom have been engaged in a conflict with the Taliban and are likely to continue to be so engaged? I will support that engagement, too. However, is it not necessary for a degree of even-handedness to be perceived to exist in, for example, the Pushtun areas? We have given support in concert with the Northern Alliance. In those circumstances, should we not try to engage, as rapidly as possible, in the stabilisation force troops from countries that have not so far been engaged in the conflict, so that we do not put ourselves in an apparently divided role?

The Prime Minister: That is a perfectly reasonable point. We do not want UK troops to remain there in the long term. They are there simply to perform certain duties that they may be called on to perform, and they may be the only ones who can do that at the moment. There will be not only US and UK troops, but troops from other countries which have been part of the coalition; for example, France and other countries that have been involved already.

In the medium term—while the United Nations exercise is, hopefully, taking increasing control—it is entirely sensible that we involve other countries as well. Obviously, discussions are going on about what type of force could help in this situation. As I said in my statement, we need to be able to work alongside the Afghan military commanders to ensure that stability is restored to the country. We are well aware of the sensitivities there, and it is important that we take account of them.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): As a Member of Parliament who has been to Afghanistan and seen the way in which the people there are repressed, may I ask my right hon. Friend, his coalition and the United Nations to make sure that it is not only the Afghanis who are liberated, but the women, too?

The Prime Minister: What my hon. Friend says is right. Some of the people who are rejoicing most visibly today are the Afghan women who will no longer have to suffer quite appalling repression. Under the Taliban regime, they had no proper education and were excluded from many walks of life. Also, as I know from talking to women who have been in Afghanistan, they suffered the most brutal repression, including physical beatings for anyone who did not obey rules that are, on any basis, grossly unreasonable and wrong.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I wholeheartedly endorse what was said earlier about the United Nations. What does the Prime Minister envisage in terms of the United Nations intervention? Is it to involve a form of protectorate or trusteeship while the building of a broad-based representative Government goes ahead in Afghanistan? I also fully share the right hon. Gentleman's hope that there will now be a huge increase in the amount of humanitarian aid going into the country.

The Prime Minister: It is envisaged that the UN will help to facilitate the coming together of the new Afghan Government. That is the sensible limit of its ambition there. We shall, of course, try to step up the humanitarian aid now—although, in my view, it is only because of the military action that we are able to get the humanitarian aid into the country.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Will he work with his coalition partners to try to ensure that, under any post-Taliban regime, the drugs trade does not start up again? Will he also update the House on the important financial measures needed to tackle the flow of funds to terrorists, particularly given that the Taliban received such large sums from terrorist sources?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend has raised two important points. On the drugs trade, what we shall do in helping with the reconstruction of Afghanistan is make it clear that we want Afghanistan to develop farming—of proper agricultural produce, not produce for the drugs trade—and business, so that they can grow again in a legitimate way. That will take some time, but as I was told when I was in Pakistan a few weeks ago, Pakistan used to have a very active drugs trade but it closed it down with the help of measures taken with the international community. So it is not impossible for a country that has been involved in drugs to shut down its drugs trade, and we must work to ensure that Afghanistan does that.

In respect of financial measures, we need first to make it clear to countries that have been somewhat lax in enforcing their laws on financing terrorists that we shall not tolerate that. Secondly, we must tighten up provisions on money laundering and the disclosure of information. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has been working on that and there has been international agreement at an EU level and, I am sure, at other international levels.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I congratulate the Prime Minister and our armed forces on the efforts made and

the successes enjoyed. However, may I enjoin him to look carefully at the specialist reservists? More than a month ago, 150 were called for, but so far only 13 have volunteered. Can measures be taken to encourage and protect them further with legislation?

The Prime Minister: We shall do what we can in that regard. I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is immensely important that we do everything possible to acknowledge the contribution that has been made. There are practical issues that we need to get right, but I am sure that with good will and discussion we can do that.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Prime Minister has rightly condemned excesses by the Northern Alliance in retribution, which is now going on in Kabul and other cities. What influence and pressure are being put on the Northern Alliance to cease those activities? How quickly can the UN command take over, so that it is clear that the Northern Alliance is not running the show, but somebody else is? In analysing the whole situation, will he encourage the US Administration to sign up to the International Criminal Court convention so that we have a future based on law rather than solely on the use of military force?

The Prime Minister: This country's position on the International Criminal Court is clear; America's position is up to it. Irrespective of any court's existence, the military action would still have been right. We have made it clear to the Northern Alliance that we want no reprisals or revenge killings against the civilian population. In many ways, that has happened to a lesser degree than people might have expected. Of course we want to ensure that the UN is as effective as possible in the interventions that it makes.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Events in Afghanistan, and over many years, have emphasised the importance to this country of British forces' expeditionary capacity. I agree with the Prime Minister that our armed forces are second to none and that, furthermore, they must have the best and sufficient equipment and ships. Currently, we have two assault ships and only one helicopter carrier, HMS Ocean, which is in refit. Will the Prime Minister consider urgently the ordering of a second helicopter carrier so that one is always available?

The Prime Minister: To answer the hon. Gentleman plainly, I am not in a position now to give him assurances on that; the armed forces Minister is beside me and I have no doubt that he has heard what was said. We currently have, I think, one of the largest naval programmes ever. However, I shall have to leave the hon. Gentleman's specific representation to my right hon. Friend the Minister.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Would my right hon. Friend agree that the problems of victory, however great, are infinitely preferable to the problems caused by defeat? As we turn from the speed of the military advance to the political track, could he give the House an update on the draft resolution that is now being debated at the United Nations? What will it say, for example, about security? Could he also be a little more clear about the British forces that are on 48-hour stand-by? When they go—with French, German, Italian and Spanish forces—under whose command will they be?

The Prime Minister: The difficulty is that we have not yet decided the precise nature of the command because we have not yet finalised not only what our troops but what other troops will do. Obviously, I hope that the House will understand that the situation has moved very fast in the past 48 hours. The requirements, too, are moving very fast. We may now be able to go to parts of the country that we could not go to before, and we may no longer need to go to other parts of the country where we thought that we might be required. Very many issues still have to be decided.

As for the United Nations resolution, it is obviously important that we get the most broad-based regime possible and that the international community—which has been remarkably solid in the action that has been undertaken—remains solid. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) is entirely right in saying that the problems of having been effective in Afghanistan are far more welcome than the problems that we might have had otherwise. I think that, if we do this in the right way, it opens up the possibility of making real progress not only in Afghanistan but in many difficult areas of the world.

Since I have been in the Chamber, I have received the good news that at Doha a new round of World Trade Organisation negotiations has been launched, which is a very important development. I understand that the agenda for the trade round has been agreed. It would have been difficult to foresee that success even a short time ago. However, immense work has been done and there is far greater will in the international community to try to solve some of the problems facing us. That trade round will be important to world trade and to our economy, even though it may seem very distant to jobs and living standards here on the streets of Britain, because if we manage to get the trade round under way, it will open up new prospects for our business and for investment. It will also hugely help some of the poorest countries in the world.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Although I greatly welcome the military progress that is being made, does the Prime Minister agree that the collapse of the Taliban in itself does not necessarily constitute any reduction in the terrorist threat? Will he therefore assure the House that there will be absolutely no let-up in the intensity of the efforts being made both nationally and at the United Nations, under the British ambassador's chairmanship, to strengthen our national defences against terrorism and deal with those individuals who may be conspiring to commit the next act of terrorism before they are able to engage in another act of mass murder?

The Prime Minister: I agree with that. It is important that we recognise that the closing down of that terrorist network is not complete. We do not know, for example, what planning it had put in place even before 11 September. Although I doubt that it is able to plan much at the moment because of the position it is in, we simply do not know what it may have done prior to 11 September or immediately

[The Prime Minister]

after the acts of 11 September. It is important that we do not relax our guard for one instant in the fight against terrorism here and abroad.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments on the progress that has been made in the past 48 hours and his emphasis on aid and the need to ensure that Afghanistan has a Government in whom all the people of Afghanistan have a stake. I also welcome his comments on the suspicions about the west that sometimes exist in parts of the developing world. That was why he was right to go to the middle east. Does he agree that, if our words are to be taken seriously, we must redouble our commitment to bring a just peace to the middle east and show that our commitment to United Nations resolutions 242 and 338 is no less than our commitment to other United Nations resolutions relating to other parts of the world?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to say that it is important, if we possibly can, to restart the process—the search for a durable peace in the middle east. I have no doubt at all that that is important. I also have no doubt at all that the process should be based on the two fixed points of principle that we have talked about over the past few weeks. One is the state of Israel—secure and confident in its own borders, accepted by its Arab neighbours and accepted in its right to exist by its Arab neighbours. The second is a viable Palestinian state where the people can live together, side by side, in justice and equality.

I am sure that whatever happens over the next few weeks and months, at some point people will have to come back to the relaunch of that process, and there is no better time to do it than now.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will the Prime Minister find time today to pay tribute again to Squadron 39, the reconnaissance squadron based at RAF Marham? Is he aware that it is currently based in Oman, and experiencing extremely tough, gruelling conditions in the desert there? Day in day out, they are flying over theatre, taking aerial photographs and risking their lives. They are very, very brave men.

Is the Prime Minister also aware of concerns about defence expenditure when the conflict has come to an end? Will he do all he can to ensure that our armed forces are properly funded in the future?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to pay tribute to the work of Squadron 39, and indeed to all others that have been involved in the action. Reconnaissance in these circumstances has of course been a dangerous and difficult mission.

As for defence spending more generally, the hon. Gentleman will know that we have now had the first real-terms rise for many years. What this conflict has shown, once again, is not just the strength of our armed forces in terms of what they can do by way of defending our country, but that they are an enormously important part of Britain's standing in the world and of what we can do. As I have often said, I think that our defence forces are invaluable in themselves in defending our country and doing the traditional work of defence forces; but they are also a very important part of this country's foreign policy.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the Prime Minister confirm that the supply of humanitarian aid and the deployment of the United Nations force will continue even after the formation of the next Afghan Government, on a long-term, structured basis and not just as a short-term answer to the current situation, to allow the people of Afghanistan to lead a normal life?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree. We will ensure that that humanitarian commitment is there for the medium and the long term.

I read my hon. Friend's article recently—I think it was in *The Observer*. I thought that his argument constituted the best defence of why we are taking this action, and why it was important and right, irrespective of one's faith—Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Hindu—for the action to be supported. I thought that the article was one of the best things I had read throughout the entirety of the conflict.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Way back in August, the United Nations co-ordinator for Afghanistan reported

"what we are seeing unfold in 2001, which will without doubt continue through the first half of 2002, is not only a catastrophe, but also a gradually cumulative humanitarian disaster of enormous proportions. Conflict, drought, displacement, grinding poverty and human rights abuses add up to a deadly combination, a chain reaction of misery upon misery."

Did the Prime Minister note that?

It is important always to realise that under the Taliban, way back, there was going to be a humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan. Can the Prime Minister assure us that, long after the television cameras and the journalists have disappeared from Afghanistan, the United Kingdom will continue to provide humanitarian and development aid for the restructuring of that country?

The Prime Minister: I totally agree that that is the test of our commitment. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct to point out that this is a humanitarian crisis that was going on long before 11 September, partly for natural reasons but partly because of the appalling nature of the Taliban regime. It is important that we stay with the commitments we have made, and recognise that helping Afghanistan to become a stable and secure partner in the region is not merely in the interests of people in Afghanistan but—as we can see from what happened as we let Afghanistan decline and descend into chaos—in our own interests too.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): May I reassure my right hon. Friend that, in addition to the relief and apprehension that we all must feel, as expressed by the leader of the Liberal Democrats, there was joy in my heart and that of many others on Friday evening to hear that there had been movement on the ground to signal the beginnings of the end of the Taliban? I feel really happy that, so far, the movement has been very positive in getting rid of the Taliban and setting the scene for the delivery of aid and the development of a future far better than anything that Afghanistan has had over the past 30 years.

Will the agenda that my right hon. Friend laid out so persuasively at the Labour party conference and here in London this week now become a focus for the United Nations, to deal with the major problems not only of the middle east but of many other areas in the world, such as, to mention only two, Zimbabwe and Sudan?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right in saying that most people will have welcomed what has happened in the past few days. The military success on the ground allows the political and humanitarian work to proceed in a much more coherent way. That is important and we must build on it. The challenge, however, is still formidable on both fronts—political and humanitarian—and there is no point in disguising that.

On the broader global agenda, I hope that we can make progress. We are working very hard with African countries on the new Africa initiative. It is very important to ensure that, by the time of the G7/G8 summit next year, we have a viable plan for economic and political development in Africa, led by Africa itself. The concept of partnership is there, and it should be seized on. I hope that, today more than ever before, people understand that international issues can be domestic issues, too.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Following the answer to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), does the Prime Minister agree that those who have been crying out for humanitarian aid should be leading the van of thanksgiving for the successes that have happened, because if the Taliban had remained in power, the people who really needed help would not have got it?

Will we equip fully for winter conditions our forces that will be in Afghanistan?

Is the Prime Minister convinced that the al-Qaeda network has not moved out? What about the suggestion that bin Laden himself may have moved on to Somalia? Can we have an assurance that there will be no pulling back and that international forces will continue to pursue him until they bring him to justice?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct: it is only because we have been able to secure places on the ground militarily that we can put in the humanitarian aid where we need to.

Our troops will be properly equipped for anything that they may do there.

We believe that Osama bin Laden and the main al-Qaeda network are still in Afghanistan. It is true that, prior to 11 September, various parts of the organisation and terrorists connected with it were in different parts of the world. That is why it is important that we ensure that, wherever they are, they are hunted down. They have shown by their acts how dangerous they are.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): I thank the Prime Minister for his timely statement. In the light of what he has said, will he reconsider, even at this late stage, the perceived necessity for clauses 21 to 27 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, which we are to debate next week, which allow for imprisonment with neither charge nor trial? Precisely why is it thought necessary to preclude any appeal to any court on matters of fact, by way of either habeas corpus or judicial review?

The Prime Minister: I think that I can answer those questions. I am afraid that we believe that it is right to take those powers for the reasons that I gave to the leader of the Liberal Democrats earlier. The choice is simple. There is no doubt at all that there are suspected terrorists—I have dealt with such cases myself—who have entered this country who cannot be deported to their own countries because of legal decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, which are binding on this country irrespective of whether the European convention has been incorporated into British law. Those people have been released here, even though in some instances the courts have accepted that those people were involved in terrorist offences and were plotting more. There are not many of those people.

We must present evidence to the appointed commission, which will be headed by experienced people—lawyers—and we will have to present it in private, because of its confidential nature. It will be a small number of cases, presented in circumstances in which we genuinely believe that our national interest is at risk or that of other countries. There is no alternative, other than saying, "That's fine, they are going to be let out, can stay here and do what they wish to do." There is no alternative to that.

The second reason why it is important that we take this action is that the one question I have found impossible to answer when having conversations with other world leaders is when they say to me, "You want us to join this great coalition against international terrorism, but you have people in your country who want to commit acts of terrorism in our country, and you are doing nothing about it." I have not yet found a convincing answer to that and I genuinely believe that it is right, in very specific circumstances, to take exceptional action. If we do not do that, we will put our own people at risk. The people who would abuse our laws and hospitality would put many more people at risk, because they have no compunction about what they do. Secondly, if that small group of people get away with being here and plotting their acts of terrorism, with nothing being done about them, they make life a lot more uncomfortable for the vast majority of asylum seekers who come in through the proper immigration procedures and who deserve to be treated well and with respect.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The Prime Minister said in his statement that part of the troops that may be deployed in 48 hours is 45 Commando, which is based in my constituency. I am pleased to see that the mission will be, at least initially, a humanitarian one, but is the Prime Minister aware of reports this morning that both the former president and former king of Afghanistan are travelling to Kabul, possibly to vie for power? I noted that the Prime Minister said in his statement that he had links at all levels with the Northern Alliance and although I do not expect him to give me any details of discussions, can he assure me that discussions with the Northern Alliance have been held and that it agrees with the need to deploy troops, whether from the UK or the UN, in those areas that it has recently seized from the Taliban, so that there will be no problem once the troops have been sent to Afghanistan?

The Prime Minister: I pay tribute to 45 Commando Royal Marines and the work they do, which is very important. I do not think that any one can give guarantees in this situation, but it is correct that we are in discussion with all the different parties in Afghanistan and the work

[The Prime Minister]

is being co-ordinated and led by the United Nations. The best chance of success is in the efforts being made by Mr. Brahimi, who is the designated special envoy for the United Nations. I believe that he can be successful, but I emphasise again—I hope that I have done so sufficiently this afternoon—that the military conflict is not yet over, because our objectives have not been achieved, and the humanitarian and political challenges are formidable. However, the fact that they are formidable does not mean that they do not have to be overcome.

Point of Order

4.39 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will know better than anyone in the House that it is one of Parliament's sacred duties to defend the freedoms that are enjoyed—freedom of speech, of association and of religion—including the freedom to be tried before being detained. You will be aware that on Monday an order will be discussed, probably after 10.30 pm, that pertains to that last precious freedom. Unless the procedures of the House are adjusted—and it is within the Government's power to do so—that order will be debated next Monday but will not be voted on until Wednesday. It will be subject to a deferred vote.

Many of us feel that deferred votes are important, particularly after the way in which the business of the House was abused last year. None the less, there must be certain items that the House feels are of the utmost importance and deserve a vote immediately after the debate. Will you use your usual channels to find out whether appropriate means of reaching a decision on this matter can be found and a vote taken immediately after the debate on Monday?

Mr. Speaker: I have no powers in these matters, but the hon. Gentleman will know who does. He should take the matter up with the appropriate Minister.

Motor Vehicles (Prohibition on Use of Hand-held Mobile Telephones)

4.40 pm

Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make it an offence to use a hand-held mobile telephone while driving a motor vehicle; and for connected purposes.

I was inspired to move this Bill by a councillor in my constituency, Councillor Geoff Cheetham, who serves the Eden ward on Rossendale borough council and who asked me, "When are you MPs going to do something about people talking on mobiles while they are driving?"

There can be no hon. Member who has not at some time witnessed someone at the wheel of a motor vehicle who is at the same time conducting a conversation on a hand-held mobile telephone. Indeed, there may be hon. Members who have committed what is already technically an offence under sections 2 and 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. I am pretty sure that I am one of them. Historically, the Government have argued that the legislation is wide-ranging enough to include mobile phones as the highway code already contains in paragraph 127 advice on driving and using the phone. It states:

"you must exercise proper control of your vehicle at all times. Never use a hand held mobile phone or microphone while driving."

I believe that in the long term it is right to consider a generic offence to cover the use of mobile phones while driving and any other technologies that may emerge in the not-too-distant future. That view is supported by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the parliamentary advisory council for transport safety. Indeed, a similar law was enacted in the state of New York as recently as 1 November this year. New York is the first US state to enact such legislation, but more than 30 other states are reported to have introduced similar legislation during this year. There are also moves in the United States to introduce a Bill to impose a national ban on the use of mobile phones while driving.

In New South Wales too, there is now a law that states quite explicitly that the driver of a vehicle must not use a hand-held mobile phone while the vehicle is moving. Korea has now followed suit and I understand that the Government of the Irish Republic are considering doing the same.

Some may argue that our present laws are sufficient to deal with this problem, but I believe that we know from our daily experiences that they are not. As recently as July this year the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents called for a specific offence to ban the use of mobile phones while driving. It called for new legislation to make it crystal clear that mobile phones should be switched off while drivers are at the wheel.

ROSPA estimates that there have now been at least 16 deaths on British roads in which a mobile phone has been implicated, and that this could be the tip of the iceberg. It is only when someone is killed that the problems associated with mobile phones and driving are highlighted as there is no specific offence related to mobile phones and driving. It is therefore impossible to keep track of how often they are a major factor in accidents. It is possible that hundreds of accidents may be caused by the use of mobiles and that that is going unrecorded. Text messaging is the latest craze and poses a new threat to road safety.

A brief report in *The Observer* of 8 July stated:

"One of the most alarming sights on our road is a driver, mobile phone crooked in shoulder, chattering endlessly, oblivious to other traffic. Inevitably accidents occur."

Cars are struck, and people are run over. Driving and phones can kill, as US academics made clear four years ago when they found that mobile telephone use made accidents four times more likely. Research in the United States also claims that to speak on a mobile telephone while driving is as dangerous as drink driving.

New York has had enough and has outlawed the practice. I believe that it is high time we did the same because no one, regardless of how competent a driver someone claims to be, can hold a phone, dial a number, conduct a conversation and be in complete control of a car or lorry. It is simply not the same as having a conversation with a passenger or listening to a tape or the radio. It takes less than a split second for a lapse in concentration to result in an accident. It must therefore be made crystal clear to drivers who insist on behaving in this way that they endanger the safety of the public generally, and their own safety too.

That is why I am seeking leave to introduce this Bill today.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Janet Anderson, Mr. John McFall, Ms Bridget Prentice, Mrs. Betty Williams, Jim Dowd, Mr. Paul Keetch, Sir Sydney Chapman, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Siôn Simon, Andy Burnham, Lawrie Quinn and Barbara Follett.

MOTOR VEHICLES (PROHIBITION ON USE OF HAND-HELD MOBILE TELEPHONES)

Janet Anderson accordingly presented a Bill to make it an offence to use a hand-held mobile telephone while driving a motor vehicle; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 April, and to be printed [Bill 50].

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)) and Standing Order No. 108 (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)),

That—

1. The matter of the Pre-Budget Statement and its implications for Wales be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration;

2. The Committee shall meet on Wednesday 28th November at half-past Ten o'clock and between Four o'clock and Six o'clock at Westminster to take questions under Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) and to consider the matter of the Pre-Budget Statement and its implications for Wales under Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales))—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 100 (Scottish Grand Committee (sittings)),

That the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet at Westminster on Wednesday 28th November at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the adjournment of the Committee—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Clause 1

EXCLUSION OF CANDIDATE SELECTION FROM 1975 ACT

4.48 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 1, line 15, at end insert—

'(2A) This section applies to arrangements made by a registered political party which, in respect of elections for a single representative for a geographical area, confer preference on a female candidate who possesses equivalent or substantially equivalent merits to a male candidate but only if such candidatures are the subject of an assessment that takes account of the specific personal situations of the candidates, including their relationship with that specific geographical area.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 3, in page 2, line 23, at end insert—

'(2A) This Article applies to arrangements made by a registered political party which, in respect of elections for a single representative for a geographical area, confer preference on a female candidate who possesses equivalent or substantially equivalent merits to a male candidate but only if such candidatures are the subject of an assessment that takes account of the specific personal situations of the candidates, including their relationship with that specific geographical area.'.

Mr. Lansley: On Second Reading, the Bill received a welcome across the House. It was rightly said that the Bill was short and relatively simple, but important. I support it, and the amendments are not intended to reduce that support.

On Second Reading and in Committee many Members applauded the fact that the Bill is permissive in intent, but by switching off the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 it allows the discretion given to political parties to be used to do various things. It became increasingly clear to me in Committee, and I hope that it will become clear to other right hon. and hon. Members, that the Bill runs the risk of reintroducing to this area of law and practice by political parties many of the uncertainties that arose from the Jepson case in 1996, and we would do well to remove them.

Amendment No. 4 is designed to apply to Great Britain and amendment No. 3 to the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976. Amendment No. 4 would set a limit on the circumstances in which positive discrimination may be exercised in favour of women. It would ensure that when a single member was being elected for a specific geographical area—that would generally mean individual Members of Parliament elected for a specific Westminster constituency or, in local government, single members elected for a ward—while a woman could be given preference in the selection over a man who had equivalent merits, all the candidates for the post, including men, should be subject to an assessment. Account should be taken of the candidates' personal circumstances, including their relationship with the

specific geographical area. It may not necessarily be obvious, but the effect would be to exclude the application of all-women shortlists in parliamentary constituencies. Men would no longer be excluded from consideration for selection by political parties in areas where they live, regardless of their merits.

On Second Reading, when I was, frankly, less informed than I have become, I argued that although the Bill switched off the provisions of the 1975 Act that apply to the selection of candidates by political parties, it might none the less become subject to intervention by the courts on the strength of the adoption of the new equal treatment directive, or even the old one. The Minister confidently assured me that as the measure applied to elections and not to appointments, that would not be the case. However, in Committee, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"I cannot give an absolute guarantee because the European Court of Justice could ultimately decide the question differently . . . However, even if the court decided that candidate selection fell within the equal treatment directive, the hon. Gentleman—

the Minister was referring to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who is in his place—

"will be aware that measures under the directive and the treaty . . . allow for positive action."

He said later in that short debate:

"We expect political parties to take legal advice before proceeding".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 6 November 2001; c. 27.]

I do not doubt that the Minister was being both prudent and accurate, but in doing so he highlighted the problem to which I partially referred on Second Reading and which we explored in greater detail in Committee. If a court held that the equal treatment directive applied, it might apply to the measures adopted by political parties—the test of proportionality. That test was summarised in a commentary on the European Court of Justice ruling in Abrahamsson and Anderson *v.* Fogelqvist in July 2000, in which it was held that it was

"permissible to confer preference on a female candidate who possesses equivalent merits to a male competitor, provided that the candidatures are the subject of an objective assessment that takes account of the specific personal situations of the candidates."

I hope that it is clear that the language chosen for the amendment rests directly on that used to express the test of proportionality that a court might choose were it to apply the equal treatment directive to positive action measures taken under the legislation.

When I questioned the Minister in Committee, he said that he wanted to make it clear that

"providing the remedy is proportionate to the wrong that it is seeking to address, political parties should be able to introduce measures such as we have discussed."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 6 November 2001; c. 28-29.]

In that debate, the right hon. Gentleman, regardless of his confident declarations on the inapplicability of the equal treatment directive, was none the less contemplating the possibility that under the Bill political parties would have to act in a proportionate manner. Most of us would want to do so, but the question is, if political parties—in this instance the Labour party—go down that path, will it be regarded as proportionate by a court?

The Government maintain that the judgment applies to a post, but not to the selection of a candidate. I am still not persuaded by their argument. If the Jepson case demonstrated anything, it was that the selection of candidates by political parties effectively puts those parties in the position of qualifying bodies under section 13 of the Sex Discrimination Act. By extension, I see no reason why a court, in assessing whether people receive equal treatment when taking up a vocational activity or occupation under the directive, would not hold that the selection of candidates is integral to the process of securing employment.

The purpose of the amendments is pre-emptively to apply a test of proportionality to the positive action that the Bill will enable political parties to take, thus removing the uncertainty about the extent to which they can take action. They will then no longer need to undertake expensive legal inquiries and test cases, with all that they entail, to establish the law on positive action of this sort.

It is not only the equal treatment directive that might impact on positive action measures. If I have read the notes to the Human Rights Act 1998 correctly, protocol 12 to the convention—I do not know whether the Government intend to sign it—which creates a free-standing right to equality looks to a right of member states to take

"measures to promote full and effective equality, provided that there is an objective and reasonable justification for these measures".

A court might regard such a test—of objective and reasonable justification—as being similar to the proportionality test. In those circumstances, the European Court of Human Rights might, separately, look to some of the jurisprudence in the European Court of Justice in order to establish the relationship between those principles and their application to these matters.

5 pm

If the Bill is designed to permit political parties to take positive action and the Labour party wants to pursue all-women shortlists, it runs the risk of legal challenge. Although I have not succeeded in tempting the Minister on this point, it would none the less be helpful if he were to tell us whether the Labour party wants to re-introduce all-women shortlists.

The Liberal Democrats debate whether or not they want such shortlists. The hon. Member for North Cornwall may be able to tell us a little more about that. He certainly seemed to imply that although the Liberal Democrats might be tempted in the direction of all-women shortlists, they were deterred by the possibility of legal challenge. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman, like Conservative Members, wonders whether a legal challenge would ensue and doubts that this is a sensible measure for a political party to pursue.

The purpose of the amendment is to remove uncertainty about a legal challenge. It is also intended to establish that there should be limits—never mind the European legislation—to the extent to which positive action is taken by political parties in order to secure greater equality.

Two wrongs do not make a right. In this case, the wrong that we want to remedy—the lack of balance in representation in the House—will not be appropriately remedied if we introduce another wrong by discriminating in such an overt and extreme fashion against men. That would occur in specific circumstances—for example, where a man wanted to be selected as a candidate for the area in which he lived.

[Mr. Lansley]

We are talking about only those circumstances in which somebody wants to be selected as a candidate for the area where they live and where that constituency offers them a unique opportunity for election.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that many people who seek selection are also able to do so in an adjoining area? Often, they are in a borough, county or area where there is some choice of seats. It is not always, or even usually, a specific and sole seat for which a person wants to be selected. Does he agree that many Members—of whom I am not one—have never lived in their own constituency?

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, as she takes me to the points that I wanted to make, although I am not with her on her latter point. I live in my constituency and am happy to do so. However, I understand her first point: people who want to be elected to this place do not necessarily seek selection as a candidate in the place where they previously lived or currently live. Indeed, I did not live in South Cambridgeshire before I sought selection as a candidate for that constituency, but that fact does not remove the principle. For example the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor)—he is no longer in his place, but he put a question at Prime Minister's questions—secured election as an Independent Member of Parliament. He secured election to the House on behalf of the place where he lives.

One might argue that the hon. Gentleman would not be affected by the measure because it deals with political parties, but is not the basis on which political parties select prospective Members of Parliament increasingly being influenced by the fact that they live in a particular place? In previous debates, the former Home Secretary, now the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, seemed to think that selection by political parties was all and that the merits of individual candidates were nothing, but that is not true of individuals. It was not true at the last election, and it will not be true in future, so it will be more important for political parties to select candidates who have links with the specific geographical area that they wish to represent.

Joan Ruddock: According to the hon. Gentleman's logic, if a seat has historically been held by one political party and all the evidence suggests that it will not change hands, a prospective Conservative candidate who lives in a traditionally Labour-held area could never become a Conservative candidate with any hope of success. Is he saying that those men should never consider becoming a Member of Parliament?

Mr. Lansley: No, I am not, but it is perfectly reasonable and entirely logical for people to seek selection as parliamentary candidates in the place where they live, and if they cannot do so they may well seek selection elsewhere.

Under what circumstances should we introduce a form of discrimination—a bar on such people seeking selection as a candidate in the place where they live? If I were a Conservative living in a strong Labour constituency the electorate would impose that bar on me. That is fair enough. In those specific circumstances, the hon. Lady advocates—but I oppose, under the amendment—telling a man that whatever his individual merits he is not good enough because a woman has to be selected for the constituency. He might have lived in the area for a long time, served as an elected representative and been the leader of the local council.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that for many years women have sought selection in their home areas but have not succeeded, as the composition of the House shows? Does he agree that, in effect, that has been a bar to women becoming Members of Parliament?

Mr. Lansley: I have no doubt that that is precisely why the experience of all political parties is that such discrimination has occurred. The amendment is not intended to dispute the fact that women of equivalent, or substantially equivalent, merit to men have not been selected when they should have been. The issue is that Labour Members want to use the Bill to disbar a man from being selected even where he has far greater merit as a candidate by virtue of his specific personal circumstances, his relationship with a constituency and on the grounds of any objective assessment. That is wholly undesirable. In fact, not only is that inequitable, but it runs the risk of bringing into disrepute the positive action that needs to be taken to redress the lack of representativeness in the Chamber.

It is clear that my party needs to take further action, and in my view some of our ideas will make a substantive difference. If we were to contemplate introducing women-only shortlists, the process of trying to secure greater representation by women would be brought into disrepute. That is one of the reasons why we did not succeed in the past. The Conservative party sought women-only shortlists, but the Labour party's actions in the early 1990s were seen as inequitable and discriminatory and they brought into disrepute the adoption of such measures by the Conservative party.

Joan Ruddock: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, when the Labour party introduced all-women shortlists, it took a regional approach, introduced the lists on the basis of consensus and applied them to only half its target seats? Contrary to his suggestion, our approach was not draconian. It applied to only a very few seats.

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Lady raises an interesting point. The issue is what the Bill should allow people to do. If the hon. Lady is saying that it should not be used to create all-women shortlists that apply in a specific constituency, I agree with her. Furthermore, if she is suggesting that the Labour party should be able to introduce all-women shortlists on a regional basis through some form of twinning, I point out that twinning would still be acceptable under my amendment.

Perhaps the hon. Lady and the Minister will support the amendment because it would allow twinning to take place. If a couple of constituencies worked together, they would assess the merits of a man for selection in a particular geographical area—namely either of those constituencies—but they would select one woman and one man. That would be permissible under the amendment, as such an approach

would be proportionate. However, it would not be proportionate for a man who on any objective basis is better qualified to be debarred from selection for an individual constituency.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The hon. Gentleman said that, under his amendment, twinning would be acceptable, but I am not sure that he understands how it worked in reality. I understand the process because I am from Wales. Two constituencies would be twinned with one another and they would agree to be represented by one man and one woman. Under the system, a man could have double or treble the votes of a woman and a woman could have double or treble the votes of a man, but that person still might not be selected. The right of individual constituencies to select who they wanted was taken away. A constituency might overwhelming vote for a man or for a woman but, because of the system of twinning, its choice could be thrown out and a person of the other sex brought in.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because his view balances those expressed by other Labour Members. However, I do not go as far as he does. It is possible to devise a system of twinning that is proportionate and that would be acceptable under the Bill as amended by amendment No. 4. He refers to the votes cast in an individual constituency—that is the determining factor in any system adopted in the Conservative party—but that is not the same as an assessment of the merits of the candidates and their specific personal circumstances.

Under my amendment, a court would not only have to consider the preferences of members of an association—that is one factor—but assess whether a candidate who had a close relationship with an area and had substantially better merits than anyone else but who had been debarred from selection had had his merits objectively assessed.

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I am in my hon. Friend's debt, because he has tabled an important and interesting amendment. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments.

Does my hon. Friend agree that some hon. Members have not understood the significance of the amendment because—I do not wish to be provocative—the Labour party's tradition is much more authoritarian? The trade union culture of imposing rules and regulations is very different from the Conservative party's tradition, which is much more liberal, much more permissive and much less likely to be imposed from the centre. In the past, the Labour party had a serious problem because it was so dominated by the trade unions. It was very male and very white. However, using a pretty authoritarian approach, it changed the rules for women, and denied the interests of individual members in doing so. Is it not the different traditions that explain why Members on either side of the House have misunderstood each other?

5.15 pm

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I expect that our different traditions do explain some of the attitudes prevailing in each party. The response of the Labour party to any problem is to create a central directive that will remedy the matter. The intention in the Conservative party was always to try to work with the most relevant local organisation in order to secure the objective through consent.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Lansley: I will give way when I have responded to my right hon. Friend.

The objective in the Conservative party will always be to work through consent and in a democratic process involving members of local associations. I know that if my party responds positively to the legislation, it will do so in a way which none the less retains the ability of a constituency association to judge individual candidates on their merits. The system about which my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and I spoke earlier this year would allow a man who had a specific connection with a geographical area and substantial merits leading to his possible selection as a candidate in that constituency still to be considered by the association, regardless of shortlists.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) has been patient. I give way to her.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Setting aside the extraordinary intervention by the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) about the structures and mores of my party, and given that the hon. Gentleman is assiduous in attempting to preclude my party from advancing the cause of women and has been silent about whether his party has any plans at all for the advancement of women, may I return him to his point about regional links? The Bill will apply also to candidates for the European Parliament. Can the hon. Gentleman define the piece of the infinitely larger European constituency with which any potential candidate would have to prove a specific relationship before selection?

Mr. Lansley: I should chide the hon. Lady. I am the last person who can be accused of being silent about what my party should do. Some months ago, before the Bill was presented to the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead and I set out from our personal perspective what we thought should be the position. I cannot say what my party will do. That will be decided by the board of the Conservative party, not by me. In due course my hon. Friend will no doubt chide the Minister who I am confident will not tell us what the Labour party will do using the powers under the Bill.

On the hon. Lady's substantive point, selection of candidates for the European Parliament would not be affected by the amendment. It would remain, as the Bill intends, entirely open for gender balance to be achieved in selection. The amendment makes it clear that the

"section applies to arrangements made by a registered political party . . . in respect of elections for a single representative for a geographical area".

We are indeed speaking about a specific geographical area, but the amendment refers to the election of a single representative for that area, whereas in all regions there are a number of Members of the European Parliament.

Llew Smith: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman understands how the twinning system worked in Wales

[Llew Smith]

for the election of candidates for the National Assembly. There could have been a situation in which someone had spent their entire political life in a particular constituency, held high office in the local council and achieved the overwhelming vote of that constituency, but still would not have been elected or put forward as a candidate because he or she was the wrong sex. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that that is acceptable under his amendment?

Mr. Lansley: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. There was some discussion in Committee about the twinning arrangement. Clearly, I have not participated in such an arrangement, as it has not been applied in our party. None the less, if the hon. Gentleman is looking to my amendment to remove the possibility to which he refers, I must say that I am not sure whether it would serve him. In the circumstances that he describes regarding a twinning process, men in the two constituencies would have had the opportunity for an assessment to be made of their specific personal circumstances and of their relationship with the geographical area in question. The simple fact that a larger number of members vote for a man would not necessarily convince a court that that should override the positive action measures that are being taken generally to deliver an outcome. There must be a subjective judgment about what is proportionate, and there is no way out of that.

My point is that it is disproportionate and unacceptable, prior to any assessment of whether a man can be considered, to apply to any constituency a bar on even assessing a man. In those circumstances, under all-women shortlists, a man would not get to a point at which members could vote for him at all. He would simply be excluded from consideration in individual constituencies. Those are the circumstances that the amendment is intended to prevent.

Julie Morgan: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman supports the principle of twinning in general. Certainly, my experience of twinning was different from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith). Throughout Wales as a whole, the proportion of women representatives achieved by twinning has been a big boost to Welsh politics, so I want to put it on record that the twinning arrangement has been good for Wales. I cannot understand, however, what he has got against the principle of dividing the seats in a region between men and women, which seems a very proportionate response to ensure that we have equal numbers of candidates.

Mr. Lansley: For the avoidance of doubt, let me say that the hon. Lady should interpret my remarks as meaning not that I am in favour of twinning, but that I would interpret my amendment as not precluding the possibility of twinning being one of the positive action measures that could be taken under the legislation. We know that the purpose of the legislation is permissive, but the question is what limitations the amendment would set upon that power. The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) rightly probed that issue and sought to identify the limits. It is precisely the situation that the hon. Lady described in her last point that I am setting out to try to prevent—a situation in which, in an arbitrary fashion, a given number of constituencies are told that somebody cannot be considered because he is a man, before any assessment has been made of the merits of male candidates who live in those areas. Those are the specific circumstances that I am trying to preclude.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): If I understand the hon. Gentleman correctly, he is contesting that the amendment is required to bring us into conformity with European legislation. If that is the case, however, it means that that European legislation exists and is binding, and that the amendment is otiose. I am also concerned about his suggestion that somebody's local connection is the key issue. The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) has a local connection, although it cannot be said to be more local because he talks about it all the time, and he used to have exactly the same degree of connection with Basildon. I am concerned that the amendment suggests that locality, rather than any other qualification, is appropriate for an assessment. I think that he is wrong about that.

Mr. Lansley: There are two points. First, on the latter point, the hon. Lady elevates the local connection as if it were the only part of the assessment. The assessment relates to specific personal circumstances, including a person's relationship with a geographical area. The point of focusing on that aspect is not that it is the connection that matters most. It is not necessarily that merit, but one of the lesser issues, that matters most. However, if it is important to individuals to be elected for a specific geographical area where they live, all-women shortlists could bar them arbitrarily. That is unacceptable.

The hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) should check the second point with Labour Front-Bench Members. I do not believe that the Minister will consider the amendment otiose simply because the equal treatment directive or the Human Rights Act 1998 will make the test of proportionality in the amendment redundant. I think that the Minister will argue otherwise.

The Minister's view may be wrong. I am not a lawyer, and perhaps I am the last person to judge precisely whether he is right, but I suspect that he is wrong. Given the merit of the argument and the undesirability of arbitrarily barring men from standing for constituencies where they live, it may be better to include the test in the Bill rather than leave the measure open to legal challenge, which will mean uncertainty and cost for the political parties that try to deal with it.

The hon. Member for Slough appeared to be under the misapprehension that the measure applies only to selecting parliamentary candidates. It also applies to other bodies, but not to the European Parliament because we are not elected in single-member constituencies. Single-member wards are common in local government. The residence qualification for a local authority is based on living not in the ward but in the local government area.

Whatever we believe about the desirability of a Member of Parliament's prior local connection with a constituency, it is incontrovertible that such a connection is important for local government candidates. Introducing all-women shortlists to create gender balance, but, in the process, saying to a man who lives in a specific village in, for example, my constituency, "You cannot stand for

election as district councillor because your ward will be used to achieve gender equality on our local council" is unacceptable.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I am not sure whether I heard the hon. Gentleman correctly, but he appeared to introduce an interesting variation on the definitions in the amendment. He said that a local government candidate, who seeks election for a single-member ward, would not necessarily have to live there, but would have to be resident in the local authority area. How does he justify that in the context of the amendment, which clearly does not allow for such an exception? It would provide that the relationship of a candidate who seeks election for a geographical area had to be

"with that specific geographical area".

Mr. Lansley: I am not talking about a legal qualification for selection. Local government and representation legislation provide that. One should be able to assess a candidate's merits. In the context of a local government election, the candidate's residence in the area will form a substantial part of the assessment. An assessment of a candidate's personal merits should also be made. That cannot be done if a political party imposes all-women shortlists on specific wards in a local authority area to try to achieve gender balance.

Joan Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman is beginning to confuse us all. He appears to place incredible emphasis on exactly where a male candidate lives. He asks why a man should not be able to stand in a specific area. What is the hon. Gentleman's motivation? He has absorbed the culture of the favoured son who serves on the council and is being prepared for a seat. That is the implication of his defence of the amendment.

5.30 pm

Mr. Lansley: I like to think that I am being generous in giving way, but at this point, rather than my being confusing, it is the hon. Lady who is deliberately confused, unless the Labour party is going to introduce all-men shortlists and debar women under this legislation. I am talking about men because, in reality, all-women shortlists are the measure that the Labour party appears to be contemplating.

If the Labour party is contemplating all-women shortlists in specific local authorities to secure gender balance, it might say that, in the election of a member representing a single-member ward, men should be debarred from standing in that ward. I want to enable the Minister to be clear about this. A man could, therefore, be debarred from standing in the ward in which he lived, even though he might meet the local authority's residence qualification and could therefore seek election in that local authority area, somewhere other than where he lived. That seems an absurdity.

It has been entertaining to test the resolution of Labour Members to pursue all-women shortlists, even under what appear to be untenable circumstances. They appear to be set on that course, even though it seems undesirable. The pursuit of equal treatment is important and necessary, and the Conservative party can and should achieve greater equality in its selection processes. We know, although Labour Members may not, that to do so by using overt discrimination against men, even in exceptional circumstances, is a denial of our democratic processes of parliamentary representation and of representation in local government.

This legislation should not be the way forward for political parties. Regardless of whether the measures would, in practice, be circumscribed by the courts in terms of a test of proportionality similar to the one that I have described, hon. Members should accept the amendment to demonstrate that they are willing to apply such a test to the measures used to deliver this worthwhile objective. I look for support in the House.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) for moving the amendment. I suspect that when he stood up to do so, he little thought that he would be on his feet for quite so long as he was because of the number of interventions that he took, especially from Labour Members. I found some of those interventions a little strange.

One of my hon. Friend's reasons for tabling the amendment is the importance of ensuring that whatever action is taken by political parties under the Bill—when it becomes an Act, as we assume that it will—it will be action that can be supported not only under this legislation, but under European Union legislation. As we have discussed in Committee, action taken by the Labour party is the most likely to be challenged, because the Labour party is the party most likely to move down the route of all-women shortlists, as opposed to the more proportionate attempts at positive action favoured by other political parties.

It is necessary to probe this issue because when we discussed the Bill on Second Reading, most of us expected political parties to be free, under the permissive nature of the Bill—which I entirely support—to introduce whatever positive action they chose to achieve the aim of getting more women selected and then elected to the House and to other elected bodies.

However, the Minister brought us up a little sharp, as did the Under-Secretary of State in Committee, with a number of references to the importance for political parties of seeking legal advice before taking action. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire quoted the Minister directly when he said that the Government expect political parties to take legal advice before proceeding. There was a considerable point in the Minister making those remarks and, I suspect, some feeling in respect of his own party because, as many hon. Members have said, if any action is to be challenged, it is most likely to be that of creating all-women shortlists. The party most likely to go down that route is the Labour party, so the Minister's party is most likely to be subject to a legal challenge and to require that advice.

I want to explore an aspect to which my hon. Friend referred but which has not been dealt with as explicitly as other aspects. It concerns the way in which the European Court of Justice has interpreted the law surrounding positive action. The Amsterdam treaty, which amended article 141(4) of the treaty of Rome, provides for positive action to be taken in circumstances where no gender balance exists in a particular area of representation. However, in interpreting the law in a number of cases,

[Mrs. Theresa May]

the European Court of Justice has tended to suggest that the positive action system should not be so rigid as to bar men totally from access to particular posts.

My hon. Friend made a valid point when he questioned the Minister on the differentiation between a post and selection for election as a representative on an elected body. I looked at cases that tested the original 1976 European Council directive. We should look not just at the Abrahamsson case, but at others such as the Kalanke *v.* Freie Hansestadt Bremen case—I apologise to the House for my pronunciation—in which the court ruled that

"on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment . . . as regards access to employment, vocation training and promotion, and working conditions precludes national rules such as those in the present case which, where candidates of different sexes shortlisted for promotion are equally qualified, automatically give priority to women in sectors where they are underrepresented".

In the Hellmut Marschall *v.* Land Nordrhein-Westfalen case, the court made specific reference to the phrase that my hon. Friend has put in amendments Nos. 4 and 3. It said :

"where there are fewer women than men at the level of the relevant post"—

the court was looking at public sector service—

"and both female and male candidates . . . are equally qualified . . . priority be given to promotion of female candidates"—

under various conditions—

"provided that:

in each individual case the rule provides for male candidates who are equally as qualified as the female candidates a guarantee that the candidatures will be the subject of an objective assessment which will take account of all criteria specific to the candidates".

That was again tested in the case of Georg Badeck and others *v.* Land of Hesse. The same phrase was used in the judgment:

"provided that that rule guarantees that candidatures are the subject of an objective assessment which takes account of the specific personal situations of all candidates".

The issue was tested again in the case that we tend to quote in this context because it was the most obvious challenge to positive action—the Abrahamsson case. It was held in that case that an automatic preference for an inferior candidate solely because of sex was precluded by the directive, and that application of article 141(4) of the treaty of Rome did not overturn that particular judgment.

As all those cases show, the issue of positive action cannot be addressed in isolation. The issue is set against the background of the need objectively to assess a candidate's specific qualifications and personal situation in relation to the positive action that is being sought. My hon. Friends the Members for South Cambridgeshire and for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) have therefore specifically included in amendments Nos. 4 and 3 the words

"specific personal situations of the candidates".

There were many interventions and much discussion on the issue of locality and whether a candidate should be required to live in a specific locality. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire made clear, and as anyone reading the amendment would see, the issue of a relationship with a specific geographical area may be encompassed by the "specific personal situations" mentioned in the amendments; it is not an exclusive requirement.

The distinction may deal with the point that the Minister made in his intervention on the legal qualifications to stand for local authority office and the requirement to live in a local authority geographical area as opposed to a specific ward in that local authority. Nevertheless, living in a specific ward may be part of the "specific personal situations" that could be taken into account in assessing the candidates.

Various hon. Members—including the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), in various interventions—have speculated on what the Conservative party will do. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire said, he and I are perhaps the two Conservative Members who least deserve to be challenged on the issue by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate because we have proposed to our party a positive way forward on the issue. Although it is, of course, for our party to choose which route to pursue, we have made positive proposals.

I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for South Cambridgeshire and for Fareham for tabling their amendments, which are intended to test the issue. Case law sends a message on the issue. If the legislation does not incorporate amendments to reflect that case law, it is possible that a political party—we assume that it will be the Labour party—that chooses all-women shortlists will find that its all-women shortlists are challenged. I apologise to hon. Members as I have not seen the reference, but I understand that Mr. Jepson, who took the Labour party to an industrial tribunal when it first introduced all-women shortlists, has said that he would consider challenging, on the basis that I have outlined, the party's decision to reintroduce such lists.

In a sense, therefore, the amendments have been introduced to help the Government to operate the legislation and to address the issue of what positive action the political parties can take. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response. If he is concerned about the possibility of legal challenge to certain types of positive action, as there most likely will be to all-women shortlists, he should very carefully consider accepting the amendments. They attempt specifically to ensure that the legislation clarifies the types of allowable positive action, thereby reducing the likelihood of legal challenge to political parties that try to take such action.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) has done us a favour by moving amendment No. 4, if only because this debate allows us to test on the Floor of the House some of the proportionality issues that we did not fully explore in Committee. He described his amendments as a pre-emptive test of proportionality. I think that such a test is valuable and I hope that the Minister will respond to it.

It is slightly ironic that, in legislation that is short, simple and permissive, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire wanted to be more restrictive. Having described the Labour party as much more centralist and directive, he tried to represent the Conservative party as more decentralised and liberal. That is not a description that I recognise, having fought the Conservative party for over 30 years.

Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman has done us a service by raising the overall issue of proportionality. As was constantly made clear in Committee, it must be true that

however permissive the legislation is in allowing the parties to adopt their own response to the situation that they face, they must do that in a proportionate manner. The Minister was constantly telling us that.

As both earlier speakers said, at several points in Committee—and, indeed, on Second Reading—I was at pains to point out that there was already evidence suggesting that the Bill was likely to cause more legal wrangling rather than less. Knowing the sort of expense that the parties might have to incur, I felt that the House had a responsibility to try and pass legislation that was, as far as possible, invulnerable to excessive legal challenge and interpretation. The issue of proportionality is clearly the key issue in terms of interpretation.

5.45 pm

My normal response to legislation is this: the simpler it is, the less likely the lawyers are to get at it. That is why I have a real problem with the amendment. For reasons with which the Minister may, I suspect, agree, it is likely to cause more trouble rather than less. The references to legal advice made this afternoon and in Committee are entirely appropriate—and, as I said on Second Reading, Labour is likely to be first in the dock. Although the party may have access to a certain distinguished lawyer at No. 10 Downing street, which may give it preferential terms, the process will still be expensive. Nevertheless, I think it right for us to consider the question of balance.

We should pay particular tribute to all the preparatory work done by Meg Russell and the constitution unit. Meg Russell's 2000 and 2001 reports set out, in effect, the options open to Parliament and Government. I am struck by the fact that she even anticipated this issue in dealing with the Badeck case, mentioned by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). She stated succinctly—how beneficial it is to learn of the feminine attitude to these matters:

"This case found that national rules which gave priority to women when men and women had equal qualifications were acceptable in areas where women were under-represented provided that the rules guaranteed an objective assessment taking account of the specific personal situations of the candidates."

The amendment is very much a response to that.

The Minister has a problem. He must try, either here or in the other place, to give some assurances that his party—and perhaps others, in due course—will not run into difficulties. I think that we were led down a false path, and that the issue of locality was a red herring. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire did not bring out as vividly and as succinctly as the hon. Member for Maidenhead the inclusivity, as opposed to exclusivity. I happen to live about 500 yd outside my constituency, but I have spent all my adult life in Cornwall. Indeed, where I live used to be in my constituency before the boundary commission came along and moved the boundary. Does that still give me a geographical connection?

I feel that the amendment lays too much stress on that issue; there may well be others just as important. For that reason, I suspect that, in due course, we shall find that the amendment does not really achieve what we wish to achieve. That, however, does not absolve the Minister of his responsibility to deal with a specific problem that his party and, no doubt, others may face. I hope that he will give us reassuring answers.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I support the amendment, which, indeed, is in my name as well as that of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley).

As was established in Committee, there is widespread support for the Bill's principles, and its attempt to improve women's representation in Parliament. It is important that we get it right, however. The amendment reflects the series of cases, referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), that established the basis on which positive action could be taken.

One of the cases that gave rise to the Bill was Mr. Jepson's legal action against the Labour Party. In Committee, there was much discussion about whether a legal challenge to the Bill could succeed. In this month's edition of *The Parliamentary Monitor*, Mr. Jepson raises his head again, saying that he believes the Bill will

"collapse if it could be proved it is a vehicle through which to introduce controversial all-women shortlists. He dismissed government claims that there will be no legal problem providing 'positive action is proportionate to the issue'."

He went on to say:

"Excluding all men or all women has no element of proportionality. The government is claiming this is positive action when it is actually positive discrimination. There is a difference—positive action, such as advertising in women's magazines, is legal—whilst positive discrimination is not."

Clearly, those issues will be dealt with in a court of law if he challenges the Bill, but it is important to introduce some proportionality now.

I want to refer to my experience in finding a seat before the general election and the issue of people with a local link. Contrary to what Government Members have said about their experience of being selected, I know that some people put forward their name to represent solely one seat, and no other. When I was selected to fight Fareham, there were people who wanted to represent only that seat.

In taking any measure to increase the representation of women in Parliament, we should be careful not to exclude people who want to represent the seat in which they live or for which they have another criterion that makes them especially suitable. In my area, someone with a military background might be highly appropriate to stand in seats in Portsmouth or Gosport, but might be precluded from doing so by the adoption of a particular kind of shortlist.

We need to have an objective assessment of who should be considered for adoption as a candidate and there should be guidance in law to ensure that parties can frame their procedures to take proportionality into account. It is not Parliament's job to frame laws that will lead people to incur unnecessary legal costs because the drafting has not taken into account the full range of circumstances that might exist and the framework of recent European Union legislation. The cases referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead set a clear trend: we must consider objectively the merits of all candidates when taking positive action, and we should not prefer a female candidate if all the other criteria match. All candidates should be able to set out the criteria that make them suitable to represent a seat.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I apologise for coming in late, but I have found the arguments fascinating and that is why I have stayed. I understand the reasons for the amendment, but are the hon. Gentleman and his

[David Winnick]

colleagues saying that preference should be given to local people? It seems that one of the factors in the amendment is that those with local links would be given preference, and I would have thought that most undesirable.

Mr. Hoban: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would have benefited from being here to listen to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire, who gave a clear exposition of the case. We are saying that, in any attempt to redress the gender imbalance in the House, we should not prefer female candidates in all cases, and that where candidates are ostensibly of equal merit, we should think about objective criteria that make one of them more particularly suited for the seat. That is not solely limited to the fact that someone is local, but that may be a factor. We are talking about selecting a candidate for one seat, not a group of seats, and we need to be proportionate in our response.

Mr. Lansley: Selection for parliamentary constituencies often consists of national candidates and local candidates. We do not say that local candidates should be given preference: the issue is whether they are to be debarred from being considered.

Mr. Hoban: Indeed. We should certainly not, by any measures that we take to change the composition of the House, debar local candidates from selection. That is the crucial point of the amendment. The Minister should take it seriously, to ensure that the Bill is not subject to legal challenge once it is enacted.

Glenda Jackson: I felt I must speak against the amendment and Opposition Members' arguments, which have demonstrated a failure to remember why the Bill was introduced in the first place. It is not dedicated to absolute equality of opportunity: it is designed specifically to redress the gross inequalities that prevail against women who believe that they have a part to play in the political life of their country and find that the selection processes—even before we get to a decision by the electorate—preclude them from stating their case.

It took the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire a long time to get around to the basis for the amendment, which is to stop the Labour party adopting all-women shortlists, but that is something for the Labour party to decide. If we waited for the proposals that the Conservative party has been pushed kicking and screaming into acknowledging that it has to introduce in relation to the selection of women, there would be even fewer women on these green Benches.

There is something fundamentally confused in the thinking on this subject, as we saw when the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) referred to the necessity of selecting candidates with a military background for constituencies close to his. Such thinking may be replicated throughout the House. The obvious response is that he does not seem to realise that there are women in our armed forces—some in positions of great responsibility. The assumption is that if it is military it is automatically masculine.

Mrs. May: If the Bill is enacted as it stands and the Labour party adopts all-women shortlists that are successfully legally challenged, what will the hon. Lady say to Ministers in her Government?

Glenda Jackson: I can only say to the hon. Lady that I was selected from an all-women shortlist, before the idea of making that part and parcel of my party's structure was voted for overwhelmingly at two successive party conferences. There was no challenge. It was a decision for the individual constituency party.

In my experience, when I was privileged to campaign in seats where women had been selected under our all-women shortlist procedure, admittedly the individual constituency parties were somewhat chagrined in the first instance that they had been chosen for this ground-breaking development in equality for women, but their subsequent response, without exception, was that they had never seen candidates of such quality and their real difficulty was in selecting only one from four excellent women. With one exception, I believe, all the women selected to fight the election in 1997 were returned in 2001, because they are excellent.

It is interesting that the hon. Lady automatically presupposes that a legal challenge would win. I see no reason to suppose that, but if it did, presumably my party, along with others, would have to exercise a little more imagination. The basic issue is that the Bill was introduced specifically—with, up to now, the unanimous support of all political parties—to redress the gross inequities that still work against women who want to participate in the political life of this country, be it on local or central Government level. That is why, if the amendment is pressed to a vote, I shall certainly oppose it.

6 pm

Mr. Raynsford: We have had a long and somewhat convoluted debate on what has been almost universally recognised as a short and simple Bill. The danger is that we will lose touch with the fundamental issue and we would perhaps have run that risk but for the appropriate speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) that concluded the debate, in which she rightly drew attention to the main reason for the introduction of the Bill—to remedy the chronic under-representation of women in all our elected bodies, including the House, local government, the European Parliament and, to a lesser extent, the devolved Assemblies and the Scottish Parliament.

The fact that the imbalance is less in the devolved bodies is an interesting reflection of the fact that when the parties were selecting candidates for those bodies, the issue of gender balance was on the agenda and specific positive measures were taken to try to ensure a more balanced outcome than happens at Westminster. In terms of the representation of the parties at Westminster. the fact that we have a significantly larger—but by no means adequate—representation of women on the Labour Benches is the result of the measures that were adopted by our party before the Jepson judgment. Those measures allowed a substantial increase in 1997 from the position of the early 1990s. As I commented in Committee, the fact that post-Jepson it was not possible for similar measures to be used by the Labour party when selecting candidates for the 2001 general election meant that the

representation of women on the Government Benches was marginally less than before. The momentum had been lost.

The issue is crucial and one that we cannot avoid. It requires urgent action, and the Bill will achieve that. When the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) moved his amendment, he said that the Bill risked reintroducing the uncertainties caused by the Jepson judgment, but he is wrong on that point. The Bill is designed to remove the uncertainties caused by Jepson, which, as I have already conceded, led our party not to adopt similar measures—to those we had adopted before 1997—before the 2001 general election. It is precisely for that reason that we have framed the Bill so as to make it possible for political parties to adopt measures that will make it more likely that the outcome—in Committee, we focused on outcomes rather than on processes—would be a significant increase in the proportion of women candidates elected. The Bill would achieve that aim, and the amendment would not be helpful. Indeed, it would be disadvantageous in several ways.

Before I deal with the disadvantages of the amendment, I shall discuss the legal issues which rightly pre-occupied many of the hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. I am aware that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire drew extensively on the Abrahamsson case in the way he presented his case and in the very wording of his amendment. I remind the House that that case was brought in relation to the appointment of a candidate to an academic post. Indeed, all the cases from the European Court that have been cited in the course of the debate have all been related to the appointment of candidates, not the selection of candidates for election. As I stated on Second Reading and in Committee, in our view there is a clear distinction, in terms of European law, between the appointment process and the selection of candidates for election. Our view is that the latter does not fall within the ambit of Community law.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) referred, appropriately, to the report, "Making It Happen", by Meg Russell from the constitution unit. The report, which relates to the Bill, makes a relevant and well expressed point that:

"it is extremely unlikely that the European Court of Justice would (as UK courts have done with respect to the Sex Discrimination Act) outlaw positive action for women in the party selection process by ruling that it is covered by employment provisions. The European Commission has twice stated a clear belief that selection of candidates by political parties does not fall within the scope of the Equal Treatment Directive, in answer to questions in the European Parliament. If the court were to rule that EU law extended to candidate selection by parties, this would create chaos for those many parties all around the EU which use quota systems. As described in Appendix 2, strict positive action measures are now even enshrined in domestic law in some states such as France. In practice it would be politically impossible for the European Court of Justice to overturn these systems, and it can easily be argued that selection of candidates for political office is outside the competence of the EU."

In the course of our considerations we have obviously referred to people expert in such matters, and those comments are apposite and should guide our judgments.

If we were to accept the amendment, we would introduce a limitation into the Bill that is unnecessary and which would limit political parties' freedom to decide for themselves how they wish to use the provisions of the Bill. We have stressed throughout that the Bill is permissive and the amendment strays away from that by seeking to dictate limits on the kind of measures that could be considered by political parties. It is not appropriate for the House to impose such specific restrictions on the way in which political parties order their selection criteria. It is right that the legislation should allow political parties to adopt measures that seek to meet the objective for which the Bill was introduced, but it is not right to prescribe in detail the measures that parties can adopt.

Mr. Lansley: The Minister has sought to reassure us about the application of European Union law, but he has not touched on the question of the application of the Human Rights Act 1998 and whether the argument about objective and reasonable justification for the measures, as a departure from what would otherwise be equal treatment, might apply.

Mr. Raynsford: As the hon. Gentleman knows well, we covered that ground on Second Reading and in Committee, but I shall present the issues once again. The first principle is that the concept of candidate selection differs from the concept of appointment of a candidate to a post of paid employment. I have already made that distinction. The second issue, which we have considered in some detail, is one of proportionality. Measures that seek to remedy a wrong must be proportionate to the wrong that they seek to redress. We have considered that principle and the Bill contains a sunset clause so that the impact of any measures that might be introduced under the Bill can be reviewed at a future date when the imbalance that exists in all elected bodies in this country will have been reduced, if not eliminated. I ask the hon. Gentleman to bear in mind that issue of proportionality when he considers the issue of human rights.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, I have made it clear that I do not intend to be drawn into the respective merits of specific measures that political parties might take under the provisions of the Bill. Parties themselves must have their own discussions, and decide internally which measures, if any, they wish to use. It was a little rich of the hon. Gentleman to chide me on the fact that I would not suggest what measures the Labour party would introduce when he made it clear that he could not say what measures the Conservative party would introduce, even though he and the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) have been almost lone voices in their party in pressing for positive measures to further the cause of women's representation.

Mr. Lansley: The record will show that I was not chiding the Minister, but predicting that he would not be able to say what action the Labour party would take. Indeed, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) chided me for not being able to say what the Conservative party would do. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and I have aired our views and if the chairman of the Labour party were here, we might chide him. As he often shares the Front Bench with the Minister, perhaps he will have something to offer us.

Mr. Raynsford: I have no doubt whatsoever that the Minister without Portfolio, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), the chairman

[Mr. Raynsford]

of the Labour party, will indeed want to consider the scope that the Bill, as and when it is enacted, offers our party and all other parties, and introduce appropriate measures to increase further the representation of women here and in other elected assemblies and local authorities where the Labour party puts up candidates.

I will reiterate: our view is that the candidate selection process falls outside the ambit of EU law and, as such, the equal treatment directive does not impose limits on the measures that political parties can consider. With that in mind, I firmly believe that the Bill should remain permissive and set no limits.

The amendment, apart from potentially confusing a Bill which is essentially simple, risks making it much more prescriptive, and we disagree with that.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire also referred to geographical areas. I agree with the hon. Member for North Cornwall that that was something of a red herring. Although we would not want to underestimate the fact that people may wish to select a candidate who has a local link, that is only one of many factors that parties will want to take into account. The hon. Gentleman made the very valid point that he does not fall within the remit of the amendment because he lives just outside his constituency.

Mr. Lansley: I am sorry to be tedious and intervene again, but both the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and the Minister are wrong. The amendment is perfectly clear. It refers to a connection with a specific geographical area; it does not state that candidates would have to live within a specific geographical area and it is only one factor that might be taken into account in considering a candidate's personal situation. I would be grateful if the Minister would not misrepresent the amendment even if he objects to it.

Mr. Raynsford: I was simply picking up the points that were forcefully argued by the hon. Gentleman. Many of his hon. Friends referred to the merits of parties being able to select people who lived within certain areas. If he is now saying that his amendment would not achieve that effect, what is its purpose if it would allow someone to use the obscure reference that they happened to have passed through the constituency of South Cambridgeshire in 1937 to claim a local connection with the area?

Mr. Tyler *rose—*

Mrs. May *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall give way first to the hon. Member for North Cornwall and then I shall give way to the hon. Member for Maidenhead.

Mr. Tyler: In order to avoid further misrepresentation and confusion, let me say that I understood the point that the hon. Gentleman was making. However, this discussion illustrates how dangerous it would be to go down this path. It happens that my ancestors arrived in Cornwall in 1066. Is that a connection with the constituency?

6.15 pm

David Winnick: Can the hon. Gentleman prove it?

Mr. Tyler: Yes, I can. Is it more significant than the fact that I was not born there and I live 500 yd outside my constituency? Adding extra burdens to legislation will inevitably lead us to such confusion while keeping it simple will, I hope, keep the legal bills cheap.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Member for North Cornwall, who has told us a most interesting fact about his own ancestry, makes an extremely sound point and I could not put it better. The amendment would add an unnecessary complication which would add all sorts of arguments over interpretation and ambiguity to what is in essence a simple Bill.

Mrs. May: I merely wish to point out yet again that the Minister's suggestion that the amendment stands or falls on the issue of locality and whether somebody has a relationship with a specific geographical area is a complete misreading and misinterpretation of the amendment. As he has already acknowledged, the amendment is specific in that it would introduce into the Bill wording that has been used in the European Court of Justice cases which specifically say that positive action can be taken in certain areas, provided that there is an assessment that takes account of a specific personal situation. That is what matters. A relationship with a specific geographical area is merely one factor that could, but would not necessarily, be included in that assessment.

Mr. Raynsford: I understand clearly what the hon. Lady is saying, but I put it to her ever so gently that Conservative Members have placed considerable emphasis on the geographic issue and that is why I have tried to respond to it. I take her point that the wording relates to cases that have been heard before the European Court of Justice, but I reiterate that all those cases related to employment. It is our contention that employment is a different issue from candidate selection as quite different criteria apply. That is the key point.

The amendment also refers to personal situations. We had an interesting debate in Committee in which the hon. Lady quite rightly and very graphically described the kind of problems that arise in the selection process when women are asked inappropriate questions.

Introducing the concept of personal situations risks legitimising exactly the undesirable questions that she was at pains to criticise in Committee. If it is legitimate to delve into personal situations, how can it be wrong for parties to start asking awkward questions about women's availability to carry out certain functions or the impact of family responsibilities on their ability to discharge their parliamentary responsibilities or other such entirely inappropriate questions which the hon. Lady and other members of the Committee said made it very difficult in some cases for women candidates to be selected?

I am afraid that the introduction of this concept into the Bill would tend to legitimise a process that we all accept is undesirable.

Mr. Lansley: I am afraid that this is the Minister's most bogus argument so far. By switching off the application of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Bill

opens the door to such a possibility which the Minister says should not be happening. In any case, the procedures applied by political parties should avoid that.

Mr. Raynsford: I have to put it to the hon. Gentleman, however, that if he put that concept into the Bill, it would be impossible to prevent the kind of malpractice that he and his colleagues rightly criticised in Committee.

For the following reasons, therefore, I believe that the amendment is inappropriate. It is unnecessary because it misconstrues the impact of the cases in the European Court of Justice that hon. Members have quoted. It unnecessarily complicates a Bill which is clear and simple and it introduces potentially undesirable elements which could work against the Bill's very purpose. We do not believe the amendment is necessary or desirable and I trust that the House will reject it.

Mr. Lansley: I take entirely the Minister's point that complicating the Bill should be avoided in all possible circumstances. If it can be simple, so much the better, therefore in this context everything rests on the validity or otherwise of his assertion that the equal treatment directive and the application of European Union law will not impact on candidate selection and that, effectively, EU law will not apply to the activities of political parties. I hope that he is right. It would be reasonable for the Government, and subsequently political parties, to try to sustain that in courts and to try to keep the EU out of the legislation. I suspect that he will be wrong and that, as in so many of these issues, European legislation will creep in.

I do not accept the Minister's other arguments about introducing undesirable features. The amendment would have done precisely what it was intended to do and in a targeted fashion, but as the Labour party appears set on allowing itself the opportunity of all-women short lists, there is little benefit in pressing the amendment to a Division. As the hon. Member for North Cornwall was generous enough to say, I hope that by raising the issues in this way, we will at least have exposed to the House and perhaps to a wider public that what might otherwise seem a simple Bill raises important issues that people should examine carefully. They should understand the nature of what is intended by the legislation. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

6.20 pm

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We have heard some interesting and useful contributions during the debate, and there were many more in Committee. Women make up just under one fifth of hon. Members, and we all agree that that is not acceptable in 2001.

The under-representation of women in politics at all levels requires urgent attention. Political parties must ask themselves why so few women successfully come through the selection process.

Recent research by the Fawcett Society confirms that women face discrimination in the selection process. I shall not go into detail, as we heard enough evidence in previous debates. The lack of women in politics, however, deprives our political processes of many important contributions; women have much to contribute in a huge variety of ways. They are grossly under-represented in the House, as they are to a lesser extent in other elected bodies, and all those bodies are the poorer.

Since 1996, when the employment tribunal in the Jepson case ruled that the Labour party policy of all-women shortlists was illegal, parties have been wary of using positive measures to reduce gender inequality. The Bill is designed to remedy that problem and to give parties the confidence to use positive measures again.

I repeat that the Government believe that all political parties must decide for themselves how to make use of this permissive Bill. We believe that it would be prudent for all parties to take legal advice about the measures that they propose to adopt before they put them into practice. That is not a sign that we lack confidence in the Bill. Offering that advice is a measure of the Government's prudence, and I hope that it will be accepted in that spirit.

Political parties will have different views about how best to increase women's representation. The Bill gives them the freedom to decide the right way to proceed, but they must take responsibility for their decisions.

I am delighted that there is broad commitment to the Bill's principles. Contributions to the Bill's consideration have been constructive, and its central tenet has not been questioned. No one doubts that something desperately needs to be done to reduce the imbalance in the numbers of men and women elected.

I hope that the Bill will redress a fundamental imbalance and go some way towards making our democracy more representative, effective and reflective of the population at large. In the end, however, that will depend on outcome and what happens at the ballot box. We shall be able to judge the Bill's success only when we see what happens in elections to this House, local government, the European Parliament and the devolved Assemblies in the future.

I hope that the measures taken by all political parties will increase substantially the number of women candidates, and that the electorate as a result will be in a position to elect many more women to Parliament and other elected assemblies in this country.

I commend the Bill to the House.

6.24 pm

Mrs. May: I shall be brief, as we have already heard many contributions.

I repeat that the official Opposition support the Bill's aim, which is to get more women elected to Parliament and to other elected bodies. We also support the fact that the Bill is permissive, and allows political parties to make their own judgments about the action that they should take to ensure that more women are selected, and then elected. In an earlier debate, the Minister rightly said that we were interested in more than the process of selection, and that the outcome of the Bill's enactment would be that more women would be elected to representative positions in elected bodies.

The Minister rightly said that all political parties must ask themselves why so few women become elected representatives. We in the Conservative party have been doing just that. We are very aware that there are very few women on the Conservative Benches, and that our party must act to improve that.

[Mrs. May]

Women must be encouraged to see election to this House as a career that is open for them to pursue. Showing that political parties are serious about enabling women to be elected to the House is an important part of the process of encouraging women to come forward for selection in the first place. If women outside do not see a significant number of women in the House, they will consider that the job is not for them, or that they will not succeed at it. If that is what they feel, they will ask why they should bother to go through the hassle and possibly even the trauma of a selection process that ends only in rejection.

I pay tribute to all the women in my party who put themselves forward for election and go through that selection process. Many of them would make excellent Members of Parliament if they could succeed in getting elected. We support the Bill and want there to be more women in the House, but not for any tokenistic reason. We support it because it will enable us to take the positive action of our choice to ensure that women of talent—who would make a good contribution to the House and represent their constituencies well—are able to strengthen Parliament and improve our debates and our discussion of legislation. It is important therefore that we ensure that the Bill is allowed to proceed.

The Minister said that many women feel discriminated against in the current selection processes. The MORI report on equal opportunities interviewed 400 female candidates, and four out of every 10 said that party selection committees favoured men over women. We want candidates in the future to be selected on their merits, and not because of their gender.

I was interested in what my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) said earlier, when he talked about the suitability of individuals for particular constituencies. I know that the actions of political parties are not a matter for the House, but I contend that my party—and I suspect others—needs to adopt a more professional approach to selecting candidates. Such an approach should take proper account of the skills needed by Members of Parliament, or by members of the other elected bodies to which the Bill applies. A more professional approach in that respect would also help constituencies.

The job of a Member of Parliament has changed over the years, and political parties should reflect that change in their selection processes. We must recognise the different abilities that hon. Members need today, compared to what was required in the 1950s, or in earlier centuries.

The Opposition support the Bill. It is important that women are given a proper opportunity to be selected to stand as candidates in the name of political parties and to gain election to the House. Women should not be debarred, effectively, from election to the House because the selection process discriminates against them.

The Bill will enable each party to make its own judgment about what positive action to take. The Bill is permissive, and I welcome that. I support the aim of the Bill, which is to ensure that more women are elected to this House and to other representative bodies.

6.30 pm

Joan Ruddock: This is a night for real celebration, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister wholeheartedly on bringing forward the Bill and on having conducted our proceedings in such a helpful and consensual way.

I have a particular interest in this matter because I was once a Minister with responsibility for women. At the time, there was considerable controversy over all-women shortlists, which were defeated by the tribunal judgment. Sadly, without a challenge—although I had hoped for one—the decision went against such shortlists. I was certain that our political party would return to type.

There was also the difficulty of a possible challenge over twinning in Wales and Scotland in selecting candidates for the devolved Assembly and Parliament. Fortunately, with a great deal of pressure from Labour Members, particularly our colleagues in Scotland and Wales, those measures were passed. The all-women shortlists adopted by the Labour party for the 1997 elections and for the devolved Parliament and Assembly in the twinning procedure were hugely successful, not only in bringing greater numbers of women into our elected bodies but in bringing women's views and contributions to those legislatures in ways that had never been seen before.

Sadly, many people regarded the presence of a greater number of women in this House as a means by which to totally transform it. That was never possible, but perhaps some of the aspirations that were dashed led to people believing that female Labour Members had not made as big a contribution as had been expected. The fact is that the women who came through the all-women shortlists have proved themselves to be superb contributors to the House and very popular in their constituencies. It has been pointed out that, with one exception, they were all returned at the last election. There can be no doubt about the worth of bringing women into this Parliament through the mechanisms that we have adopted.

As I said, we were certain that the party would return to type. That is what happened in the selections that preceded the elections to this House in 2001. We must remember that, and accept that it can only mean that there is deep prejudice in the selection of candidates for elected office. That discrimination is against women and, of course, people from ethnic minorities. It is true of all parties. Only mechanisms such as those in the Bill will change that pattern of behaviour.

For those parties that have not had the courage of ours, the challenge, as my right hon. Friend the Minister has said, is to find mechanisms that can produce the appropriate outcomes. Nothing that we have heard so far in our debates has led me to believe that, in selections for local government and Westminster, other parties have in mind mechanisms that will deliver. If we fail to deliver in introducing mechanisms that lead to proper outcomes, we will continue to have an extreme democratic deficit in this place.

More than 80 per cent. of our Members are men. That cannot be effective representation. There are two ways in which groups can be represented—one is to have their own Members speaking for them, the other is to have Members speaking on their behalf. I know which option women would prefer, and I know which is most effective. If I can say that for my gender, I am quite sure that it is even more true for people of ethnic minority backgrounds.

The time is right. This is the 21st century, and we have to produce a Parliament that better reflects our population. That can be done only if our political parties enthusiastically grasp what I hope will become an Act and thereby offer them, and us, the opportunity, once and for all, to begin positively on the road that will end the democratic deficit on gender. Furthermore, although there is no such provision in the Bill, we must also deal with the selection of people from ethnic minorities.

Again, I congratulate my right hon. Friend, who looks as though he might want to intervene. No, he is just encouraging me and listening with attention, for which I am grateful.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) who, along with a number of her female colleagues, has made serious attempts to change the culture in the Conservative party. That change is long overdue and difficult to make, and I congratulate her on her efforts.

This is an historic occasion. I hope that the Bill will be very speedy in its passage through the other place so that it becomes an Act in time for the new selections in our political parties.

6.37 pm

Mr. Tyler: I, too, congratulate Ministers on introducing the Bill. To echo the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock), the Bill also has a number of godmothers, including the hon. Lady herself, and we thank them.

Let me follow the hon. Lady by putting this in historical perspective. It has taken an awfully long time just to get this far. It is important to remember that women got the vote as long ago as 1918, when the first woman Member was elected to this House. It took until 1928, of course, for the restrictions that had previously been imposed to be removed. Until then, a woman had to be over 30, a householder, or wife of a householder—that must have stuck in the gullet—a university graduate, or rent property of a certain value.

The Minister and other members who served on the Committee may recall that my mother appeared briefly in our proceedings. She is celebrating her birthday today, and I am not there to assist. She had to wait until she was 27, in 1928, to involve herself fully in the political process. Before then, she drove cars at Cornish elections and got excited about them, but she could not take part. Therefore, it is important to bring a sense of humility to the legislation. We are taking a step forward but, my goodness, it has taken a long time.

We discussed outcomes on Second Reading and in Committee. We cannot be satisfied with the legislation if it does not produce results. That is why there is a responsibility not just on the parties to look at the legislation carefully but on the Government of the day and the House to monitor the success with which it is applied. I have frequently drawn the Government's attention to the fact that legal advice will undoubtedly be required by all parties. The Government owe it to the House, quite apart from individual parties, to ensure that the legislation is effective. That is why there is a role for Government legal advice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton), who took part in proceedings on Second Reading and in Committee, is unable to be here because this debate coincides with our party meeting. I think that she would agree that women Members bring to the House an ability to be rather more succinct, sensitive and, occasionally, consensual than their male counterparts. I hope that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) will not take offence when I say that his 40-minute contribution this afternoon was admirably summarised in about eight minutes by his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) from the Front Bench. Therefore, I intend to be as brief as I can to show that we all have a feminine side.

The progress of the Bill in Committee has been a model of how best to exchange views in a consensual rather than a confrontational manner, and that is partly a result of the fact that the legislation is more permissive and less prescriptive. We need to study the way in which legislation is applied and it will stand the test of time better if it has that feature.

The Bill also contains a sunset clause, which Members on both sides of the Committee recognised as being of real value. It will concentrate the mind of Parliament to look again to see whether the outcomes have been achieved, rather than simply letting the legislation sit on the shelf gathering dust and saying, "Oh well, it doesn't really matter if we're not getting anywhere."

My leg has been pulled at various stages about the way in which the Liberal Democrat party conference approached this issue. Those who want to read the motion that was passed will find it in the Library guide to those proceedings; they will not then have to contribute to party funds by buying a conference report.

Clearly, my colleagues were apprehensive about going so far as to put in place a system before the legislation was enacted, but we do not rule out the need for action in our party. Goodness knows, we are not proud of the fact that we have not succeeded in getting a reasonable proportion of women Members of Parliament—only 10 per cent.

We have been much more successful in local government, and the Minister will recall that at the European elections we put in place positive action—zipping, as it was then called—with the triumphant conclusion that we elected five Liberal Democrat Members of the European Parliament of each sex. We achieved total equality. Since then, I am afraid, a number of other parties have lost Members to us and we have lost that equality, but that is the name of the game and I cannot complain. We recognise that this permissive legislation may well be required in our party and we welcome the fact that it has been left in a format that will enable us to make maximum use of it.

There was only one element of the contribution of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford that I would not want to endorse. I would look at the matter from a slightly different angle. It is very important that we all recognise that the Bill is not intended to favour women or to help them; it is intended to favour Parliament and the nation. I do not say that all women want women to represent them, but if Parliament is not fully representative of the majority

[Mr. Tyler]

of the population and there are clear obstacles to effective representation of all parts of the community, that is a weakness.

Joan Ruddock *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: I am about to complete my speech, if the hon. Lady will forgive me. I want to be succinct and, in this respect, more female than male.

Parliament as a whole will benefit from the way in which the legislation rolls out and the parties respond to it. As the hon. Lady said, there is a democratic deficit, but that is not a gender issue as such; it is a parliamentary issue. This Parliament is weakened by the fact that it is not as representative as it should be of all the community that we serve.

6.43 pm

Julie Morgan: Thank you for calling me to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was pleased to be a member of the short Standing Committee and by the all-party support for the Bill.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock), I think that this is a day to rejoice. Eventually, this legislation will transform politics in this House, so it is a historic day.

I am glad that all the political parties have woken up to the fact that it is beneficial to have women in Parliament and at all levels of government to ensure, as the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said, that our laws are better. That is the crucial point. We need women here to ensure that our laws are fully informed by different sections of the population. That is the ultimate end. We need women if we are to make better laws and we are taking a big step towards that goal today. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government on leading us so ably through the Standing Committee debates and this debate today.

When we have resolved this issue, I would also support measures to tackle the under-representation of black and ethnic minority members at all levels of government. The National Assembly for Wales has no black or ethnic minority Members. That is the necessary next stage after this legislation.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) referred to the article in *The Parliamentary Monitor* about Dr. Peter Jepson, who challenged the Labour party's all-women shortlists in 1996, in which he said that if Labour proceeded with such shortlists he would put himself forward as a candidate in an all-women shortlist seat. That would paint an interesting picture in Wales—someone putting himself forward for such a seat—as I think that we may well adopt all-women shortlists. I am mystified by Dr. Jepson's attitude. He seems to want deliberately to wreck the plans of the party to achieve fair representation.

It is interesting to think of all the women who were excluded from all-male shortlists for so many years. They found other ways to contribute to the community and Government, in all the different ways that women do contribute. We should remember the all-male shortlists that existed for so many years. On Second Reading, I said that in Wales we have only had seven women MPs since 1918. We cannot get away from those facts, which is why I am so pleased that the Bill is proceeding today; I am glad that all the parties support it.

It is right for the legislation to be permissive. Now, it is up to all of us to sort out this problem in our parties. I think that there is no option other than all-women shortlists or twinning, but the latter is difficult unless one is setting up a new type of legislature.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I visited Stockholm city council recently, which has just over 100 members, 51 of whom happen to be women. I asked what they had done to achieve that and was told that they had done nothing: it had happened spontaneously. Does the hon. Lady agree that we have a long way to go with our national psyche and our understanding of equal opportunities and gender equality—but, happily, not in Upminster?

Julie Morgan: I happily agree with the hon. Lady. Many systems used in the Scandinavian countries are of enormous benefit to women, for example the child care there, which I studied with the Welsh Affairs Committee. Many aspects of their societies are conducive to allowing women to progress. We need developments in all such areas too. The Bill alone will not achieve the representation of women that we want. We must tackle many other issues. For example, recent surveys have shown that women find it expensive to stand as candidates for Parliament. It costs a lot of money to put oneself forward to be selected. We must consider that issue as well as child care.

This Bill is a good step forward, but it is only a step and there is a long way to go. It is up to individual parties to sort out where we go from here.

6.48 pm

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I once more declare my interest as vice-chair of the British Council, which does a lot to promote and involve women in government throughout the world, and chair of a not-for-profit practice of headhunters, where much of my work involves finding talented women and encouraging them to put their names forward.

In congratulating the House on reaching a conclusion, I must confess to an on-going note of disquiet, and I say that with some regret. I warmly commend my hon. Friends the Members for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) and many others. They all know that, shortly after the 1997 election, I produced a paper on what the Conservative party should do to secure the election of more women Members of Parliament. I did so not because I thought it a matter of human rights and equality, but out of enlightened self-interest. It is clear that women are popular with the electorate. Many women have been chosen at by-elections, as I was, when selection committees think not, "Who is the favoured son?" but "Who is likely to win in difficult circumstances?". My message is: "If you want to win, choose a woman".

Mr. Tyler: Has the right hon. Lady noted the gender of the candidates in the current Ipswich by-election?

Virginia Bottomley: I have not, but I have noticed that, today, no woman Liberal Democrat MP has been in the

Chamber during our debates on the measure—nor, I think, on the last occasion when we debated this subject, which is fascinating.

Mr. Tyler: Yes, there were.

Virginia Bottomley: There were certainly none today.

Many questions have been asked about the measures that hon. Members would take. I want energetic recruitment, mentoring, coaching and monitoring. I want best practice guidance. Selection panels should be required to undertake training and outsiders should monitor their activities. I want vigorous positive action.

I should find an all-woman shortlist extremely invidious in constituencies—whether parliamentary, European or council—where there was only one elected representative. The person who most persuaded me of that was the late Baroness Seear—a most distinguished woman. She pointed out that once we say that there must be a woman, next we shall say that there must be a disabled person, an ethnic minority person, somebody aged over 60, or somebody in their 20s.

Above all, we are elected to represent all the people, whether or not they voted for us, and whatever their gender, race or age. I find all-women shortlists, or indeed twinning, extraordinarily invidious. Were they to apply, I should have to think carefully about my interpretation of the role of a Member of Parliament.

I remain concerned about why we should want such different arrangements for Members of Parliament compared with other occupations and professions. The Minister did not adequately address that point in his brief summing up on Second Reading, or in his remarks in Committee and the debate today. The point about redress through employment law is one element, but it is not a complete answer.

The House will be aware that, at present, the civil service is, rightly, making a great effort to try to promote diversity, so that public servants reflect the Britain of today. I strongly welcome that, but few permanent secretaries are women and few come from ethnic minorities.

The majority of medical students are women, but the majority of consultants are not. I gave an example on Second Reading—about which I have received an enormous amount of correspondence—of a primary school with an all-female staff and asked whether an all-male shortlist would be permitted. The answer is that it would not.

The issues arise in other sectors. Last week, black police officers met in Manchester. There are real issues about ethnic minorities in the police force and the services. In social work, there is a real desire to appoint more black and ethnic minority social workers and inspectors. In all these sectors, positive action—legal or illegal—is under way. Coaching and mentoring are available. People are being encouraged to come forward. As long as an appointment is made on merit, people in the public services have become fairly vigorous—rightly so—in saying that the public face of those services should reflect the diversity of Britain today.

I fail to understand why Members of Parliament are such a different case. We should reflect the diversity of Britain today. We should take all the steps taken by others and we should not be thought to be legislating for ourselves in a vacuum, as though we were blinkered.

Similarly, I find it difficult to support measures relating to women rather than considering other ways to make us look as though we were more representative of Britain. At a time when 40 per cent. of the electorate fail to vote, we are missing out. We are not registering with the public—whether that is about gender, or age, none of us really knows.

I commend those who have worked so hard on the Bill. I worry whether the ends justify the means. It seems like a form of social engineering to treat politicians as a special case. I continue to find that disturbing, but I, with others, will continue to do everything in my power to encourage more women to come forward, more selection committees to choose women and more members of the electorate to vote for them.

6.55 pm

Mr. Lansley: I shall try not to disappoint the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) by being too long-winded on this occasion.

In contrast to my earlier remarks, I do not want to cavil about the Bill, to question it or even to oppose it. As the Minister for Local Government and hon. Members will know from Second Reading, my intention is to support the Bill. I hope that my effort to amend it was understood as an attempt by the Opposition to strengthen and validate the purposes of the Bill.

I share the questioning approach of my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley). That is why I question the Labour party's desire to go all the way to women-only shortlists. The way in which the Government have structured the Bill suggests that we may be able to switch it off by 2015 and that there will have been a culture change: but how do we get to that point? Can we reach it without the imposition of women-only shortlists? Many Labour Members think that we cannot: Conservative Members think that we can.

As my right hon. Friend said, such change is happening in other professions. She rightly drew attention to the fact that, in 1975, 16 per cent. of hospital consultants were women; at present, the figure is 34 per cent. More to the point, over 50 per cent. of those entering the medical profession are women. By 2015, it would not surprise me if more than 50 per cent. of consultants were women.

Nineteen per cent. of the accountancy profession are women, but 45 per cent. of current entrants are women. Women make up 51 per cent. of current entrants to the legal profession. However, there is a difficulty—a culture problem. As a House, it is not merely the fact that, historically, we are overwhelmingly male, and that if those entering it are disproportionately female the balance will shift over time: we have to deal with the beam in our own eye. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) is in the Chamber and offers abundant evidence of the merits of women candidates, but she is the only woman among the 35 new Conservative Members elected in 2001. That is not remotely acceptable.

We should have changed that situation and might have done so if more of the suggestions made by my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey had been taken on board. However, although I cannot go along with my right hon. Friend's view that measures such as recruitment, mentoring and training will be sufficient, there is a large gap between her proposals and women-only shortlists. That is the area of balanced shortlists.

[Mr. Lansley]

As a party, we insist on going out from the centre and recruiting in the expectation that constituencies will be obliged to select from balanced shortlists. Given the nature of the system that we have adopted, even if constituencies do not deliver the necessary outcome, they will increasingly see more suitably qualified women candidates than men. By the expedient of not reaching the point where we insist that an individual constituency cannot consider the merits of a male candidate, we shall not undermine the case for the positive measures that we in the Conservative party should take. My hope and belief is that we can achieve the necessary change in culture relatively quickly and demonstrate that the form of discrimination by which some Labour Members seek to achieve that objective is counter-productive and unnecessary.

At the risk of delaying the House for a second, I want to mention another issue. The Bill is intended to apply to a specific range of elections, and the Minister has made it clear that it will also apply to elections to the House of Lords. I look forward to that, not least because the House of Lords is intended to complement the House of Commons, yet in this respect it does not—only 16 per cent. of peers in the other place are women, as are only 22 per cent. of life peers created since 1997.

Leaving aside elections, the White Paper provides that at least 30 per cent. of the new life peers will be women, yet in the same paragraph it states that at least 30 per cent. of those appointed will be men. By extension, if we start with 22 per cent. and the fact that at least 30 per cent. of the new appointments will be women, it will be many years, perhaps decades, before the House of Lords approaches anything like a gender balance under such a dispensation. That is absurd, because the House of Lords should recruit from the professions and the walks of life that are under-represented in this House. Talent could be brought into the House of Lords that has not been accessible previously in our law-making procedures through election to this House. That will, if anything, disproportionately involve women on the basis of historical experience and the current situation.

I do not understand why the Government have not been bolder in the White Paper and said that, from the beginning, at least 50 per cent. of those appointed to the House of Lords will be women; nor why they have not made it clear that the Bill will allow political parties similarly to take positive action to secure the election of women to the House of Lords in due course.

Finally, I have tried to work out what has restricted the selection and election of women to the House. I listened to a description of research into why something of a glass ceiling still exists in relation to the promotion of women in business and industry. There is probably a parallel, in that those involved in the selection of women to sit on the main boards of companies are not keeping up with those who genuinely select people on merit, as seems to be the case in the professions and with qualifications.

Researchers concluded that men were, by and large, assessed on their potential. That happens in constituencies, where people look at candidates for selection, such as hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), and say, "This man will go far." However, women are selected on performance. Women candidates will be asked, "What have you achieved? How can you prove that you are good enough?" We have to change that culture, and I hope that in the three-year run-up to the next election the Conservative party will use the Bill to change the culture and use women's potential to boost the standing of the Conservative party and the reputation of the whole House.

7.4 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I am pleased to have a few minutes in which to contribute to the latter stages of the consideration of the Bill. It is interesting that we are debating the Bill on a day of very fast-moving geopolitical events. The question of female representation in a new Administration in Afghanistan has formed part of the discussions that have taken place today. That geopolitical context is pertinent to this debate, for General Musharraf reminded hon. Members at Westminster last week that a third of the Members of Parliament in Pakistan are female. We are contributing to the debate in the knowledge that the mother of Parliaments perhaps has a little catching up to do.

I entirely take on board the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for South–West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) about being adverse to the concept of social engineering, but I would say to her that the Bill is perhaps more about gearing up. In the same breath, I thank my right hon. Friend personally, because one of the first conversations that I ever had about embarking on a parliamentary career was with herself. The encouragement that I received set me on my course to the House.

The purpose of these debates has been to refine the Bill and make it more robust. I pay tribute my hon. Friends the Members for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) and for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) for undertaking the lion's share of the work. I have read the reports of the debates in Committee, and I have felt that my hon. Friends have definitely borne the brunt of debating the workings of the Bill in practice. Many of the attacks that they bore in those exchanges were about history and the way in which things have been done in the past, but the fact that the Bill is permissive enables the political parties to look forward. Although what has gone before guides and chastens us, we shall see a great deal of change in every party as a result of the way in which we have chosen to interpret the Bill.

The Minister said that he could not give an absolute guarantee about the robustness of the legislation if it were challenged in the European courts, but the right hon. Gentleman was a little churlish towards the Opposition, especially in relation to the suggestion made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that the Government, with their greater resources and the civil service at their disposal, were surely better placed to undertake an absolutely thorough investigation into the legislation's robustness. However, the debate has teased out the fact that the Labour party is most likely to bear the brunt of the challenge. As other hon. Members have said, Dr. Peter Jepson has made an advance declaration of war on that point.

I certainly should not like to conclude without paying tribute to the work that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) has done over many years. It is relevant in that context to say that, not content with trying

to advance the cause of women at Westminster, she is very active in trying to advance the cause of women's representation in Afghanistan. That is a good illustration of how current political events tie in with what we are attempting to do in our own national Parliament. We will rise to the hon. Lady's challenge to achieve the outcome, which she describes as resolving the democratic deficit, of seeing more women on the Conservative Benches. That is the fundamental reason why we support this change in the law.

We need to remind ourselves of the stark lesson that the overall turnout at the 2001 general election was only 59.4 per cent. Although there is no specific research relating the small number of women in Parliament to voter apathy, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that that is a very important factor. That is why we share the common goal of succeeding in attaining more women representatives at Westminster. We all have a duty to encourage them to come forward, and the Bill should tell women that we want them.

7.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I concur with the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) has an enormous amount to celebrate tonight because of her inestimable role in securing the introduction of the Bill. My hon. Friend said that the Bill is a cause for celebration, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan).

As the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said, there is also cause for a little humility, given the amount of time that we have taken between us to reach this point. As a result of the Bill passing into law, we can look forward to a far more balanced representation of men and women on these Benches than has ever been the case in the history of the House.

Until about two minutes ago, there was an exact gender balance in the Chamber. This is probably the first time that that has happened, but I hope that we can look forward to it in years to come.

It is a cause for celebration that the Bill's Third Reading will not be subject to a Division. That shows the strong commitment from all parties that they will take action to ensure that the House is properly representative of everyone in the country.

We recognise that there is much to be done. I have just referred to the temporary gender balance in the House, and I have another small statistic. I noted that, until a few minutes ago, 30 per cent. of the Conservative party's women Members of Parliament were present, whereas only about 2 per cent. of its male representatives were here. I did not have the opportunity to turn round to make a similar calculation for Labour Members, but I suspect that the result would not have been much different.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) challenged Ministers to ensure that elections to any future elected Chambers would be subject to the Bill's provisions. The Bill refers to the elected Assemblies that are already in place, so it would not be appropriate to write into it reference to something that does not exist. However, in Committee, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government said that

"we intend to apply the principle in the Bill to all future bodies that come into existence and are elected."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 8 November 2001; c. 51.]

That is a firm and clear commitment from the Government that that will happen in the future when relevant legislation comes before the House.

I am delighted that the Bill's simplicity has been maintained throughout its various stages in the House. It is a simple Bill embodying a simple principle and it achieves a simple outcome. It allows for political parties to introduce methods of selection which they consider—I accept that there may be differences between the parties—will enable more women candidates to be selected for election to the House and to other elected Assemblies. We face a simple challenge: to make that happen.

I look forward to the day 15 years hence when we ask ourselves whether we should renew the sunset provision currently provided for by clause 3. When we look around these Benches, I hope that we shall say, "No, we should not renew that provision because, at last, the talents of all our people are fully represented on the Benches in the House."

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

DEFERRED DIVISION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I now have to announce the results of the Division deferred from yesterday.

On the motion on Local Government Finance, the Ayes were 357, the Noes were 1, so the motion was agreed to.

[The Division List is published at the end of today's debates.]

Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill

Not amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you will be aware, in Mr. Speaker's provisional selection of amendments, a group of amendments appears under the heading "Restrictions on repeal of provisions of Football (Disorder) Act 2000". Amendment No. 1 was tabled by the Conservative party's Front-Bench spokesmen and by my colleagues and me while amendments Nos. 2 and 3 were tabled by Conservative Members.

As you will have seen, Madam Deputy Speaker, two further amendments were tabled by my colleagues and me. Given that, until this point, all selections are provisional and that there is an opportunity to make a last- minute bid for reconsideration, may I put the case for the inclusion of amendment No. 5 in the group to be considered?

We did not take votes on amendments in Committee, because we knew that we would return to the issues on Report. In effect, two different issues were raised in Committee. The first was the legislation's duration, and that will be covered by the debate on the amendments already selected. The second was whether any preconditions should be placed on the legislation having a particular duration, and that point is covered by amendments Nos. 4 and 5, which would introduce a precondition relating to previous conditions.

Although I am sure that it will be possible to touch on the second issue in the debate on the group that has been selected, I would appreciate it if amendment No. 4 or, preferably, amendment No. 5 could be selected so that those of us who wish to vote on those amendments could have an opportunity to do so at the end of the debate. I hope that you are minded to consider my suggestion positively, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I know that Mr. Speaker gave very serious consideration to the amendments before him. Having listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's remarks, I am not inclined to change Mr. Speaker's decision.

Clause 1

REPEAL OF PROVISIONS OF FOOTBALL (DISORDER) ACT 2000

7.15 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 4, leave out "subsections (2)" and insert—

'(a) subsection (2) is substituted by the following—

"(2) But—

(a) no application under section 14B of the Football Spectators Act 1989 (banning orders made on a complaint) may be made, and

(b) no power conferred on a constable by section 21A or 21B of that Act (summary measures) may be exercised,

after the end of the period of four years beginning with the day on which section 1 of the Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Act 2001 enters into force", and

(b) subsections (3)'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 4, leave out—

'subsections (2) to (5) are'

and insert "subsection (2)(a) is".

No. 3, in page 1, line 5, leave out subsection (2).

Mr. Grieve: We are considering a very short Bill and we return to a subject that was aired and that was of considerable concern in Committee. Because the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs has alas not felt able to respond to those concerns by tabling Government amendments, it is necessary to ask the House to reconsider the position.

I do not wish to take up too much of the House's time or rehearse too much of the background. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, might rule me out of order if I did. However, it is necessary to say a few words about the thrust of the Bill. Parliament enacted legislation that was designed to to halt football hooliganism, and that legislation has commanded much cross-party support. Conservative Members certainly support it.

That legislation has introduced what can only amount to infringements of what would normally be described as ordinary civil liberties, particularly in respect of the procedures under sections 14 and 21 of the Football Spectators Act 1989. Under them, either a procedure by complaint may lead to a banning order or—and more draconian still—under section 21, it is possible for police officers to stop people at ports or points of exit and detain them until the police decide whether they wish to bring them before the magistrates within 24 hours so that a banning order can be made. That is an unusual infringement of liberties, because there is no criminal element to the jurisdiction; it can be based simply on the nature of previous evidence relating to the conduct of that person.

In simple terms, the Bill will get rid of the necessity to renew the unusual powers conferred on the enforcing authority. The thrust of amendment No. 1, which enjoys the support of the Official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats, is to signal to the Government that, although we understand their motives, we think the provision should be subject to a sunset clause.

In Committee there was considerable debate about sunset clauses. The official Opposition, for whom I was the spokesman, suggested that a five-year sunset clause might be suitable. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) thought that five years might be sufficient, but an amendment tabled by his party proposed annual renewals in the meantime. We therefore suggest in amendment No. 1 that at the end of a four-year period, the powers under the Bill fall to be renewed in relation to sections 14B and 21A or 21B of the Football Spectators Act 1989.

It is worth examining in detail the powers conferred on the enforcing authority. In Committee, the Minister helpfully provided some indications of the way in which the legislation was working. He made it clear, and we accept, that in respect of the England *v.* Germany match in Munich, the powers that Parliament had conferred on the enforcing authority had been successful. The match was a success, and it is generally accepted that the level of violence surrounding it was tiny compared with some

of the problems that existed in the past. There was little evidence that English fans or supporters were the major culprits.

That is a favourable omen for the working of the legislation, but against that we must consider the statistical evidence which emerged in Committee about how it is working in relation to the powers under section 21. According to the last information that I had, 98 people had been detained. The Minister said in Committee that if he had any further information of any substance, he would provide it, but none has been put in the Library or communicated to us, although I believe that one of the statistics may have changed briefly.

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): Last night and today, in preparation for the debate, we have finalised some further figures, which it would be useful to put on the record. The major development since the Committee stage is that, arising from the Munich matches, where section 21 was used, 22 cases had been to court and been adjourned. I can tell the House that of those 22 cases from Munich, 11 have been resolved. In five cases the banning order was confirmed or imposed, and in six it was refused.

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to the Minister for his intervention, which allows us to take a brief overview. Under the section 21 procedure, I remind the House, a person is stopped summarily at the port of exit—airport or harbour—the police officer inquires into the circumstances and decides within six hours whether to allow the person to proceed or whether to bring him within 24 hours before a court. The court must determine whether the order banning that person should be imposed or not.

According to the figures available to me and discussed in Committee, 98 people have been detained under that procedure. Against 55, there had been previous complaints leading to banning, but on the basis of what the Minister has just told us, we should add five or six to that figure. At the time that we were in Committee, 23 cases had been adjourned by the court, and 18 had been refused. If I understand the Minister's figures, another five or six cases should be added to that figure. Thirteen refusals had taken place at initial hearings and five after adjournments, but that figure of five would now have risen to 10 or 11—I am not sure precisely which.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Has my hon. Friend noticed that the figures 55, 23 and 18, which he mentioned, add up to 96, rather than the 98 cases in total? I wonder what happened to the other two.

Mr. Grieve: I had indeed noticed. I reproduced the figures that we were given in Committee. Part of the problem seems to be some muddle about cases arising from the England *v.* Germany match and cases that may relate to other instances. The Minister may be able to help us, but I can only go on the figures given to us in Committee.

My right hon. Friend rightly highlights one of the problems that we encountered in Committee and on Second Reading—the paucity of information about how the legislation works in practice. The Minister says that the provisions are good; that they have served their purpose; that we have the wonderful example of the England *v.* Germany match; and that we should make them permanent, whereas previously Parliament was not prepared to do that, because of the infringements of civil liberties that the legislation entailed.

It is extraordinary that the information has come out in dribs and drabs. My right hon. Friend highlighted a minor inconsistency in the total figures, but the Minister may be able to clear that up. It remains extremely difficult to form a view about how the legislation is working. All that one can say—it may be unfair to the Minister and what he is trying to achieve, but one must face up to it—is that a substantial number of people who have been put through the section 21 procedure have ended up without banning orders. If that is the case, the House should rightly be worried about it.

In Committee, we spoke about the infringement of the liberty of the citizen or the subject—I do not mind which word we use, for the purposes of this evening's discussion. It has often been said in the House that we prided ourselves on being subjects precisely because we had so much freedom in relation to those who claimed to be citizens. Now that we call ourselves citizens, it seems that our liberties are constantly being eroded.

People are being put through a process not previously known to the criminal law. It may be administratively convenient, but it can create injustice. We are anxious to ensure that we are not about to enshrine in law and permanently a measure that we may come to regret. Because the people who will be subject to it may not necessarily be the No. 1 pin-ups of liberal society—football hooligans as a group are not people who commend themselves particularly to right-thinking people—we might bury the argument as a matter of administrative convenience, whereas we should be willing to review it.

That is the basis of amendment No. 1. It is difficult to see that it would interfere with the working of the Bill. The relevant sections would simply come up for review in four years. Considering the amount of time that we have taken over the Bill—an evening for Second Reading, an hour and a half or slightly more in Committee, and the time that we will take this evening—I do not believe that the progress of legislation four years from now will be massively handicapped if the Government are forced to revisit issues that have previously been considered.

As the Minister fairly acknowledged in Committee, there are plenty of issues relating to the legislation which legitimately cause disquiet. A balance must be struck—we are fond of that word in this place—and we are not striking a balance if, on slender evidence of the working of the legislation, we enshrine it once and for all.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman and I share many concerns about process and substance in the legislation, but I intervene simply to put one point on record. It concerns further evidence in relation to previous convictions among people in the following two categories: those against whom banning orders have eventually been imposed, and those who have been held but against whom no order has eventually been made. Has the hon. Gentleman's research since we last debated this matter revealed whether either category has ever included people who have never been the subject of any previous conviction? If that is the case, there is a greater apparent

[Simon Hughes]

infringement of liberty, because such people will have been subject to restriction on the basis of no previous evidence.

7.30 pm

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. I remember well that he made it in Committee, where he asked the Minister for clarification of the extent to which the legislation was catching people who had not previously been prosecuted for an offence of violence linked to a football match. If those whom the legislation is catching had been caught previously, it would not be necessary, so it would be interesting to find out the category of person whom it is latching on to. Of course, I accept that somebody might have had a conviction a long time ago but not be an active hooligan. In that regard, I correct myself, as I have to accept that that is also the case. None the less, we have never been given the information.

That returns me to the basis of our anxiety: lack of information. The problem is not lack of understanding about what the Government are getting at or lack of sympathy with their aims. It is certainly not a desire to see football hooliganism return to rear its ugly head, as happened only very recently. We want the ability properly to scrutinise and to make an informed decision. Indeed, the renewal was introduced precisely to enable Parliament to do that, yet, one year down the road, we are being asked to renew the legislation earlier than was originally required, even though we need not have done it until next summer.

That is why amendment No. 1 not only meets the Government's desire to introduce a greater note of permanency but provides a way in which the legislation can automatically come up for review. Many international football matches, including the World cup, will have occurred by the proposed time. All sorts of things will have happened that will enable Parliament to make a decision that is much better informed than what appears to be a knee-jerk reaction to the success of the legislation in a single instance. We are being asked to take a decision without knowing anything much about the downside.

The issue is very simple and I do not think that I would be treating the House properly by turning what should be a short speech into a lengthy one. However, before I finish, I want also to consider the other two amendments in the group, which provide an alternative approach. We touched on it in Committee, but it is worth repeating. For reasons that I have mentioned, the alternative is this: we could decide to give permanency to section 14 of the Football Spectators Act 1989, but to leave the situation in relation to section 21 under the present system.

I should like to amplify that point very briefly. I have explained the Opposition's considerable anxieties about the way in which section 21 is working. In contrast, we have far fewer anxieties about the way in which section 14 is working. Section 14 is, after all, a complaints procedure. Civil complaints procedures in the magistrates courts are a form of activity that has historically had a long track record. One of the ways in which one used to bring paternity cases was to go to the magistrates court and make a complaint. So it is not as if magistrates courts are not familiar with this form of injunctive proceedings. However, we are talking about such proceedings occurring in a framework where there is no emergency and where there may be ample opportunity to consider the issues carefully.

I say to the Minister that that is the way in which Parliament expected the legislation primarily to work. The section 21 procedure was expected to be an emergency procedure in the immediate run-up to a football match abroad. I think that I am right in saying—we considered the issue in Committee, and the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—that, in reality, far more complaints appear to have been made through the section 21 procedure in relation to a banning order than through the section 14 procedure. In itself, that must reinforce anxiety in the House about making the section 21 procedure permanent.

That is why amendments Nos. 2 and 3 together provide an alternative to amendment No. 1. They allow for the possibility, if the Minister and the Government prefer it, of making section 14 permanent—about which, on the face of it, we would have very little anxiety. At the same time, they would allow the section 21 procedure, which is new and has been applied fully only on this one occasion, to continue under the present system while there is a lack of statistical evidence and detail about its effect on individuals.

Those are the choices. For obvious reasons, I principally commend amendment No. 1, but I wait to hear the Minister's view. In Committee, he was conciliatory. He appeared carefully to take on board the points that had been made. I do not see the issue as party political, as all parties are united in their desire to ensure that football hooliganism is controlled, so I had rather hoped that by the time we reached Report, somebody in the Home Office might have sat down and concluded that a sunset clause was a reasonable way of proceeding. We could then all leave here very happy, but I fear that that is not going to happen unless the Minister has suddenly experienced his Damascene conversion. If he has done so, I will be delighted. I dare say that, if that were the case, we could all go away very quickly and bring this Report stage to a conclusion.

I wait to hear what the Minister has to say, but I must tell him that we are considering a fundamental issue. Civil liberties and the rights of individuals must not be eroded for the convenience of the state or even the majority unless there is good and sufficient reason. Such reason is based on evidence. At the moment, the evidence is lacking, and the common-sense approach is to ensure that the issue can be revisited.

Simon Hughes: I am very pleased to speak to the amendment, which, as the House will have noticed, was tabled jointly by Conservative Front-Bench Members and Liberal Democrats. We tabled it because we have a common view on the key issue, which was raised by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and has been the dominant theme—as it was bound to be—of our consideration of this very short Bill.

I guess that this discussion is a trailer to the debate that we are about to launch into next Monday. Although the Bill appears to be rather limited and circumscribed, and is apparently not of great national importance, it none the less touches on the same issues that the anti-terrorism Bill will, on a much larger canvass, bring before the House

from next Monday onwards for a few weeks. This is the foothill, as it were, to the mountain of important legislation that will come before us within a week from now. The legislation is linked by this common theme: the question of when it is right to restrict the liberties of British citizens and others in terms of doing what we would usually expect to be able to do. In this case, we are considering travel around this continent, within at least the area of the European Union in which there is a common travel entitlement.

An article in the *New Law Journal* by Ian Blackshaw reviewed the debates on football disorder legislation, especially recent court cases. The first paragraph of his conclusions mentions the Gough case, which, as the Minister knows, was decided only a few months ago. It states that the case

"illustrates the fine balance to be struck between the need for the Government to effectively prevent football related violence occurring when the English national team plays overseas and the demands upon the State to act in accordance with human rights legislation as well as the freedom of movement requirements imposed by UK membership of the European Union."

We are all trying to deal with getting the balance right.

Let us consider the key arguments. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield, other hon. Members and I argued in Committee that we should do only what is necessary, and that precautionary legislation, which takes away liberties, is probably bad and should exist only if it is justified by the evidence. We put the case that the evidence does not yet justify permanent legislation, and that it could not do that because we have not had sufficient time to collect, consider and assess it.

In Committee, a Labour colleague, who has a special interest in and knowledge of football because he is the chairman of a league club, argued that we should not have permanent legislation—I hope that I do not do him a disservice—because football disorder will not always be with us. We hope that we will not need to display in our shop window that England needs permanent special legislation to deal with football hooligans. Even those who argue that the measure is currently necessary hope that it will not be required in weeks, months or years from now.

There was a difference of opinion at the beginning of the debate on the Football (Disorder) Act 2000 about the duration of the sunset provision. It was fair of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield to point out that different proposals had been put before Parliament. We are trying to make the Government the most generous offer by proposing a long period and by picking up on a suggestion that the Minister's predecessor made, who hoped that the House of Commons would agree to a sunset provision of five years. We sought a better deal. The House of Lords included in the 2000 Act a maximum limit of two years. It also provided for a one-year renewal requirement. That is why we are debating the subject again this parliamentary year.

I want to make two further points about the need for more evidence. First, the Government have inexplicably introduced the Bill at almost the earliest opportunity in the parliamentary cycle instead of waiting until the end of the football season and the weeks before its expiry date next August. Even if they wanted to move urgently towards permanent legislation, their case would be better supported by waiting.

Secondly, I want to consider the argument that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield presented in detail. The figures are worryingly unsupported for three reasons. First, banning orders have not been imposed on a significant number of people whose movements were prevented. They were not allowed to attend a match abroad, but the prohibition was not found to be justified. Secondly, of all those who were stopped, many were permanently in the category that I have just described. Some were told, as soon as they went to court, that no banning order would be imposed.

7.45 pm

Thirdly, I am not aware of any case of a banning order being imposed on anyone who has no relevant previous conviction. That was the subject of my intervention on the hon. Member for Beaconsfield. It has been suggested that there is one such case, and I am sure that the Minister will put the record straight. My colleagues and I believe that we should not include in permanent legislation a restriction on a British passport holder who has been convicted neither of a football-related offence nor of any violent or public disorder offence.

My noble Friend Earl Russell asked a parliamentary question in the House of Lords on 10 July of Home Office Minister, Lord Rooker. He asked:

"What types of evidence have been held to justify the making of orders under Sections 21A and 21B . . .

How many appeals there have been"

and how many orders had been made and on what evidence. Lord Rooker replied:

"The Football Banning Orders Authority advises that in addition to the 44 banning orders on complaint cited in the Home Office report, two orders were imposed and subsequently overturned on appeal. Detailed information on the evidence laid before the courts in each case is not held centrally. However, the authority advises that all persons subject to complaint proceedings, including those prompted by section 21B notices, have convictions for violence or public order offences, not necessarily connected with football, committed within the time-scale specified in the Act."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 10 July 2001; Vol. 626, c. WA69.]

My colleagues and I cannot support amendments Nos. 2 and 3 because we have consistently argued that, without better evidence, we should not ban people with no previous relevant convictions but proceed gradually and incrementally. There is therefore a difference of opinion between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties about what is currently acceptable as a permanent position.

In considering appropriate duration for the measure, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield and I believe that there should be a decent period to collect evidence on which to make a judgment. We have not simply plucked the proposals—for five years in the amendments that we tabled in Committee and for four years in amendment No. 1—off the shelf without thinking them through. Our alternative covers a cycle of football matches that will produce every case that could be used as evidence for a reasonable conclusion. It would cover next year's World cup, a further cycle of domestic and international competition, and the European championships two years later. That competition prompted the measure. We hope that no one will argue that four years is not a reasonable period. As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield implied, it does not require the House to do lots of work regularly, but it gives everyone a chance to ascertain whether the legislation has been effective.

[Simon Hughes]

We are not keen on the Bill; we believe that it goes too far. However, the inclusion of our qualifications would improve it. It is bad enough when emergency legislation stays on the statute book for years, let alone measures that are not justified by evidence.

My second point is that, since we last debated this issue in Committee, one of the Minister's colleagues in the Home Office ministerial team was asked what became a topical question in the context of the international alliance's action against the Taliban regime. The question was whether there is a power to stop a British citizen leaving the country, if it is their declared intention—in practice or in theory—to go to fight against British troops. The Minister suggested that that was something that could be considered, and referred to the fact that legislation already exists to stop British citizens going abroad.

I argued elsewhere—perfectly straightforwardly, I hope my colleagues will agree—that it sets a dangerous precedent to have a piece of legislation in one corner marked "Football disorder" and another somewhere else that could, in theory, be marked "Baseball disorder" or "Basketball disorder". It is much better to address the principle: do we, as a country, believe that we should have legislation banning people from travelling and, if so, in what circumstances?

If there is an issue to be addressed in the Home Office of whether people can be prevented from leaving the country on the basis of evidence that they might be going off to become mercenaries or to join in some military action, we ought to have a debate in the round and to debate these issues together. The restriction of liberty to travel is the bigger issue, even though it is being presented at the moment only in the context of football. That is another argument for coming back to this issue in due course.

The third issue is this—the hon. Member for Beaconsfield and I agree that these measures constitute a significant infringement of people's liberty. The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), the former deputy leader of the Conservative party, who has assiduously followed this debate, has also made strong speeches on the issue. No one has yet reminded the House of what, in practice, the length or the severity of the penalty might be. Under section 14B, it is possible for a ban to last between two and three years. Its upper limit is three years. Contravention of the conditions of a banning order can attract a penalty of six months imprisonment or a level 5 fine of £5,000.

In relation to banning orders generally, if they are imposed at the same time as a custodial sentence is imposed under the existing legislation, they have to be for at least six years and they can be as long as 10 years. If they are imposed off the back of any other conviction, the period must be at least three years and can be up to five years. Obviously, I do not know what is in the minds of all colleagues on both sides of the House, but we are not talking about a measure that stops someone travelling for two minutes, two days, two months or even two years. In many cases, we are talking about a long-term restriction of liberty.

The measure risks turning someone with no previous conviction of any sort into someone who is defined by law as a hooligan because they have been banned from travelling on the basis that suspicions about their previous behaviour—for which they have never been convicted—and suggestions about their future activities make it appropriate to say that a restriction of liberty should be imposed.

I am sorry that we cannot put to the House the opportunity of discussing the matter of previous convictions; I accept that that is not possible this evening. In the circumstances, I hope that there will be maximum agreement for the restriction of the life of the measures, as the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives jointly propose. I have a sense that if, down the corridor in the other House, the Liberal Democrat and Conservative peers vote together—even without the independent peers, although they are often supportive—we may be able to persuade the Government by our numbers in a few days' time, even if we have not persuaded them by our argument tonight.

It would be more gracious, and probably save a bit of time, if the Government accepted the amendment this evening. We have given them plenty of notice and plenty of opportunity, and our proposals are eminently reasonable. I hope that I am being fair to the House in saying that I hope that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield and I will be regarded as having put the case reasonably. It is a strong case, and we really must not make this legislation permanent now. There is just not the evidence to do so.

Mr. Lilley: I shall endeavour to be brief. The position is very clear—sections 14B, 21A and 21B give the authorities the power to deprive British subjects of their liberties and rights even though they may not have been convicted of any offence. That power ought not to be on the statute book at all. It certainly ought not to be on it permanently, and I therefore support the amendment. None the less, the power is on the statute book temporarily. We have some experience of its operation. That experience may not be adequate or complete, but none the less we have to use it to make an assessment of whether the powers are effective and of whether they are necessary to meet desirable objectives.

Since the powers were introduced, there has been a period of calm at home and abroad with respect to English football hooliganism. Clearly, the Football Spectators Act 1989 as a whole has either been effective or it has coincided rather happily with a period of calm for which it is not responsible. Let us assume that it has contributed to that calm. We know that, of the 400 or 500 people who have been detained or prevented from travelling, only about 10 per cent., or a little more, have been detained and prevented from travelling under these offensive sections. Therefore, about 90 per cent. of any improvement that has been achieved by the measure has been achieved by their inoffensive or less offensive aspects.

The Government say that although only a relatively small number of people have been detained, the sections provide a deterrent effect. The other sections presumably also provide a deterrent effect, so I still maintain that 90 per cent. of the effect of the Act could be achieved without these sections. They have not been shown by the experience of the legislation to be necessary to achieve the aims that the Government set themselves. That is certainly not a reason for putting them permanently on the statute book, and it reinforces the case for this sunset clause.

I shall consider the position in principle. The reason that section 14B is offensive is that it enables people to be detained even when they may not have been guilty of any criminal offence. In particular, it requires the court to be satisfied that the condition in subsection (2) is met. Subsection (2) states:

"That condition is that the respondent has at any time caused or contributed to any violence or disorder in the United Kingdom or elsewhere."

Broadly speaking, therefore, three kinds of behaviour are involved. The first is behaviour which may constitute an offence in the United Kingdom, but for which no conviction has yet been obtained. In Committee, the Minister pointed out that Lord Justice Laws had said that the standard of proof required would be practicably indistinguishable from the criminal standard. If, therefore, it is possible to bring forward proof of a criminal standard that someone has engaged in behaviour that constitutes an offence, why do we not simply charge them with that offence and convict them? For that kind of behaviour, we do not need section 14B.

The second kind of relevant behaviour is that which does not constitute a criminal offence in the UK or abroad. If something is not a crime, it should not be punished. If it deserves to be punished, it should be a crime. The Government have not resolved that or told us whether they believe that there is a category of behaviour that does not constitute a crime but can none the less be described as

"causing or contributing to any violence or disorder in the UK or abroad."

What is particularly abhorrent is that non-criminal behaviour is to be punished, quasi-administratively, retrospectively. People acting legally can be retrospectively punished by being deprived of their right to travel and of their freedom in the UK for some hours or days.

8 pm

The third category of behaviour is that which constitutes an offence abroad but has not resulted in conviction abroad. The Minister said that we all understand that foreign Governments do not want to charge and convict British hooligans but prefer to send them home. Foreign Governments have that right but, essentially, their duty is to uphold the law in their territory and our duty is to uphold the law in ours. There has always been a strong presumption against extra-territory legislation—against us legislating in this House for offences committed outside our jurisdiction and in other parts of the world. We have always believed that that is wrong and undesirable. It should be avoided partly because it can lead to a double jeopardy—people can be held accountable by our courts and courts abroad—but, more practically, because it will always be more difficult for a British Government and our courts to have the necessary access to evidence, witnesses and so on for offences carried out abroad. That applies in these circumstances.

If Belgium, France and Germany do not wish to charge and convict British citizens for behaviour in their territories, it is certainly wrong for us to do so. Obviously, we should co-operate if we have evidence about people by sharing it with foreign Governments so that they can either pursue cases in the courts or, if they wish to restrict British citizens' access to their countries during football tournaments, they can do that and it is their responsibility. We should not set ourselves up as legislators for the rest of the world. The Government have a slight tendency to think that they rule the world, but that is a wider issue and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not allow me to deviate in that direction.

Simon Hughes: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if the Government wanted to present extra-territorial legislation or seek an agreement with foreign Governments, they have plenty of immediate opportunities to do so? An extradition Bill is coming up for debate this year and there are plenty of European Union directives dealing with common practice that the Government seek to implement. The Government have plenty of opportunities in other forums to get the agreement to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. Whether he or I would agree with them is a separate question.

Mr. Lilley: Yes. Emphasising the hon. Gentleman's final point, I agree with the principle of what he said.

Practically, these measures account for at most a tenth or an eighth of the total consequences achieved by the Act as a whole. Within that 10 per cent. or so, a significant element of behaviour must be criminal, established to a criminal level of proof, charged under the relevant criminal statute and taken out of the legislation. The residual element, which is either non-criminal behaviour in the UK or criminal behaviour abroad, should either not be punished at all or left to the foreign authorities.

I hope that the House will pass this amendment and time-limit the offensive clauses of the Bill, remembering that, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said, they have been quoted by the Government as a precedent for other legislation restricting British citizens' rights. We shall consider in due course whether that other legislation is necessary, but we must be aware that if we allow offensive legislation on to the statute book, it tends to spread. It is infectious. Bad precedents lead to further bad legislation, so I urge the House to pass the amendment and ensure that the offensive clauses are with us for only a short period.

Mr. Denham: I hope that this has been a useful debate, although inevitably we have covered as much ground as we did on Second Reading and in Committee. One of the responsibilities that falls on Governments is to assess evidence, take decisions and offer some leadership to the House. One of the Opposition's jobs is to find reasons to oppose specific pieces of legislation without coming off the fence about whether in principle they support them. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) did an admirable job this evening, because I was left none the wiser by the end of his speech about whether, deep down, he thinks that this Bill is acceptable.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) was clear: he does not like the Bill. He does not believe that the measures that it takes are justified in order to tackle the problem that it seeks to address: the damage done to England's reputation and English football by hooliganism. That is a tenable position for the right hon. Gentleman to take, but it is not the position of the Government or of most hon. Members.

I want briefly to go through the arguments that have been made tonight, assess them and say what I think the House should do under the circumstances. When the

[Mr. Denham]

original legislation was going through the House, the then Home Office Minister, now Minister without Portfolio, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), suggested that there should be a five-year sunset period. Ultimately, he was faced with arguments in another place that we should assess the original legislation after a year, and we are now doing that. Each individual Member will have to decide, on the basis of the available evidence, whether we should now put the legislation on the statute book on a more permanent basis. I believe that sufficient evidence is available to the House to do that.

We set out our reasons in the impact reports that we published on Second Reading and in Committee. The measures contained in sections 14B, 21A and 21B of the 1989 Act have already faced the stiffest challenge that they are likely to encounter before the 2004 European championships in Portugal. I anticipate that we shall not see such huge movements of fans to Japan or Korea as we have seen in the past, although we will liaise with the authorities in those countries ahead of the World cup.

Therefore, the argument that it would have been better to wait and try to rush the legislation through in the very few weeks between the World cup and when the legislation needs to be renewed does not stand up to examination. It is not obvious to me that a vastly greater body of significant evidence would be available to the House had we operated on that time scale.

Simon Hughes: Has the Minister thought ahead about what the Government would do if, after five years or so, there was no evidence that the English disease was continuing? Do the Government think that hooliganism by so-called English football supporters will, like sin, for ever be with us, or does he hope, like the rest of us do, that in time it will no longer exist, in which case we should not need to keep legislation on the statute book just in case one day it might recur.

Mr. Denham: We approach many pieces of legislation on the basis that the problems that they seek to resolve might not be with us for ever. It is sometimes argued that all legislation should have a sunset clause built in for that very reason. I shall not go through the detailed chronology of events, but we have lived with the problem of hooliganism for at least 20 years, possibly longer.

Let there be no doubt that we are being looked at by the rest of the world and tested on the seriousness of our commitment to tackling the thuggery and violence that has been associated with England. I think that the rest of the world would look at us rather oddly if we sent the message that we truly thought that, with that 20-year history that we have only just started to reverse, the problem can be eradicated in only three or four years and that there is no need for the legislation. Although I would love to believe that that will be the position, at this stage, I think that that would be asking a lot. It would be wonderful if there were no need to use the legislation.

My personal view is that, given the time scale that we have talked about, we are likely to continue to need to have in place a legislative framework. On Second Reading, it was recognised that although domestic premier league football matches are very largely free of trouble at the grounds and immediately around the grounds, there is still a significant amount of violence at some of the fixtures of lower division clubs. We have not yet eradicated the problem in our domestic game as we should have liked.

It is quite interesting that, although we have had debates on the legislation's impact, no individual cases have been cited either in the House or in the media that suggest a real risk to the civil liberties of anyone other than known troublemakers. I think that, on the basis of the evidence available to us, it would be appropriate to enshrine sections 14B, 21A and 21B in statute.

I have tried to be as open as possible with the information that we have on the Bill and to update the House as information became available. I shall again run through some of the figures, and deal with the point that was made in earlier exchanges on the missing two cases. The total number of banning orders amounts to 808, 708 of which prevent travel to matches overseas. That is an increase of about 200 since the Munich match, and an increase of about 600 since the Football (Disorder) Act 2000 came into force.

As the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden said, about 10 per cent. of the total number of banning orders have been made using the section 21 route. However, his conclusions and mine are diametrically opposite, as I think that it is a good thing that the majority of banning orders are obtained by routes other than the five-day control period that applies to section 21 orders. Nevertheless, I also believe that the provision's existence, and the knowledge that there is the possibility to act against someone who was not previously subject to a banning order on complaint or conviction, is a powerful and important deterrent that we should not lose.

Since the law was changed, after Euro 2000, 537 orders have been imposed after conviction for a football-related offence, and 90 orders have been imposed in accordance with the 14B complaint procedure. As the records show, the remainder of the orders were made under previous legislation.

I shall go through the figures on 21B notices. The reason for the apparent discrepancy of two in the figures is that the figure of 98, as it then was, included two orders that had been imposed but were subsequently overturned on appeal. Therefore, the initial figure is the maximum number of orders that were imposed, and the final figure is gained by deducting from that the two orders that were overturned on appeal.

In the control period applying to Munich, there was a total of 67 21B notices, of which 41 orders were imposed, 15 refused and 11 subject to adjournments. The Munich figures incorporate the earlier figures that I gave to the House.

Simon Hughes: The Minister said that 90 per cent. of the cases have been vindicated and 10 per cent. have not, but he surely cannot say that the civil liberties of that 10 per cent. who were stopped from going about their lawful business have not been unjustifiably infringed. If that percentage applied to the population more widely, it would be regarded as a national outrage. He seems to be saying that it is not a severe infringement of liberties simply because it affects only a small number of people.

8.15 pm

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman has to be slightly careful about that. There may be many cases in domestic situations in which individuals have an encounter with the law and are arrested, for example, but those individuals do not sue for wrongful arrest although they are not convicted of an offence. The House has to be realistic that, in court-based proceedings, we are unlikely to have a situation in which 100 per cent. of the orders that are sought are granted. Although it would be wonderful to think that a system could be so precise as to produce that outcome, such an outcome is inherently unlikely.

The House has to decide, on the basis of the figures before us, whether the situation that has so far been operating is satisfactory and sufficient to be enshrined in law. The question that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield failed very carefully to answer is whether he would find the legislation unacceptable if that situation continued. Perhaps he will answer the question.

Mr. Grieve: The Minister asks an interesting question. However, the answer depends also on whether there is a perceived need for such legislation at all. Labour Members, for example, consistently opposed the renewal of internment because they considered that, in the Northern Ireland context, it was a serious infringement of civil liberties. The Government are now about to reintroduce it. The example demonstrates at least a willingness to consider the situation in which one introduces legislation affecting the individual's liberty. Surely the same criteria should apply to this legislation.

Mr. Denham: The House will note that the hon. Gentleman did not answer the question. However, I do not blame him for that as he is an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman and does not want to commit himself on the issue. We have all been there. Nevertheless, he did not offer an answer to the question whether he finds the situation satisfactory.

I have had to consider these issues, and I have considered the possible impact on people's civil liberties. I think that there will be most concern about the issue of adjourned cases. However, as I said in Committee, it is important to recognise that any restrictions to travel arise from the bail conditions imposed by the court, which is a separate decision from the one to seek a section 21B order. It is the courts that have to be given evidence and persuaded that there are sufficient grounds to prevent the individual from travelling. It is a separate decision, and that is an important point.

Reference has already been made to the quality of evidence that is required, and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) talked about human rights considerations. As of today, no human rights challenge to the legislation has succeeded. Therefore, the human rights implications have been tested in the courts, and the courts have come out in support of the legislation. If I had more time I would read out what was said in those judgments. However, I have already done that in Committee.

I certainly do believe that as experience grows among police, the National Criminal Intelligence Service and magistrates the accuracy of the orders will further improve, as it has already done since the legislation was passed. I draw to the House's attention the Lord Chancellor's recent speech to the Magistrates Association in which he pointed out

"some inconsistency in the application of the law".

The Lord Chancellor went on to stress that

"under the Football (Disorder) Act, where the legislative criteria are satisfied, there is no discretion and the court must make an order."

I think that, in that case, the Lord Chancellor was prompted to make the comment by data provided by police that showed that banning orders are imposed only in respect of one third of all football-related convictions. Of course each case must be treated on its merits, but, again in the words of the Lord Chancellor,

"the magistracy has a key role to play in ensuring Parliament's intentions are realised—particularly in the run up to major international tournaments."

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey also mentioned the issue of whether there should be a test of conviction before section 14B orders are obtained by means of the section 21 route or by direct application.

Let me restate the Government's position. It would be rather odd if the qualifying criterion were a conviction for violence incurred, possibly, 30 years earlier, rather than more recent evidence that might be available to the court—for example, video evidence of participation in violent events in Munich. In that event, someone who had had a violent conviction many years earlier might be subject to a section 14B order although there might not be such strong evidence of recent association with violence, while someone who had clearly been involved in violence at an overseas football match might escape because he had never been convicted in this country.

I suspect that the hon. Gentleman and I will have to disagree on the point, but it is an argument that we rehearsed in Committee.

Simon Hughes: None of us are arguing that spent convictions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 should be resurrected for the purposes of this debate; we are only talking about "live" convictions. Will the Minister tell me, however, whether I am still right in thinking that—as it happens—there has been no banning order under the legislation that we seek to continue that has not involved a previous conviction in relation to an individual? If that is the case, it shows that so far previous convictions have provided the justification, and that there may be good reasons for continuing in that way for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. This is, I think, no bad thing, because it reflects the fact that the activity we are discussing is intelligence-based, co-ordinated by NCIS and local police forces. It would not be surprising if there were more concentration on those with convictions for violence, but I nevertheless think that the safeguard represented by the ability to bring in wider evidence, such as international evidence, is important.

The drafting of amendments Nos. 2 and 3 is flawed, although it would not be helpful if I spent time explaining why. I believe, however, that the use of section 21A and 21B powers is integral to the operation of the Bill. If we could not take action against those who had not been previously identified as going to a match with the

[Mr. Denham]

intention of causing trouble in the five-day control period, the legislation would be seriously weakened. I do not think that the attempt to make this a separate part of the legislation, leaving the rest as it is, holds water.

I hope that I have replied to the vast majority of points raised this evening.

Simon Hughes: As I think the Minister understands, the great debate within what is a narrowly focused issue concerns the additional powers introduced by the Bill. I refer to the right to intervene at the port of exit, at the last moment, when by the time the person who has been stopped can deal with the situation it will be too late, because the match will already have been played and that person will not be able to attend it.

There is a much more logical justification for acting beforehand under the old procedure, involving going to the magistrates court to seek an order. Those who believe they have been wronged can appeal, and have time to do so well before needing to travel. The real mischief occurs when intervention by the authorities comes so late that there is no time to do anything about it.

The combination of that factor and the lack of the necessary evidence fuels the argument for giving this more time to run. I hope that the House will support us, and those on the Conservative Front Bench, and agree that it is better to legislate carefully and for a limited time than to legislate for ever, when we have no assurance that any future Government will find time to reverse the legislation, even if it is absolutely clear that we do not need it.

Mr. Grieve: I found the Minister's response disappointing. I was particularly startled by his comments about the relationship between sections 21 and 14 of the 1989 Act. I had never understood that it was other than the Government's case that section 14 was the principal instrument that they intended to use for enforcement purposes; yet the Minister now tells us that section 21 is the indispensable tool.

Mr. Denham: There is an important difference between saying that section 21 is an integral part of the legislation and saying that it is an indispensable tool. I pointed out myself that 90 per cent. of banning orders are obtained by other routes. I believe that it would seriously weaken the legislation if the procedures relating to sections 21A and 21B were not part of it.

Mr. Grieve: I thank the Minister for that, but we have seen that section 21 is used more than section 14.

The issue is simple. The Minister has kept asking what a future Conservative's Government's attitude might be. He must understand that the legislation restricts civil liberties. The House will discuss such matters next week—in a much more serious context, but the principle will be exactly the same. There may be circumstances in which the restriction of civil liberties for which we should fight tooth and nail in the House are necessary because of circumstance. There is no doubt that football hooliganism has been a terrible scourge, but before putting into a permanent form legislation that, by its very nature, should be subject to constant review by a House eager to get rid of offensive legislation wherever possible, we should bear in mind that principle.

The Minister, however, wants permanency. The amendment is surely a sensible and constructive way of giving the Minister what he wants—no annual renewal procedure—while also ensuring that the legislation comes up for review when, perhaps thankfully, all Members may agree that we can safely get rid of it. For that reason, I wish to press the matter to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 106, Noes 278.

Division No. 62] **[8.26 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Bruce, Malcolm
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Cotter, Brian
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Mr. Nick Ainger.

Question accordingly negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

8.40 pm

Mr. Denham: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

[Mr. Denham]

The Bill may be short, but it has been the subject of careful scrutiny by the House. I shall not repeat what was said in earlier debates although I was surprised by the power of my oratory when the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) decided after all to enter the same Lobby as the Government instead of supporting his own amendment.

Mr. Grieve: The Minister had better be careful as I understand from the Conservative Whips that he wandered into the wrong Lobby too.

Mr. Denham: Far from it.

There is a strong case for placing on the statute book without time limits sections 14B, 21A and 21B of the Football Spectators Act 1989 as amended by the Football (Disorder) Act 2000. The Government believe that the measures are a tailored and effective response to English football disorder abroad and that they strike the right balance between national and international interests and civil liberties.

I should say for the record that earlier I was referring rhetorically to a conviction 30 years previously being taken into account. As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said, convictions can be taken into account only if they occurred within 10 years.

The available evidence demonstrates that the measures work. Apart from some disturbances in Germany, which were discussed at length on Second Reading, there has been no significant disorder involving English fans abroad since Euro 2000. The current football season has been up and running for about four months and I am pleased to report that the excellent record of English fans is still in place.

The number of troublemakers prevented from travelling to matches overseas is growing significantly and Governments and police forces across Europe and in Japan and Korea continue to welcome the measures as an on-going declaration on the part of the United Kingdom of our intention to tackle the menace of hooliganism before it leaves these shores. The UEFA threat to expel English football from European competition has not been resurrected.

In short, there is powerful evidence for enshrining sections 14B, 21A and 21B on the statute book without time limit. They withstood a thorough practical and legal examination in the past 14 months and it would be a blow to our national reputation and the image of our national game if they were to be lost next August. That would send out a negative message to our European partners, undermine the English and Welsh anti-hooligan strategy and weaken the power of the police and courts to act against thugs. It would also be seen as an encouragement to hooligans to resume the pattern of repeat offending overseas at a time when England is preparing to embark on its Euro 2004 campaign. I commend the Bill to the House.

8.43 pm

Mr. Grieve: During consideration of the Bill, the Minister has failed to take on board what I believe to be sensible, moderate and justified concerns expressed by Opposition Members. They would not in any way have negated the thrust of the Government's intention, which was to put on a more permanent footing legislation which, on its introduction, had commanded support from both sides of the House, and even though it caused some hon. Members to express deep anxieties, was something that could be understood.

We find it very difficult to understand the logic behind the course of action that has been adopted, but we draw some reassurance from the prospect that, given the concomitance of views among Opposition Members, it is likely that individuals in another place will put up a robust defence for civil liberties and try to persuade the Government that, although they should have their Bill, it should not be permanent. That will certainly be the thrust of what we shall seek to achieve later.

On that basis, we are in no position to support the Bill and we do not intend to do so. After all, only last year the Government were prepared to consider a five-year sunset clause, but now they seem set against it. They have introduced this legislation to make permanent what in any event ought only to be temporary on such a paucity of evidence and on the back of one undoubted success—the England *v.* Germany match—but not on the basis of material on which a rigorous detailed analysis could be conducted as to whether civil liberties were being adversely affected.

In those circumstances, I can tell the Minister that he will have to carry the Bill on the support of Labour Members. We do not wish to have any part in it, and we will seek to review the matter elsewhere.

8.45 pm

David Wright (Telford): I did not get an opportunity to speak on Second Reading, so I appreciate the chance to contribute this evening. I welcome the Bill. It sends the message to those involved in football violence that their actions will not be tolerated, in Britain or abroad.

It is easy to discuss these matters when football violence is absent from the headlines, but we should not forget the shame experienced when supporters of England or of any of our club sides engage in misguided violence abroad in the name of football and the nation. I am sure that many hon. Members share the emotion felt by many when the England team plays in an international tournament. It is an awful feeling when one wakes up, switches on the television and sees hundreds of people rioting in towns in Europe and around the world. It brings tremendous shame on our nation. The Bill makes it clear to the people involved that such violence is unacceptable.

My right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned the need to demonstrate to UEFA and FIFA that the Government have an on-going commitment to dealing with that violence. It is important that we do that, and that we do so in good time. The Bill shows the world and the football authorities that we are serious about dealing with the matter before, during and after the World cup. I hope that the House will support the Bill this evening, so that we can make progress in trying to change our national game, and in dealing with the scourge of the violence that mars international fixtures.

I intend to focus on some of the wider issues and motivations behind football violence, and on how the Bill can contribute towards stopping it, especially in connection with matches involving the England team.

On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) spoke about some of the reading material that he had enjoyed over the summer. It included a Marxist analysis of football violence.

The Whips will be pleased to hear that I do not intend to pursue a Marxist analysis of football violence this evening, but some of the intellectual analysis of football over more than 20 years has been interesting. In 1981, Desmond Morris published a classic book called "The Soccer Tribe", which deals with the following that football attracts at national and international level. He likened football to tribalism throughout the ages, and noted that football had many tribal symbols, such as team colours, the status of teams among supporters, the territories involved in home and away games, and the displays of triumph.

I follow lower-league football. I support Shrewsbury Town and Telford United, so there are not many tribal displays for me to become especially worked up about. However, my point is clear: football is a tribal pastime. It provokes a tribal atmosphere among its followers which can, and does, provoke conflict. It is at its most dangerous when allied to a warped sense of nationalism.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman is in danger of making a Second Reading speech. His speech must not be too wide-ranging, because on Third Reading we can debate only the contents of the Bill.

David Wright: I understand your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will endeavour to follow it.

The Bill assists us in dealing with people who engage in a warped form of nationalist violence on the continent and throughout Europe. The Bill gives the police and the courts the authority to deal with people who intend to go abroad and commit violence in the name of a warped sense of nationalism. That is not helped by the way in which the press and media cover football violence. We all remember the front cover of *The Mirror* at the time of Euro 96. Prior to the England *v.* Germany game, England players were depicted in second world war helmets. Such coverage, and the link to a warped nationalism, does nothing to assist us in tackling football violence.

The influence of the far right on this warped sense of nationalism—which I hope that the Bill will prevent people taking to Europe—is particularly alarming. It is worrying to see people chanting certain songs at football matches in Europe. I recall hearing "No Surrender"—the watchword of organisations such as Combat 18—being sung during Euro 2000. The Bill endeavours to stop people who provoke violence and warped nationalism from going across the Channel into Europe and taking their hatred abroad.

Other supporters in Great Britain do not seem to have this problem. Scottish and Welsh supporters do not behave in a violently nationalistic manner. The disease seems to apply particularly to England's so-called football supporters.

The Bill will help to alleviate the problem of people travelling abroad to display the nationalism that is linked to football. However, change will be difficult, which is why the measure needs to be enshrined in law in the long term. I share the view that this problem may be with us for some time, unfortunately. We have to show the football authorities that we are committed to dealing with it.

Desmond Morris said in his book on the subject in 1981:

"The trick for the future, clearly, is to retain this—"

tribal—

"tension, but at the same time to dispense with its most extreme and destructive forms of expression."

The Bill attempts to do that.

The other key reform that needs to accompany the Bill is the rejuvenation of the England supporters' formal structure. I know that the Government have considered that and have come forward with proposals.

We need to prompt a more modern and internationalist perspective in relation to our broader national identity and to the approach taken when supporting our national football side. It would be great to have some moderation and support for that in the national media. I hope that the appointment of a non-English football manager will help to change the emphasis on the particularly warped view of nationalism held by many England supporters. I hope that the Bill will go a long way towards stopping people from travelling and causing trouble. People wake up with a terrible feeling in the pit of their stomach during international football events when, once again, we have been disgraced at a national level.

Football is a gift that our country has given to the world; the Bill will help us to celebrate it together.

8.54 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): There is a sense that, in their haste to clean up our national game, the Government are using a large sledgehammer in sections 14B and 21A and 21B. Recent tragic events, the human rights issues that surround them and our response perhaps put the Government's perfectly understandable desire to control football violence in some sort of context. I believe that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) hinted at that, and we will debate it on Monday. Proportionality is the key and I am not convinced that the balance has been correctly struck. The Law Society appears to agree, in particular about the standard of proof.

We must divorce the argument from notions of national pride and the disgust that we feel at the actions of a small number of our countrymen abroad. We should not be in the business of curtailing traditional liberties to repair our national image or pander to the threats of other bodies, national and international, many of which are also burdened with a violent and distasteful minority. In that respect, the hon. Member for Telford (David Wright) was wrong. To attempt to do so would be a gross presumption on the part of an authoritarian Government. Paradoxically, it would diminish one of the most attractive features of this country in the eyes of others—the freedom that we enjoy and the presumption of innocence.

This Bill is a sticking plaster designed to remedy a small but significant lesion. We do not know, but we surmise, that it will help. Whether or not it does, it has huge implications for the traditional liberties that we enjoy and for which this House stands as guarantor.

I could understand the Government's enthusiasm to curtail the liberties of subjects, or even citizens, if this was a problem that affected sport generically. There might then be more appetite for magisterial legislation of this sort. However, the Bill is designed to deal with a discrete

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

problem and, arguably, a declining one at that, notwithstanding an upward blip in arrests relating to football in 2000–01. As such it is surely not appropriate to award the authorities the ability to act against persons without criminal records in the summary manner that is proposed. To do so strikes at the very heart of our system.

While one could be persuaded that the circumstances make it reasonable to support the general thrust of the Bill, one would do so with a heavy heart. Amendment No. 1 and the sunset clause that it proposed would have made the legislation conditional and would have set a time limit for the evaluation of evidence of its effectiveness and operation that we will now lack.

8.58 pm

Simon Hughes: The House of Commons is extremely helpful to hon. Members when we are preparing for debates. Football disorder matters have come before the House often in recent years, so the Library has on more than one occasion produced briefings for colleagues. The research paper that it produced in July 2000 on what was the draft Football (Disorder) Bill, which became the Act that we are trying to make permanent now, contained the reminder that this issue has been knocking around for an extraordinarily long time. On the first page it states:

"Measures have been taken or sought since the fourteenth century to deal with the problem of disorder relating to football—a 1314 proclamation of Edward II declared:

Forasmuch there is great noise in the city caused by hustling over large balls, from which many evils may arise, which God forbid, we command and forbid on behalf of the King, on pain of imprisonment, such game to be used in the city in future."

—[HON. MEMBERS: "Millwall".] I hear completely unjustified allegations from colleagues, such as the Members for Colchester United and for Hereford United and even, for all I know, the Member for Telford United, that the fans of certain clubs might cause trouble. I must place on record that, although it has been around for a long time, the great and ever-rising Millwall football club, which is eighth in the first division and on its way up to the premiership, was not around in the 14th century, much though it would have benefited the country had it been there. Playing football was an imprisonable offence in those days.

The research paper notes that we have introduced the following legislation to deal with football-related matters: the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc) Act 1985; the Public Order Act 1986; the Football Spectators Act 1989; the Football (Offences) Act 1991; the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc) (Amendment) Act 1992; the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994; the Crime and Disorder Act 1998; and the Football (Offences and Disorder) Act 1999. However, the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs tells us that the most recent measure, which became law in July 2000 and took effect in August 2000, to which we gave a life of two years—the Opposition defeated the Government in the House of Lords and amended the Bill accordingly—and for which we approved a second year only in July 2001, should now come back to us only four months later in order to be made permanent legislation.

I was happy to hear the speech made by the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison)—I had not previously heard him speak in the House. He made the point that we tried to teach the Government the lesson of history: that, on the basis of logic and precedent, it is nonsense to believe that we know now what we shall need in four years.

My view and that of my colleagues is clear. We did not support an unconditional Bill when it was introduced a year and a half ago. We tried to restrict it as much as we could, but we were only partially successful. However, we obtained a guarantee that it would be brought back within two years. We got it back after a year—at half-time—but we did not make a big fuss because we knew that it would return shortly. It is now back with us.

We do not believe that it is appropriate for Parliament to make permanent legislation that bans people from travelling without allowing them enough time to make an appeal that would let them attend games. We believe that things may be much better in four years. It may be enough to introduce limited powers to curb the right to travel of people with previous convictions and about whom there is suspicion.

The test for us is whether the Bill is temporary or permanent. By defeating the amendment, jointly tabled by the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, the Government present us with no option but permanent or nothing. We believe that it would be better to defeat the measure so that this Bill with permanent provisions should not go to the other end of the building. The Government have plenty of time—until August next year—to introduce the simple one or two clause Bill that would be necessary to extend the life of the existing legislation, either for four years, as we recommended, or for a lesser period.

A permanent Bill is not justified. We agree with the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) that that argument will prevail in the other place. We ask the House to vote against permanent legislation. It is a bad practice, unsupported by the evidence, and we shall divide the House.

9.4 pm

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): As I spoke on Second Reading and in the Standing Committee, I had not intended to speak on Third Reading until my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) and other hon. Members talked about their football clubs. My hon. Friend referred to the tribal affinities in football clubs and I realised that, as a lifelong supporter of Cheltenham Town, I must be a Chelt. On the other side of the House I recognise a fellow-Chelt—the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones)—so I suppose that we could say that the Cheltic hordes are here today, although I suspect that the hon. Gentleman will not be joining me in the Lobby on this issue. However, I want to make a couple of points because they have not been given ample recognition in the debate so far.

Much has been said about the need to include a sunset clause because of the basic civil liberty issues involved. However, the Bill will operate only for designated international football matches, and it has a mechanism by which some matches, for a variety of reasons, may not be designated as requiring the full weight of the legislation to be brought into operation.

If hooliganism at international matches diminishes as time progresses and the balance of civil liberty considerations changes, the sensible way to deal with the

reduction in violence is not to designate those matches. So we can keep the powers in reserve without having recourse to debate further legislation in Parliament, but we do not have to signal to the fans at large that the legislation is no longer operational.

That is a far better way to balance the civil liberties and the anti-crime and disorder policies necessary to protect our international football matches and the status of the England team and its supporters than simply including a sunset clause or not having the legislation at all. The Bill represents a much better way to deal with those issues and it should not be opposed, so I ask the House to back it.

9.7 pm

Mr. Denham: With the leave of the House, I shall reply very briefly to the debate. The hon. Members for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and for Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) will not mind my saying that the fact that other hon. Members have contributed to this evening's debate is welcome. As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield said, subject to the outcome of any Division tonight, the Bill will be discussed in another place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) made the very important point, which we should always acknowledge in considering such legislation, that we are dealing with cultural and social problems, and legislation can only ever represent one part of our strategy for dealing with the underlying difficulties that have been with us for several hundred years, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey said. During this debate, the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey asked us not only to understand that the problems have existed for 500 years, but to anticipate that they might all be resolved in the next 18 months; therefore, the legislation will be needed for no longer than that.

Simon Hughes: It may be introduced every year.

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman wishes us to legislate again, but the Government want to put the Bill on to the statute book.

The hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) raised several issues. He talked about the standard of proof, which we dealt with in Committee by quoting from Lord Justice Laws' judgment on the standard of proof required under section 14 of the Football Spectators Act 1989. Although the hon. Gentleman said that hooliganism is, arguably, declining, it is doing so at least in part because of the success of the legislation and the targeted policing operation that supports it.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) made the important point that flexibility and safeguards are built into the legislation, as is evidenced by the fact that some 20 people subject to banning orders were allowed, on application, to travel abroad during the five-day control period in the run-up to the Munich match because they had good business, personal or family reasons to do so. We have examined the issues thoroughly tonight. I believe that we should proceed with the Bill, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 270, Noes 51.

Division No. 63] **[9.9 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*

King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Oliner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Bruce, Malcolm
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Lamb, Norman
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Noes:
Bob Russell and
Tom Brake.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, notices of amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Road Safety (Mid-Essex)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

9.22 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): This week is not an especially auspicious time to have a debate on road deaths and injuries in mid-Essex. Tragically, two days ago we saw the 100th road accident in the county of Essex that involved fatality and the 110th person in that county die from such an accident. Given the concern that road safety is arousing in the county, I am delighted to see in their places the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) and my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). I know that they are as concerned as me about what is happening on our roads and to our constituents.

It is only fair to say that under both the last Conservative Government and the current Government, the Department with responsibility for transport, in whatever configuration, has been doing its utmost to try to improve road safety in this country, as well as to ensure that the roads on which we drive are safer and that drivers are of higher quality and have the ability to drive more safely.

There is some good news. As a result of the efforts of both Governments, the number of road deaths in the past 22 years has dropped dramatically. In 1979, 6,352 deaths occurred on our roads as a result of road traffic accidents. By last year—the last full year for which we have statistics—the number of deaths had dropped to 3,409. Between 1979 and 1997, deaths and serious casualties on our roads fell by 43 per cent., drink-related road deaths fell by 68 per cent. and fatal accidents involving motor cycles fell by 62 per cent.

In 1995 alone, there were fewer road deaths than in any year since 1926, when records began, despite the fact that there were 14 times as many vehicles on our roads. Any Government could be proud of that record. Since 1997, the Labour Government and successive Departments responsible for transport have worked to build on that success and to emulate it by making our roads safer and trying to reduce road deaths and accidents further.

As the Minister knows, the latest 10-year road safety strategy, "Tomorrow's Roads: Safer for Everyone", was launched with a specific aim, which is to

"introduce tough new casualty reduction targets."

At the same time, local authorities in mid-Essex—Essex county council, Chelmsford borough council, Maldon district council and Braintree district council—have spent considerable time and effort with the highways agencies and the police on trying to make our roads safer for our constituents and motorists.

Road safety is an important factor in the construction of new roads in the area. It is also important to consider existing roads, which have accident black spots and appalling safety records, and to try to improve the road safety on them.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): My hon. Friend is right that there are one or two black spots in the county where road improvements could make a significant difference. The A130 is in my constituency and was in my hon. Friend's. He will remember the problems on that road, especially the bypass round Howe Green, and the improvement scheme that is under way and should soon be completed, which could lead to a significant drop in the statistics. Does he agree that there are several other black spots to which such improvement schemes could make an important difference?

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend is right. As he knows from his experience and from campaigning about the A130 bypass from Howe Green to the Rettendon turnpike, conditions on the existing road have been nightmarish. All too often, the most horrendous road accidents have occurred. They have led to far too many deaths. In addition, there are hazards for motorists who use the road for access to the villages of Danbury and Howe Green. Like my hon. Friend, I am confident that when the bypass opens, there will be a significant drop in road deaths and accidents because it has been specifically targeted as a route that will overcome the problems that posed such a danger to motorists. My hon. Friend is right to highlight that.

Other roads in the county have a record that is less than desirable. The A120 is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Braintree. He is doubtless reassured by the prospect of the new road that will be built towards Stansted and help to alleviate the problems.

The A12 travels up the county's spine from the M25 to Ipswich and the ports. It is a good road, but because it is more or less straight, and has three lanes in many areas, the amount of traffic, and the speed at which it travels, sometimes leads to horrendous accidents.

Those are well-known examples in the county, but for every well-known example, I suspect that there are 10 examples of smaller roads on which, because they follow old, historic routes and have not taken into account the greatly increased traffic of the past 20 or 30 years, there are accidents involving injuries and deaths. The Government, through the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the regional office, the local authorities, the Highways Agency and the police have a positive record on seeking to eliminate unsafe aspects of our roads, as resources allow.

There is evidence throughout the county of tougher speed limits being introduced in urban and residential areas to stop the rat-running boy racers and other problems associated with speeding in towns, which pose a serious threat to pedestrians and children in built-up areas. Changes are also being made to speed limits on trunk roads and main roads throughout the county, and there is increasing evidence of speed cameras being installed to help to bring down the number of accidents caused by speeding. There are mobile speed cameras, operated by Essex police, and the fixed ones with which we are all so familiar.

In recent months, my constituency of West Chelmsford has seen a noticeable increase in the activity of police with mobile speed cameras, as well as in the presence of fixed ones. If I remember correctly, until a few months ago there was only one fixed speed camera in my constituency. That is no longer the case. There are now others in areas where there are opportunities for drivers to break the law by speeding.

I particularly welcome the announcement by the Treasury of the eight pilot schemes to look into the feasibility of allowing the local authorities that install the

[Mr. Burns]

cameras to keep the revenue generated by them, so that they can plough that money back into providing more speed cameras for the local community. I am delighted, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford and the hon. Member for Braintree are, that Essex has one of those eight pilot schemes. The scheme is currently in operation there, and I have no doubt that it will be a success.

It is in the very nature of the beast that a speed camera that catches speeding motorists will generate revenue, and if the local authority can keep that revenue, it can invest in new cameras; they are not cheap. One of the alleged disadvantages in the past was that the money went immediately to the Treasury, so the local authorities that were having to lay out the capital investment for the cameras were not benefiting from the revenue that they were generating from the speeding vehicles. I hope that the pilot schemes will prove successful and that the Government will make that policy a permanent feature in the pilot scheme areas and possibly in the rest of the country so that everyone can enjoy the benefits that counties such as Essex are enjoying at the moment.

It bothers me that, despite all the efforts of the Government, local authorities and the police, and despite the targets set down in the Government's strategy, "Tomorrow's roads—safer for everyone", the appalling statistics on deaths and injuries in mid-Essex this year are bucking the national trend and seem to be impervious to the road safety initiatives. How are we going to achieve an improvement in road safety?

The new road safety targets for the next 10 years are very challenging, as I am sure the Minister will accept. By 2010, compared to the average for 1994-1998, the targets aim to reduce by 40 per cent. the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads. The targets set a 50 per cent. reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured in that time, and a 10 per cent. reduction in the number of slight injuries.

I do not question or challenge those figures. I hope that they will be successfully achieved in the time scale. Everybody will be delighted if that happens, because it will mean even fewer deaths and injuries on our roads nationally. The trouble is that the figures for mid-Essex over the past few years, and particularly for the 10 months of this year so far, show that it will be extraordinarily difficult to get anywhere near reaching those targets. Indeed, I wonder whether it will be possible unless something can be done.

In 1998 in mid-Essex—the Braintree and Chelmsford police divisions, which include the constituencies of all three hon. Members in the Chamber tonight—15 people were killed and 1,558 were injured on the roads. So far this year—I only have figures for the nine months up to 30 September—35 people have been killed and 1,633 have been injured. In 1998 in Essex as a whole, 84 people were killed in road accidents, and this year, up to and including this week so far, 110 people have been killed.

Mid-Essex is not a third of the size of the county of Essex and it certainly does not have a third of the population, yet it contributes to slightly more than a third of the deaths in the county. I am genuinely perplexed as to why. Are the accidents alcohol related? I welcome the initiative being tested by the pilot schemes, but perhaps there is too much speeding. Is the standard of driving declining? Perhaps people are becoming immune to the dangers of driving because they drive so often. They see that 99.9 per cent. of the time they are not involved in accidents and they forget the potential dangers of losing concentration and of not always ensuring that they drive safely and within the speed limits, watching out for the actions of other drivers who cause accidents through no fault of their own.

I do not know the answers. I am worried about that because, if one does not know the cause of a problem, it is much more difficult to find a solution and to minimise the tragedies. I certainly do not have a panacea for getting back on track in reducing road accidents and deaths, although I know that it is not an easy problem to solve. I shall therefore be genuinely interested to hear what the Minister has to say. I hope that her Department has some idea of what might be done to improve the situation. It might have more up-to-date information and statistics showing why road safety has deteriorated in my part of the country, which seems to be at variance with what is happening nationwide.

9.38 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): With the Minister's leave, I hope to say a few words in support of my constituency neighbour—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he has the permission of the Minister and the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) to take part in the debate?

Mr. Hurst: I sought the permission of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and I was about to seek the Minister's permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I support most of the remarks made by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford. One can speculate about the reasons for the unusually high number of road traffic accidents in mid-Essex. For example, we have had an exceptional amount of rain in the past nine months—but then again, so have other parts of Essex and the United Kingdom. Essex has also had exceptional population growth around the constituency of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford, on the edge of the constituency of the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), and certainly around the main town in my constituency. Houses are being built at an enormous rate, creating much more traffic.

Another factor is the various road schemes to which the hon. Member for West Chelmsford referred. The Great Leighs bypass is proceeding very rapidly, and the A130 is progressing rapidly into the southern part of Chelmsford. We are also awaiting development of the Hatfield Peverel to Witham link road, which I should like to mention very briefly, and which has featured in previous Adjournment debates.

It was announced as long ago as January 1998 that that link road would proceed. Since then, preparation for the scheme has meandered very slowly, only now to be confronted with a public inquiry. I am sure that all hon. Members in the Chamber would like that public inquiry

itself to proceed quickly, with a view to our having a road at least before the fifth anniversary of the announcement of the scheme.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): The hon. Gentleman mentioned Hatfield Peverel. He will be as horribly familiar with the roadworks there as I have become in the past few weeks. Does he think that it is possible that, because those roadworks are causing such huge congestion to motorists trying to use the A12, many people are leaving the A12 to seek alternative routes, causing a build-up of traffic on minor roads that were probably never designed to cope with the number of cars now using them because of the roadworks? That in itself may be contributing to the problem and is another reason why we all want those roadworks to be completed as quickly as possible.

Mr. Hurst: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's speculation on the issue. On a number of occasions recently I have crossed back-country lanes through his constituency and my own to avoid those roadworks.

I do not think that any of those factors alone have created the increase in road traffic accidents. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford emphasised the consequences of speeding. Another enemy to road safety that is growing apace is the practice of tailgating. In 1963, when I qualified to drive motorcars, my late father told me, "Whatever you do, son, keep back from the vehicle in front if you wish to overtake." It seems that that policy has disappeared and that the policy of other drivers is to get as close as they can to the vehicle in front so that they can overtake quickly. The practice creates a dangerous situation on many roads on which it is not possible to manoeuvre.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply. I should like to see a concerted campaign by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to reduce the practice of tailgating and draw people's attention to its risk. It is a major hazard and is probably a major determinant of road accidents.

I think that, with the road schemes that are proceeding, the future for mid-Essex is probably brighter. At least those roads will become safer. I also agree entirely that, by its nature, dualling of the A120 west to Stansted will assist greatly. Of course, we also look forward to a sensitive scheme that creates a better carriageway through to the A12 east of Braintree. I believe that such a scheme is being considered. However, it will have to take very acute account of the villages and environment between Braintree and the A12.

9.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): Let me begin by extending condolences that I am sure the whole House will wish to extend to the families of those bereaved in the most recent accident. Let me also acknowledge the depth of concern about the subject among Members representing the constituencies involved—shown, I think, by the attendance of a number of Essex Members, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) and the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) is also present.

I do not want to go into all the figures, because the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) has set them out very clearly. So far we have made good progress towards achieving what are ambitious targets for dealing with road deaths and road accidents, although of course each death is one too many, and our task will not be completed until we have made such accidents a thing of the past. I want to focus on Essex, however, and on the issues that have been raised tonight.

The local transport plan for Essex county council contains targets to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured that are very much in line with national targets. The recently submitted annual progress report, which presents progress in the first year of the plan, shows that 1,122 people were killed and seriously injured on the roads of Essex in 2000. That is 5 per cent. less than the 1994-98 average. The number of children killed and seriously injured was already 18 per cent. below the baseline average.

Because of the hon. Gentleman's special interest, my Department also obtained more up-to-date figures for Essex from the county council. I can therefore tell him that 9 per cent. fewer people were killed or seriously injured in the 12 months ending in August 2001 than in the previous 12 months. I hope to see a further overall reduction in the number killed and seriously injured on the roads of Essex in the calendar year 2001 compared with 2000, showing that Essex is working hard to play its part in meeting the national target reductions.

However, as the hon. Gentleman said, there are some specific problems within the overall figures. He said that there had been a 10 per cent. increase in the number of people killed on the roads in the same August-to-August period. That apparent reversal of a previous downward trend is very disturbing, and I share his concern. I understand that the increase is largely due to more accidents and casualties involving motorcyclists. Indeed, over the same period non-motorcycling deaths fell by 6 per cent. I have asked my Department to work closely with Essex county council and the police to establish the reasons behind the increases, and to look at ways of combating the problem.

I understand that the county council has reported a significant increase in the number of motorcyclists on the roads in Essex in recent years, and that there has been a sharp increase in leisure motorcycling. That is not confined to young people; older people have returned to riding motorbikes as a leisure activity. Already a working partnership between the police and local authorities, including Chelmsford borough council, has been set up to identify why that is happening and to look at some of the profound issues that it raises, including safety issues.

The police are offering motorcyclists in Essex an opportunity to improve and develop their riding skills through a recent initiative, which seeks to reduce motorcycle injury and theft. It is called "the edge", and the hon. Gentleman may well have heard about it. I am sure that he could use his high profile on the whole issue of road safety to support the project. The county council will soon publish a motorcycling strategy setting out a number of related actions that will work together to create better motorcycling facilities in the county, and to promote safer motorcycling.

My Department is examining the disproportionately high casualty rate among motorcyclists. We are working closely with organisations in the industry, riders,

[Ms Sally Keeble]

manufacturers, retailers and instructors to develop better training and testing programmes, to consider the need for extra protection for both vehicle and rider, and to raise awareness of the vulnerability of motorcyclists among all road users.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the role of speed in accidents. It is believed that excessive speed is probably one of the main contributory factors in road traffic accidents. In Essex, about 26 per cent. of all road accidents are related to speeding. That is a reduction from 32 per cent. five years ago. For accidents involving fatalities, the figure rises to a quite staggering 90 per cent. Research evidence shows that 70 per cent. of vehicles exceed the 30 mph speed limit.

We are committed to reducing excessive speeding on all our roads. It is one of the highest priorities for accident reduction. We have a number of programmes involving education, training, highway engineering and enforcement, as well as speed cameras, of course.

As far back as 1996, Essex county council launched a speed commitment campaign to encourage local drivers to sign a commitment to drive within the speed limit at all times, which has been very successful. Thousands of organisations and individual motorists have signed up.

The local transport plan for Essex sets out some new initiatives. Particular emphasis is being placed on the need to change attitudes to speed among the young and among inexperienced drivers, who remain one of the largest groups in the casualty statistics. I am very encouraged by the work that is being done to train and educate our motorists about the antisocial dangers of speeding, as well of course as the problem of tailgating.

We are also encouraging all local authorities to improve the standards of their road network and to apply accident reduction engineering measures to accident clusters. Essex has about 200 sites that are receiving attention, with many grouped together in a whole route action plan. I understand that this year's programme includes the implementation of action plans for the A1060 Chelmsford to Bishop's Stortford road and the B1018 Braintree to Witham road. The construction of the new A131 Great Leighs bypass and the A130 improvements are also well under way.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the problems on the A12 and the improvements there, so he may want some more information about the progress that is being made. The improvements to the A12 are currently being considered as part of the London to Ipswich multi-modal study, which started in October 2000 and will report to the regional planning body in June 2002. The highway authorities are undertaking a route management strategy along the A12, to include measures over the next 10 years. Although, unfortunately, it will not happen straight away, there will be steady and progressive improvements along that route.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the role of safety cameras. In April 2000, we launched the trial scheme that allows the funding of speed and red light safety cameras by "netting off", with money collected from fixed penalty speeding fines being reinvested into more cameras. The Essex partnership was one of the first to join the scheme, as indeed was my own local authority.

Results from the first year of operation have been very encouraging, and hon. Members will recall that the Minister for Transport announced in August this year that the scheme would be rolled out nationally. Across the eight areas that made up the initial trial there has been a 47 per cent. reduction in the number killed and seriously injured at camera sites and an 18 per cent. reduction elsewhere in the pilot areas.

Quite often, the cameras are not the most popular things, because they have produced quite a lot of speeding tickets, but if one considers the number of people who are alive now who would not have been otherwise, it is easy to see that they have been extremely worth while. In Essex, before the introduction of the scheme, 68 per cent. of motorists exceeded the speed limit at camera sites. That has now fallen to 11 per cent.

I want to touch on issues of local transport funding, because the importance of local authorities and the police working together to reduce deaths and injuries on our roads cannot be overstated. The introduction of the local transport plans means that authorities must now have clear strategies for road safety in their areas. The draft road safety strategy for Essex has been out to consultation and I understand that it will be published shortly.

In December last year we allocated Essex £13 million for integrated transport, including road safety, in its local transport plan. That was more than double the allocation for integrated transport in the previous year. It will enable Essex to make real progress in meeting the challenging targets that have been set. I cannot comment today on the allocation to Essex for next year, but the announcement will be made shortly—we expect it to be made next month. However, I can say that Essex can proceed with some confidence on the basis of the indicative allocations for the rest of the five-year plan period.

We are committed to working with all local authorities to see a significant reduction in road deaths and injuries and to make road safety a high priority. I know that much work remains to be done and I agree that any death or injury on our roads is an unnecessary tragedy. I am, however, convinced that we can see a significant reduction in the accident statistics in the future. Given the problems that Essex has experienced, I am sure that that will be very welcome to the constituents of those hon. Members present for this debate.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford has done well to raise several important issues regarding road deaths and injuries in mid-Essex. I know that he has kept a consistently high profile on the issue and ensured that it is at the forefront of the public debate. The Government, through the road safety strategy, have already begun to tackle many of those issues on a national level, but we will continue to rely heavily on the direct help of local authorities and the police in striving to achieve our road casualty reduction figures. Further effort on all our parts will bring about the improvements in road safety that we all seek, and will protect lives and reduce some of the horrendous injuries that too many people in Essex and elsewhere have suffered over the years.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Ten o'clock.

Deferred Divisions

Local Government Finance

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 81) (HC 276) on 2001–02 Special Grant for Gypsy Sites Refurbishment, which was laid before this House on 29th October, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 357, Noes 1.

Division No. 61]

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Hilary
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Donohoe, Brian H
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce

Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

NOES

Hunter, Andrew

Question accordingly agreed to.

House of Commons

Thursday 15 November 2001

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

BSE

1. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): What representations she has received from Professor Alan Ebringer of King's college London on BSE and related issues. [13062]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): I received a report on the research work conducted by Professor Ebringer in August 2001.

Mr. Dalyell: In view of Professor Ebringer's report that BSE is probably an auto-immune disease caused by a soil bacterium, which therefore cannot be passed on by meat consumption, does the Department propose to support further research on developing an ante-mortem test to avoid unnecessary cattle culling and thereby save large sums of taxpayers' money? May we hope that the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has no vested interests of the mind in this controversy? The consequences are enormous if Professor Ebringer is right. May we have the assurance that the Department will consider carefully any work from the university of Chicago, a distinguished peer group that may pass judgment on Professor Ebringer's report?

Margaret Beckett: As my hon. Friend knows very well, Professor Ebringer's theory is not universally supported, although it is very interesting. My Department does indeed keep an open mind on new theories on BSE. Where Professor Ebringer's work includes development of a diagnostic test, we are providing funding for him to test his theories more rigorously. My hon. Friend asked about SEAC having a vested interest. I am not aware of any such interest, but he may like to know that the SEAC chairman has, I believe, written to Professor Ebringer inviting him to attend a meeting of the committee.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the right hon. Lady agree that it would be a great pity if Professor Ebringer's team has to be dissolved because the grant that runs out in December is not renewed? As the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) rightly said, that extremely important but controversial work should be considered. Is she aware that there is grave concern that any research with which DEFRA is not automatically happy is quietly shunted into a siding? Does she agree that that work is important and should continue to be funded?

Margaret Beckett: Of course I accept that it is important, and, as the hon. Gentleman said, my Department is funding it. I do not think it fair to say that there is no interest in it. If there were no interest in alternative theories, we would not be funding work now. He will also know that Professor Horn's team, for example, which earlier this year investigated the origin of BSE, was unable to agree with Professor Ebringer's theory. We shall keep the funding issue under review. Although I have no current plans to extend that funding, there is no question of the research being in any way suppressed; it is supported.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I at least welcome the fact that the Department is funding further rigorous research into Professor Ebringer's theory, but will the right hon. Lady address in particular the connection between Professor Ebringer's work and the conclusion of the Phillips inquiry that there may well be a connection between the spread of BSE—not the origin of the disease—and the use of organophosphate warble fly dressings in the 1980s? As there seems to be a direct connection, is further research being done to establish whether the Phillips inquiry was correct in that conclusion?

Margaret Beckett: As the hon. Gentleman knows, a great deal of research is being conducted. Although there is almost a plethora of theories, up to now there has been no clear and simple explanation that everyone has accepted, other than that which is familiar to all hon. Members about the possibility of animal feed being the cause. My Department, and SEAC advising it, keep all those different ideas under review and continue to support a range of research into such issues.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is it the Government's and the Department's policy to pay out grants to everyone who has a controversial idea? I can think of a thousand and one controversial ideas. Where does the policy begin and where does it end? If this fellow gets a grant for doing controversial work, should that not apply to a lot of others who would like to take part in the exercise? It sounds like a DEFRA new deal.

Margaret Beckett: I do not think that it is quite that. If I may remind the House, any research funding that my Department undertakes is provided on the basis of thorough scientific evaluation and advice, but I take my hon. Friend's point—many people are investigating different theories. When there is a possibility of scientific validity, we try to avoid squeezing out theories that are initially controversial and new, which is what my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mrs Dalyell) expressed concern about. We try to ensure that we investigate the right range of potential answers. I am nevertheless grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) for pointing out that we cannot do absolutely everything.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): The right hon. Lady might have told the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)

that Professor Ebringer heads up a world-class laboratory that deserves support and his findings deserve to be taken very seriously indeed. Do not those findings in relation to BSE underline yet again the disturbing confusion in the scientific world over those vital matters of food safety and health?

I sympathise with the right hon. Lady. It is extremely difficult to base far-reaching Government policy on science when science appears to shift like sand, but does she accept that Professor Ebringer's evidence only emphasises the need to take account of scientific opinion beyond her own advisers at SEAC, particularly bearing in mind the fact that scientists show a natural reluctance to alter their opinions once they have reached a decision and published it?

Margaret Beckett: We all understand that, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his understanding, but perhaps he is being a little unfair in saying that there is disturbing confusion in the scientific world. As he is well aware, we are talking about people who operate at the cutting edge of science.

The hon. Gentleman is entirely right about Professor Ebringer, but many of those engaged in this range of work, some of whom have different ideas, also work in world-class research institutes, as one would expect of people who are trying to establish a greater scientific consensus on an issue that is so very difficult and that is at the cutting edge of science. We very much take and heed the advice of SEAC, but we also try to keep an open mind, as SEAC itself does, and try not to stifle an interesting new theory, wherever it may come from.

Kyoto Protocol

2. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): What role her Department played in the international round of climate change negotiations in Marrakech (COP7); and when she expects the UK Government to ratify the Kyoto protocol. [13064]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): UK Ministers and officials and experts played a leading role in the negotiations in Marrakech. We believe that the agreement reached should pave the way for ratification and entry into force of the Kyoto protocol. The UK intends to ratify, along with our EU partners, in time to allow entry into force before the world summit on sustainable development next September.

Tom Brake: I thank the Secretary of State for her response and I welcome the role that the UK has played so far, although it is worth remembering that the figure for reduction is 5.2 per cent. on average, or 2 per cent. according to some environmental groups. That is some way off the 60 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions required in the longer term.

The Secretary of State knows that the UK and the US are standing shoulder to shoulder in respect of Afghanistan. What progress are the Government making to ensure that the UK and the US stand shoulder to shoulder on this issue, which is also of international importance?

Margaret Beckett: First, the figures that the hon. Gentleman quotes are based on an approach of "business as usual plus about 15", so the contribution to tackling the issue is more substantial than is sometimes acknowledged. However, I fully accept, as does everyone engaged in the talks in Bonn and Marrakech, that this is very much a first step on the road. Not only is it a substantial step in itself, but for the very first time we have an international environmental agreement with detailed rules and mechanisms allowing not just implementation but monitoring of that implementation.

On the position of the United States, I had discussions with the US Minister in Marrakech and I understand that substantial work is continuing in the United States. The US Government recognise the importance of climate change and the need to address that issue. My impression is that the United States will work on and hopefully produce proposals as to how it may act domestically. Obviously we do not yet have a time scale for that, but it is clear that substantial work is being undertaken, and that in itself is welcome.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on the progress that has been made. Does she agree that, to meet the much higher targets that the United Kingdom Government have set themselves, it is necessary to move more quickly towards the use of maximum energy efficiency and renewables? In that context, will she commit to using the powers under the Utilities Act 2000 to introduce an obligation on suppliers in respect of combined heat and power similar to that for renewables?

Margaret Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her remarks and for the great interest that she takes in the matter. The issue that she raises is under consideration, and we recognise the great importance of the contribution of CHP. It is intended to issue a consultation paper, perhaps towards the turn of the year, because the Government recognise and want to strengthen the position of CHP.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): In relation to the international negotiations on Kyoto, does the Deputy Prime Minister still have responsibilities, as appeared to be envisaged when the Secretary of State's responsibilities were originally set out, or is she alone taking the lead?

Margaret Beckett: In this Government we work together in pursuing our objectives. I was the lead negotiator in Marrakech and in Bonn, and we were fortunate to secure agreement. However, I was delighted to be able to engage my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister in making the international contacts outside the specific arena of Marrakech that helped us to reach that agreement.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Given the recent significant fall in the price of crude oil and given that the transport sector contributes more than 20 per cent. to total greenhouse gas emissions in the United Kingdom, has my right hon. Friend considered the fact that our attempts to achieve our targets might be undermined by increased petrol consumption and increased greenhouse gas

emissions from the transport sector? Has she considered any corrective mechanisms that may be necessary to prevent that?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. We keep all those issues under review and a lot of interesting work is being conducted on the contributions made by different sectors. It is important to do as much as we reasonably and proportionately can, acting on all those different levers, but a great deal of work is being undertaken to find out what has the greatest impact. Some recent work suggests that energy efficiency represents one of the most effective initiatives that we could take in the United Kingdom to reduce our contribution to global warming.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): The right hon. Lady is keen to take credit for the extremely welcome progress made on achieving international agreement on climate change. No doubt the Deputy Prime Minister will be delighted to hear what she said about his role in the matter, but we all know that the Minister for the Environment really deserves any accolades that are on offer.

Will the Secretary of State move to ratify the Kyoto agreement as soon as possible? Will she give us a date by which she envisages that happening? On the United Kingdom's efforts to combat climate change, does she agree that the so-called climate change levy is set to hit manufacturing industry with a £200 million bill that it can ill afford? In any case, will she confirm that 70 per cent. of carbon dioxide emissions do not come from industry and that the levy is nothing more than another stealth tax that will damage competitiveness while contributing virtually nothing to saving the planet?

Margaret Beckett: I can honestly say that it has never been my practice throughout my political life to try to take credit for something in which I have not played a role. While I am happy to echo the hon. Gentleman's tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, the hon. Gentleman has overlooked one matter, because it has not yet been reported in the House. My right hon. Friend, along with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, made a considerable contribution to reaching an excellent agreement in Doha recently.

This Government are working extremely well together and, although I would not say so if the hon. Gentleman had not been slightly less than charitable, we have been substantially more successful in those international negotiations than were the Government whom he supported. As for moving to ratification, I cannot give him more of a time scale than that we intend to ratify before the Johannesburg summit.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman and the House are also aware that the Russian delegation made positive noises and indications and that the Japanese Government have announced that they will put ratification procedures to the Diet and hope to ratify Kyoto by June. They think that a reasonable parliamentary timetable. It appears that we are making substantial progress towards ratification and entry into force, and that is excellent.

On the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the climate change levy, I am mindful that it is not popular with British business and that areas of manufacturing have expressed concern at its effect. I remind him that it is a mechanism for funding the work of the Carbon Trust. I do not know how much opportunity he has had to examine its work, as he has held his responsibilities for only a short time, but it is interesting and encouraging, and funded directly by the climate change levy.

Flooding (Cambridgeshire)

3. **Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): If she will meet the chairman of the Environment Agency to discuss recent flooding in Cambridgeshire; and if she will make a statement. [13065]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I express the Government's sympathy for all those affected by the recent flooding in Cambridgeshire and elsewhere. I have received a report from the Environment Agency on the flooding, which followed exceptional rainfall in that area. The agency is undertaking follow-up investigations into the sources of the flooding. If those reveal additional flood defence needs, I will consider them with the agency's chairman, with whom I have regular meetings.

Mr. Lansley: I thank the Minister for his reply and his remarks on those affected by the flooding. He knows that more than a dozen villages in my constituency alone were flooded, resulting in serious damage to properties. Although the rainfall was exceptional, the floods highlight serious problems with where properties have been built and the inadequacy of flood defences.

When the Minister discusses those matters with the chairman of the Environment Agency, will he also consider the criteria that his Department applies to projects undertaken by the agency? They lead people in rural areas to feel that, because they live in less densely populated areas where there is less risk to the value of properties affected by any flood, they are sometimes abandoned in circumstances in which those in urban areas would be protected.

Mr. Morley: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. We have introduced a point-scoring system for flood defences to identify priorities. The system is transparent and people can see how the decisions have been made, but complex issues are involved. For example, the flooding at about three quarters of the affected properties in his constituency was caused by problems with drains, small ditches and non-main rivers, which are not the responsibility of the Environment Agency.

The hon. Gentleman may be aware that we recently commissioned a report by the Institution of Civil Engineers to address the whole issue of drainage and non-main rivers, and we shall consider it carefully in drawing up policy.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My hon. Friend will be aware that the problems in Cambridgeshire are widely felt. Will he engineer a meeting between the Environment Agency and the Local Government Association so that

individual local authorities may be made more aware of the new planning policy guidance on building in flood plains, enabling them to avoid doing so?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I regularly meet the LGA and the central local partnership, and we discuss those issues. As he will be aware, the Government recently improved PPG25, which gives new guidance to planners on flood-plain development and the need to ensure that proper mitigation measures are taken to protect new and existing communities and, in some cases, to turn down applications.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The Minister will acknowledge that the people of Cambridgeshire were clearly dismayed to be victims of flooding yet again. Interestingly, October was the warmest on record and, in Cambridgeshire, the wettest. That is surely practical evidence of the effects of climate change. I understand that there were practical problems, such as the supply of sandbags running out at a critical time, but that raises an issue of resources and co-ordination.

On the "Today" programme, the Minister acknowledged the Institution of Civil Engineers report, which says that more resources are needed to deal with flood defences and prevention. It also recommends a national agency to co-ordinate flood prevention measures. What will the Government do to implement those recommendations and to ensure that we have proper measures to protect against flooding? How will they make planning guidelines consistent with not developing in areas where development would aggravate flooding problems?

Mr. Morley: The ICE report was very helpful, which is why I commissioned it and other independent reports to help to reduce the risk of flooding anywhere in the country. The provision of sandbags and the roles of the local authorities and the Environment Agency are certainly issues, and they are being considered because we need strategies and advance planning so that any flooding is met by a smooth and seamless response. The Government cannot guarantee that floods will not happen, but we can reduce risk. That involves additional spending, which is why we have substantially increased spending over the past two years.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): The Minister says that much of the recent problem was caused by the small rivers and was therefore not the responsibility of the Environment Agency. He is right, because it was due to inadequate maintenance of existing flood prevention and drainage systems, but, as he began to imply, the problem is buck passing, which affects many villages in my part of Cambridgeshire.

I have already found that the Environment Agency, the local district councils, the internal drainage boards and the water authorities are all saying, "It's not me, guv. It's somebody else's responsibility." Will the Minister use his authority to bring those organisations together? For the ordinary person whose house has been flooded, it does not matter whose responsibility it is as long as something is done to resolve the problem. The important point is that all the authorities should work together instead of trying to pass the buck.

Mr. Morley: The short answer is yes. I did not want to pass the buck. A report that we commissioned on the funding sources of flood defence and the institutional arrangements will be published shortly. It will address the issue of non-main rivers. The present situation is that non-main rivers and ditches are the responsibility of landowners in some cases. In others, local authorities have permissive powers. We are not ignoring the existence of those problems. Indeed, we are trying to address them, as the hon. Gentleman will see when the report is published.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): The floods in Cambridgeshire will be repeated throughout inland Britain this winter, because underground aquifers are full, the land is saturated and the water table is high. If it rains as it did last year, the one certainty is that even more homes and businesses will be inundated than were last year. Those inland floods meant misery for tens of thousands of people and cost them more than £1 billion, as the Minister knows.

The Government's reaction has been too muddled, too little and too late. Will the Minister confirm that building continues on essential flood plains and that plans for massive development on water-absorbing greenfield sites will make a thoroughly bad situation worse? Have the Environment Agency and the ICE told the Government that much more needs to be done and spent? What reassurances can he give that, if it rains as it did last year, what has been done this year will mean that fewer families will face the squalor and distress that so many faced last winter?

Mr. Morley: Instead of saying that one cannot build on a greenfield site at any time, under any circumstances, we need a balance and some common sense. There have been demands for more funding, and we have met those demands. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the independent reports that we commissioned point out that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when there was a long drought, inadequate investment was made in flood defences.

Bee Diseases

5. **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): If she will make a statement about measures to prevent the spread of bee diseases. [13067]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): The Department takes very seriously the threat to honeybees from pests and diseases and funds a range of measures to protect bee health, costing around £1.3 million annually. Under those measures, the National Bee Unit, part of the Central Science Laboratory, provides a free diagnostic and inspection service to the beekeeping sector as well as training and education to help beekeepers become more self-reliant through improved bee husbandry.

Mr. Chope: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he agree that beekeepers are the unsung heroes of British farming, because they operate without subsidy and in a spirit of enterprise, like the bees they look after? Will he

acknowledge the important role played by the beekeepers' insurance company in the fight against foulbrood, and will he acknowledge that that company, which has a premium income of less than £20,000 a year, is being severely crippled by Government regulation and red tape? Will he instruct Departments to let that company operate without the burden of the regulatory drones of Government?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman has clearly been working for a fortnight on that supplementary question, but I am not sure that it qualifies for an award for humour. I am happy to pay tribute to those who work in the beekeeping industry. It should be acknowledged—and the hon. Gentleman might be generous enough to do so himself—that the Government do a great deal to support the industry. For instance, we assist the sector in dealing with health issues—varroa is a particular challenge—through programmes that cost about £1.6 million in 2001-02. The Government recognise and support the industry.

Foot and Mouth

6. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): When she next plans to meet representatives of the National Farmers Union to discuss the foot and mouth outbreak; and if she will make a statement. [13068]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): I met the president of the National Farmers Union to discuss the foot and mouth outbreak on 30 October. Members of my ministerial team and departmental officials keep the NFU fully informed of developments at regular stakeholder meetings, which cover a wide range of foot and mouth disease related issues.

Mr. Bellingham: Is the Secretary of State aware that, as well as the devastation caused by foot and mouth in the areas directly affected by the disease, there has also been substantial damage to ancillary businesses in places such as Norfolk? For example, Far Pavilions is a company that hires out tents and marquees in west Norfolk. It has faced crippling losses as a direct consequence of the epidemic. Will she meet representatives of businesses such as that to discuss claims for compensation?

Finally, has not the time come for the Secretary of State to face up to the huge anger in the countryside and order a full and comprehensive public inquiry?

Margaret Beckett: First, we are aware of the many ancillary businesses damaged by the consequences of the foot and mouth outbreak. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that no Government have ever felt able to say that they could deal with and compensate all those affected by a range of public events. This matter is no different, although I can tell him that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs has continued to hold meetings with interested parties. For example, alongside the meetings that have been held generally with stakeholders in the wider farming community, other meetings have been held with the wider rural stakeholders. We are very conscious of the problems and have sought to do what we can to help to ease the difficulties experienced by people in other businesses. However, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that we have not been able to alleviate all those problems.

The most important contribution that could have been made was to try to bring the epidemic to an end so that ordinary business could resume. Nothing that the Government could do could replace that contribution.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): We had foot and mouth in my constituency, which has the largest English cattle ranch and the largest sheep farm in the country. My farmers want to know what the future of farming will be. In that context, will my right hon. Friend remind the House about where we are in discussions about the future of the new common agricultural policy?

Margaret Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as his question enables me to respond to the second half of the question from the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham). I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for omitting to do so earlier.

The inquiry process set in train by the Government has three strands, one of which is the work of the commission looking at the future of food and farming. I hope and expect that that commission will be able to report around the end of the year. Obviously, that will be an important contribution to what my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) will know is a widespread debate. He will know too that the Government have pressed—as did our predecessors, although less successfully—for CAP reform. I believe that the agreement reached in Doha will be a substantial stimulus to that process.

However, I can tell the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk that the Government strongly believe that there is a great deal to be said for holding independently run inquiries that disaggregate the different issues arising from foot and mouth disease. Such an inquiry will report much more speedily and at much less cost than a full tribunal of public inquiry.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Given the green light for the resumption of foxhunting in the veterinary risk assessment published this morning, will the Secretary of State join me in acknowledging the invaluable role played by hunt professionals in tackling some of the worst aspects of foot and mouth disease? Will she say for how long the proposed licensing regime will be imposed? Will it be scrapped when the country is deemed to be free of foot and mouth? Finally, will she ensure that the same restrictions are imposed on the dangerous and irresponsible activities of hunt saboteurs?

Margaret Beckett: I remind the hon. Gentleman that what was published this morning was a consultation paper. It is important that people understand that a process of consultation studying aspects of this issue will be held over the next two to three weeks. Also, I take this opportunity to stress that the picture that emerges following the veterinary advice is mixed. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, the Government propose to lift restrictions on falconry, and we shall give greater freedom to operate, for instance, to small teams working to catch vermin in specific farm areas.

However, when people think of conventional hunting they think of people riding horses, and so on. There are different regimes for such hunting in different parts of the

country, depending on disease status. That is the veterinary advice and we shall follow it, as we have followed such advice throughout the outbreak.

The hon. Gentleman called for restraint among hunt saboteurs. The Government call on everyone connected with hunting—those who engage in it or who follow it, either in support or opposition—to show restraint and to obey the restrictions that are in place. I do not think that anyone would be forgiven if foot and mouth cases started to appear again as a result of our adoption of the veterinary advice.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): It is pleasing to hear of the warmth of the relations between the Government and Mr. Ben Gill of the National Farmers Union, but does my right hon. Friend agree that individual local NFU members have been very poorly served by their national leadership? Will she take those local members into the circle of people whom she consults? Will she discuss with them the view that they hold—and which I share—that the contiguous culling policy has been costly, cruel and crass?

Margaret Beckett: The Department seeks to have constructive relationships with all our stakeholders, and the NFU is not exceptional or singled out in that respect. It is not for me to enter into disputes between any membership organisation and its national leadership.

I am aware that the contiguous cull was a policy of some considerable controversy. However, if my hon. Friend considers the course of the outbreak in the Brecon Beacons, he will find that, because of a perfectly understandable wish not to kill unnecessarily, the procedure included testing before killing. That testing showed that at every stage the disease was running ahead of those tackling it, until the contiguous cull was extended. There is complete agreement between those who dealt with the problem in the Brecon Beacons and the Department that the contiguous cull brought the disease under control. I understand that the policy is controversial, but no one has yet produced a better alternative.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Will the Government consider paying a national supplement to the sheep annual premium? Our recent inability to export and the highest European market prices on record have meant that the premium has been calculated at the low level of less than £7, instead of around £17. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that the livestock welfare disposal scheme will continue into 2002 and as long as it is needed while animal welfare problems persist as a result of the foot and mouth epidemic?

Margaret Beckett: We keep all those issues under review. The hon. Lady invites me to come to conclusions here and now, and to announce them. I am not prepared to do that. Of course, the Government are mindful of how the terrible problems caused by foot and mouth impacted on the farming community in a variety of ways. However, as she acknowledged, the question of the sheep premium is not related to that alone. We are mindful of the concerns and needs of the farming industry, and the Government do what they can to address them.

Landfill Sites

7. **Judy Mallaber** (Amber Valley): What her policy is on the siting of landfill sites. [13069]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): Any new landfill site must comply with the location requirements of the EC landfill directive. It must also be in accordance with the development plan for the area unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Judy Mallaber: A waste recycling group has submitted an application to develop a landfill site for household waste at Marehay, Ripley, in my constituency, claiming that it is the only possible new site in Derbyshire for Derbyshire's waste. There are 194 houses within 250 m of the site, and a new 300-home housing development is next to that. Does my right hon. Friend find it acceptable for waste to be dumped so close to people's homes, particularly when the stream of waste vehicles will have to go along unsuitable roads to the site, past a school and a major local tourist attraction, the Denby pottery visitors centre?

Mr. Meacher: I understand the concern that many local populations have about the siting of new landfill sites. Any landfill site requires planning permission from the local planning authority. There must be a full opportunity for local people to express their views and to have those taken into account. There must be a waste management licence or pollution prevention control permit provided by the Environment Agency. In this case, I would expect that the application for authorisation would be published and that there would be public meetings in the surrounding area to give people an opportunity to comment. Also, I would expect that any draft authorisations would be subject to consultation. We are concerned about the health implications of landfill sites nearby and the small areas health statistical unit has been looking at the health impacts near landfill sites. We have just commissioned three further pieces of research to examine that relationship more closely.

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I support the move away from landfill sites, but we are faced with a large number of proposals for incineration. What plans does the Minister have to put in place a moratorium on all these proposals to allow other activities such as waste minimisation and waste reduction to take place, and to ensure that incineration takes third place in the waste cycle?

Mr. Meacher: The Government published their waste management strategy in the middle of last year and we have made it clear that we have a hierarchy, in which the first priority—as the hon. Lady said—is waste minimisation. The best thing is not to create waste in the first place. The second priority is recycling, reuse and recovery of any waste that is created. Only then will we consider incineration or landfill. The landfill directive, which becomes operational in July next year, will require a massive switch away from landfill to alternative forms of disposal. The Government have made it absolutely clear—with statutory targets for local authorities, a considerable increase in funding for local authorities and

the waste resources action programme to provide markets for recyclers—that our chosen preference is unquestionably recycling.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): In connection with the research that the Department is undertaking on the possible health risks associated with landfill, could I ask my right hon. Friend how that research will distinguish between the potential risks that exist in the sites and are associated with the industrial activity that often took place before the site was used for landfill and the effect of landfill itself? Is he aware of the local health survey that is being undertaken around the landfill site in my constituency? Could that information be fed into the general research that is going on? How soon does he think it will be before we get the results of the research that he is commissioning?

Mr. Meacher: The small areas health statistical unit has investigated the matter and has found a slightly increased statistical risk of birth defects in babies born to women living within 2 km of landfill sites. This is worrying. However, let me make it absolutely clear that this type of study does not and cannot prove causation. In other words, as my hon. Friend has indicated, there may well be other factors that can explain that association. That is why we have commissioned three further pieces of research. They will report as quickly as they can within the next couple of years so that we can see just what role, if any, landfill sites play in the results that we have found.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): Like other hon. Members, I think that the Minister is due for promotion to the shadow Cabinet. *[Interruption.]* Wait for the punchline. I think that he is due for promotion to the shadow Cabinet before the real Cabinet because there is a bijou problemette in promoting him. The Minister has made a lot of the Government's policy on landfill sites, with the important claim that there should be recycling. Will he explain how, at present, Britain recycles only 6 per cent. of our household waste, compared with 24 per cent. in the United States, 18 per cent. in Germany, 28 per cent. in the Netherlands and 42 per cent. in Switzerland? He hopes that 45 per cent. of our household waste will be recovered by 2010. Many of us think that that is an ambitious target. I understand that recoverable household waste will include incineration. We understand that the Government are considering an additional 165 incinerators. If he is not to go ahead with any more landfill sites, could he explain whether he has yet decided where those 165 incinerators are to be placed?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is not quite right with his figures. He said that only 6 per cent. of household waste in this country is recycled. That was the figure in 1997, at the end of 18 years of Conservative government. The figure is nearly twice that level now. We expect that, within the next five years, it will be doubled again. Once the momentum in the increase in recycling has been established—through the setting down of statutory targets, the provision of adequate finance and the increased markets for recycling through the WRAP organisation that we have set up—I believe that we can meet these ambitious targets.

On incinerators, let me make it absolutely clear—I hope for the final time—that the Government do not have any figure in their back pocket about the number of incinerators that might be needed. I have said repeatedly that there are 11 incinerators operating in the UK at present. If we can achieve the requirements under the landfill directive without any increase in incineration at all, I would be delighted. However, I believe that it will be necessary to have some small increase in incineration if we are to achieve those targets. But we insist that this should be small-scale, and preferably in conjunction with combined heat and power.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Unusually, I agree with the shadow spokesman, the hon. Member for Mid–Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), who suggested that my right hon. Friend the Minister should be in the Cabinet, as that would enable us to put the environment at the heart of Government.

In respect of landfill sites, my right hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance of planning decisions. Can he give a progress report on the work that he has been able to do with the Environment Agency to ensure that golf courses are not using loopholes in planning legislation inadvertently to set up landfill sites when developing golf courses? In my constituency, at Bagnall and Goldenhill, we have real fears that we will end up with waste disposal sites when what we have at the moment are golf courses.

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her generous remarks, but I recall that when Mr. Nigel Lawson's position was described as "unassailable", he was gone three weeks later. I wonder whether calls for promotion are not a premonition of being sacked.

On the point made by my hon. Friend, there is a serious issue about exemption from waste management licensing. There is no doubt that many sites currently in use were never intended to be used and are thus not covered by existing legislation. We have undertaken a stringent review of the criteria whereby exemption from waste management licensing can be secured, and I hope to make a statement on that shortly.

Veterinary Medicines

8. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): If she will make a statement on the regulatory framework for prescribing veterinary medicines. [13070]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The over-30-months scheme was started in England on 30 July—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Gray: That is the wrong answer.

Mr. Morley: I am sorry.

The regulatory framework for prescribing veterinary medicines is set out in section 58 of the Medicines Act 1968.

Mr. Gray: I am grateful to the Minister for giving me the correct answer—albeit belatedly. He will no doubt be aware of article 67 of the EU review 2001, which would

mean that such things as worming powders and salt licks would be issued only under veterinary prescription and not by saddlers or agricultural merchants as they are at present. Does he agree that that would have a devastating effect on saddlers and agricultural merchants; it would have a damaging effect on animal welfare because, for example, people would be reluctant to buy wormers; it would endanger the 3,200 people who are currently qualified to issue those medicines without being vets; and it would have an appalling effect on the countryside in general? Will he bring the strongest representations to bear on the European Commission and the European Parliament to ensure that this does not happen?

Mr. Morley: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall certainly raise the matter with the Commission. There needs to be common sense in the application of such regulations. Of course, there are serious issues about veterinary medicines and food animals, and about animal welfare. In relation to animals such as horses, there are a range of medicines and there needs to be some flexibility. Discussions will be held, probably for about two to three years, during which we shall try to resolve these issues.

Flood Prevention

9. **Gareth Thomas** (Clwyd, West): If she will make a statement on steps taken to co-ordinate flood prevention. [13072]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Environment Agency has a general supervisory responsibility for all matters relating to flood defence in England and Wales. The agency has been working with the other operating authorities in developing arrangements for inspecting defences and watercourses, receiving reports and assessing flood risk. We have been reviewing the present arrangements for funding flood and coastal defence as part of that, and we will consider whether the institutional arrangements are fit for the purpose.

Gareth Thomas: I am grateful for that response. On the subject of insurance against flooding, I am sure that the Minister will be aware that many householders are now finding it difficult to obtain insurance cover. Does he think that the Government have a role—and if so, what role—in ensuring that the insurance industry, which is so keen to collect premiums from people in good times, provides affordable cover, save in exceptional circumstances?

Mr. Morley: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Government are regularly in touch with the Association of British Insurers, and we have held several meetings recently to discuss those points. Insurance companies are of course in the business of managing risk, while the Government are in the business of reducing risk for people in relation to the threat from floods. The substantial sums that we are putting in and the substantial programmes that we have in place are reducing those risks, and we expect the insurance companies to respond accordingly.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The flood problems in Wales are far more than a bijou problemette; they are serious and subject to repetition. Has the hon. Gentleman held discussions with officials of the National Assembly for Wales? The Welsh Local Government Association has estimated that it will cost about £50 million of new money to set up a co-ordinated flood defence strategy in Wales. What input has the hon. Gentleman made in that matter?

Mr. Morley: We meet regularly with our colleagues from the Welsh Assembly. Of course, their input in long-term strategy is most important and we take their views into consideration.

Mr. Michael Foster (Worcester): One of the barriers in setting up flood defence mechanisms seems to be the economic test to which they are subject. Will my hon. Friend impress on the Treasury the need to change the economic test so that, when it is used to assess value for money for flood defence schemes, it includes social costs, impact on health, and business and commercial losses?

Mr. Morley: We are currently reviewing the way that we apply the points score on the very issues raised by my hon. Friend. Of course, issues such as the effect on health can be difficult to quantify, but we accept that that is a perfectly legitimate consideration to take into account, and we are examining how that could be done in the future review of assessments.

Pig Farming

11. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What assessment she has made of the profitability of the pig sector. [13074]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The UK pig industry is going through a difficult time, partly as a result of the foot and mouth disease outbreak but also because of slack demand and plentiful supply. However, with the re-opening of export markets and the ability of the industry to restructure, using funds provided by the Government, medium-term prospects look more promising.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that reply, although it is a slight understatement to say that the industry is going through a difficult time. Historically, the pig industry has neither sought nor received Government subsidy and it is still reeling from the after-effects of, first, classical swine fever and then foot and mouth. It still cannot believe that the Government are not taking action to prevent illegal meat imports.

Will the Minister tell us about the pig industry restructuring scheme? The Government set aside £66 million, which was welcome. How much of that has been spent, how has it been distributed and what will be done with any residue to help our hard-pressed pig industry?

Mr. Morley: I certainly accept the hon. Gentleman's point that the pig industry has never really sought support from the Government and the taxpayer, and it deserves great credit for that. As he rightly states, the industry has been under some pressure and we acknowledge that.

The full £66 million for the pig industry restructuring support scheme was not taken up. The financing is complex and £3 million was used for business recovery schemes, which can also benefit the pig industry. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government have been successful in getting pig exports moving again earlier than expected and that will doubtless have a beneficial effect on the whole sector.

I have to take issue with the hon. Gentleman over the point about illegal imports. We are spending a great deal of time, money and resources to ensure that illegal imports do not get into this country and we shall, of course, continue to review and strengthen those efforts. However, no one can give a 100 per cent. guarantee that it will not happen.

Waste Management

12. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): If she will make a statement on the Government's waste management strategy. [13075]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): The national waste strategy, published in May last year, seeks to encourage more sustainable resource use by reducing the amount of waste created and by extracting value wherever possible from the waste that is produced.

We have set demanding statutory recycling targets for local authorities, increased the landfill tax, held consultations on a system of tradable landfill permits to achieve the required diversion from landfill, and established the waste resources action programme to help create stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products.

Later this month we shall hold a waste summit for those with an interest in waste issues to discuss what more needs to be done.

Mr. Amess: The Secretary of State will be aware that in Essex recycling is running at 19 per cent. countywide; in civic amenities the figure is as high as 53 per cent. Does she realise that in order to meet increased targets local authorities will incur huge extra costs? In July, the comprehensive spending review promised more money—specifically, £140 million was promised to local authorities. Will she explain why local authorities have not so far received any extra money?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman correctly says that extra resources were made available, but that was, of course, over a three-year period. I accept his point about what is being done already by Essex, among other local authorities, but he will know that it is important for the Government to encourage them to do far more, and that only through a constructive and effective partnership between Government and local authorities can we reach and achieve the targets. I anticipate that all those issues will be thrashed out at the waste summit.

Energy Efficiency

13. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): What steps the Government are taking to encourage a reduction in the use of energy. [13077]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The Government are committed to improving energy efficiency as a highly cost-effective way of achieving our climate change goals. The energy efficiency commitment will, from next April, provide a substantial boost to domestic energy efficiency activity. The Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust receive more than £66 million from the Department to promote domestic, business and public sector energy efficiency and the take-up of low-carbon technology. The climate change levy, and its associated voluntary agreements, are also an important spur to business energy efficiency.

Ian Lucas: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is there not still a danger that the Government are focusing too much attention on the production of energy rather than its reduction? Is it not appropriate that the Government support measures such as the Home Energy Conservation Bill—promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) and due to receive its Second Reading on 30 November—through which the public would be made aware that they, too, have a responsibility to reduce energy consumption?

Mr. Meacher: We are very concerned that efforts to promote energy efficiency are directed not only at business but at domestic households. There are basically three ways to do so.

First, there is the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, which we are strengthening, and we shall look very carefully at the Bill that my hon. Friend mentioned. Secondly, there is the home energy efficiency scheme, of £150 million a year, which is on track to meet the public service agreement target of reaching 600,000 households over the next three years. Thirdly, there is the energy efficiency component, which gives suppliers of gas and electricity a major incentive to improve the efficiency by which energy is conveyed to households. Those three together will mean that domestic households make a full contribution to meeting the climate change targets.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the Leader of the House for the business for next week, please?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill.

Motion to approve the Human Rights Act 1998 (Designated Derogation) Order 2001.

TUESDAY 20 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill.

WEDNESDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Consideration in Committee of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill (1st Day).

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the British Overseas Territories Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on the Railway Administration Order Rules 2001.

FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 26 NOVEMBER—Conclusion of consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill.

TUESDAY 27 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Employment Bill.

WEDNESDAY 28 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Civil Defence (Grants) Bill.

THURSDAY 29 NOVEMBER—A debate on the Bristol Royal Infirmary inquiry report on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 30 NOVEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

The House will wish to know that on Monday 19 November, there will be a debate relating to the draft general budget of the European Community for 2002 in European Standing Committee B.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 28 November, there will be a debate relating to the security of energy supply in European Standing Committee C.

[*Monday 19 November 2001:*

European Standing Committee B—Unnumbered European Union Document; European Communities Draft Budget for 2002; Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-iv, (2001-02).

[*Wednesday 28 November 2001:*

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union Documents: 5619/01, 7218/01: Security of Energy Supply. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 28-xi (2000-01) and HC 152-iii(2001-02).

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the future business. Last Thursday, at column 367, I raised with the Leader of the House the matter of the vote next Monday on the Human Rights Act motion, and the Leader of the House gave what I thought was a rather complacent answer on that, suggesting that a deferred vote was an adequate way of dealing with such an important matter. I have no doubt that the Leader of the House is aware that yesterday, his hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) returned to that issue, and said that

"there must be certain items that the House feels are of the utmost importance and deserve a vote immediately after the debate."

You, Mr. Speaker, said:

"I have no powers in these matters, but the hon. Gentleman will know who does. He"—

that is, the hon. Member for Nottingham, North—

"should take the matter up with the appropriate Minister."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 880.]

I think that the Leader of the House is the appropriate Minister, and therefore I ask him yet again: will he listen not only to Conservative Members but to his own hon. Friends, who have now rumbled the fact that to have the disgraceful let-out of the deferred Division used on such an important and substantive matter is frankly unacceptable, and will he, even at this late stage, please look at that matter again?

I also want to follow up a matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) who, on 13 November at column 713, raised a point of order with you, Mr. Speaker, about the very important matter of the report of the parliamentary ombudsman on the ministerial code. He said there—the ombudsman said—

"I have concluded that there is no valid reason under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information why this information should not be released, and that there is a public interest in making it available. I"—

that is, the ombudsman—

"therefore much regret that Ministers have not agreed to the release of the information."

We must have a debate on this matter, must we not? This is a matter of the utmost importance. Here is the ombudsman saying that the Government are engaged in a cover-up—and, worse than that, in a cover-up relating to Ministers and the ministerial code of practice. I hope that the Leader of the House can tell us that we shall have an urgent debate on this matter, so that the Government can come clean.

On 1 November, in a written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), the Secretary of State for Defence said that he was

"currently considering the conclusions of a review on the employment of women in the armed forces"

and would

"make a further statement in due course."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2001; Vol. 373, c. 767W.]

Surprise, surprise: no such statement has been forthcoming, but equally unsurprisingly, in *The Sunday Telegraph* last Sunday, 11 November, we find an item saying that

"the Defence Secretary is understood to have made the decision"—

on women in the armed forces—

"after receiving overwhelming evidence from the Chiefs of Staff . . . One official said: 'The trials proved that to allow women to serve in the infantry or armoured corps would undermine the operational capability of those units which could not be allowed to happen.'"

We hear that we may be about to send some of our armed forces into the theatre of war in Afghanistan. Are they going to go without us hearing on the Floor of the

House what the position is with regard to the use of women in an operational capacity in the armed forces? We yet again have an example of no statement in the House but an inspired leak or briefing in the press. It simply is not good enough, and certainly not in this case.

Finally, I think that we should have an urgent debate on what I would describe as the delicate condition of certain Members. We hear, do we not, that some Members of Parliament—probably mainly the babes on the Labour Back Benches—need counselling, because apparently the fact that—

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Cuddling.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) says "cuddling". If he is volunteering to cuddle the babes, that is a matter for him. However, there is a serious point here, is there not? The House of Commons, as everyone knows, sits from 2.30 in the afternoon until often as late as 10 o'clock at night. We also know that, generally speaking, barely half of the Government Back Benchers are even present when the House sits—that is a matter of record—and we also know that we recently voted ourselves substantially more staff to ease the burden on our delicate persons. I believe that we must have a debate, and I suspect and hope that the Leader of the House can grant it urgently, and I would suggest that it is called: "Stressed-out MPs: Myth or reality?"

Mr. Cook: I can only assure the right hon. Gentleman that if any of my colleagues need counselling or cuddling, they will not be turning to him.

I do think, on a day when I have announced that we shall be having three days of debate on legislation against terrorism, that we shall be having a debate on NHS reform, and that we shall be having a debate on civil defence, none of the issues that the right hon. Gentleman has raised at the Dispatch Box, however entertaining they may be, match the severity of the international crisis or the nature of affairs at home or what our constituents are interested in.

On the employment of women in the armed forces, of course there has been no announcement of any change, nor am I aware that any change is likely be announced. As long as there is no change, the present position applies. However, I would remind the right hon. Gentleman that the Secretary of State for Defence and his Ministers have had quite a bit to think about over the last two months. It may have passed him by, but it is important that they should focus on the international situation, and just a word of congratulation from the right hon. Gentleman on the progress that we have been making in Afghanistan would have been welcome in a very long set of questions.

On the ombudsman, the right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the ombudsman never said that there was a cover-up. He did not say it, even in the words that the right hon. Gentleman quoted. I am sure that if he had said it, the right hon. Gentleman would have made a point of quoting that.

Finally, on the question of deferred Divisions, what I said last week was that we actually have a much larger turnout of Members voting. *[Interruption.]* I have checked the figures. Since we introduced deferred Divisions, on average 463 Members have voted in those Divisions. It is in everyone's interests that there should be as large a vote as possible on the derogation from the human rights convention. I return the right hon. Gentleman's question for a response—possibly, a Conservative Member can answer it. That derogation permits us to detain terrorists whom we cannot deport. Is the Conservative party really going to vote against that on Monday and leave those terrorists at large in Britain?

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): May I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 323, which was signed by 225 Members from all parties and calls for the House to make an early decision about hunting wild mammals with dogs?

[That this House congratulates the Scottish Parliament on the passage of the first stage of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill; looks forward to taking the earliest possible opportunity to re-affirm its stand on the abolition of hunting; and reminds Her Majesty's Government of the overwhelming support for abolition in the House and the high expectation amongst the electorate that the Government will honour the manifesto pledge to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on this issue in respect of England and Wales.]

I remind my right hon. Friend of the Labour manifesto undertaking and the inclusion of the measure in the Queen's Speech. We have had plenty of time since we returned after the summer recess to debate it. Can we resolve the matter by a straight resolution of the House, so that it can go straight to the other place rather than having to go through all the stages of a Bill yet again? Have any Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs asked my right hon. Friend for time for the House to resolve the matter? It is about time that the Government started to think about 225 Members of Parliament, rather than appeasing the Countryside Alliance.

Mr. Cook: The position as stated in the Queen's Speech was that there would be a free vote on that issue in this Session. That will take place—there has been no reason to change that. As my hon. Friend knows because I discussed the matter with him, there has been no shift from that position. I note his interesting suggestion about proceeding by resolution rather than by a Bill. Obviously, that is a consideration. I see no reason not to anticipate that there will be a free vote this Session.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): First, does the Leader of the House recall representations that were made to him and supported on both sides of the House that, by amalgamating so many different topics in Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions, we are in danger of squeezing out important issues—notably, those relating to agriculture and the countryside? Will he look again at the practice that was used for Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions questions, which were split in two so that there was obvious opportunity for questions relating to both subjects to be reached?

Secondly, will the Leader of the House tell us when the Government propose that the ratification of the Kyoto protocol should take place? Does he intend that there should be a debate in the House before or after it takes place?

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

Thirdly, I certainly recognise the importance of the legislation on anti-terrorism, crime and security that is coming before the House next week and the week after. Will he demonstrate how seriously the Government take concerns about that legislation? The Bill has 125 clauses and already controversial issues have been raised, not least by the Master of the Rolls this morning. The right hon. Gentleman said when dealing with the provisional business that he expects us to deal with the legislation in just eight days and with limited opportunities to discuss those extremely important issues. Will he undertake to the House that, if it appears as a result of our progress next week that we need more time to discuss it in the following week, the programming of the legislation will be adjusted accordingly?

Mr. Cook: On DEFRA questions, the problem to which the hon. Gentleman referred has been raised before, and I note that he is saying that the system is still causing hon. Members difficulty. We will continue to discuss it to try to find a way forward.

On the Kyoto protocol, it is only within the past few weeks that we have achieved agreement at Marrakech on the protocol. I hope that we can progress the matter with all due speed. However, Britain has everything to be proud of in this matter. The cuts that we are offering in greenhouse gases are greater than those offered by any other country and we have consistently taken a lead to try to get the agreement that was subsequently secured in Marrakech.

I appreciate the co-operation that we have received in drawing up the timetable for the House to deal with the terrorism Bill. I hope that we will be able to meet that timetable, which provides a generous allocation of time to consider the main issue. Indeed, on the second day, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we propose to sit until midnight and thus make available additional time to the House and ensure that Third Reading does not take time from Committee proceedings. The timetable must be balanced against the fact that we are in a grave situation. As a result of 11 September we know the severity and potential scale of the threat that we face. While our constituents certainly want us to probe, test and scrutinise the Bill adequately, they would find it odd if Parliament were incapable of enacting measures by the end of this year that we think are essential to ensure that they have proper security.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that some Labour Members whose loyalty to the Government is regarded as verging on the grotesque, or even exceeding it, are growing increasingly impatient at the Government's failure to progress the vote on hunting with dogs? We expect that vote by Christmas so that, should the House vote in favour of a ban on such hunting, there will be sufficient time in this Session to get the legislation through the House of Lords and, if necessary, to use the Parliament Acts.

Mr. Cook: I would not wish to strain the loyalty of such a loyal supporter as my right hon. Friend. The programme that we mapped out in the Queen's Speech is for a full Session. Many issues listed in that speech have not yet been put before the House, but will be in due course. I am confident that the commitment that he mentions will be one of them.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I ask this question of the right hon. Gentleman because, as Leader of the House, he represents the interests not only of the House but all its Members. Is he aware of the growing concern about the extraordinarily arbitrary powers of the Electoral Commission, which has apparently decided that Members of Parliament who go abroad under the auspices of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association or the Inter-Parliamentary Union, or as a member of a Select Committee, are obliged to notify the commission of that visit within 30 days, otherwise they are committing an offence? Is that not absolute nonsense? Is he prepared to make a statement to the House and to indicate that, if necessary, emergency legislation will be introduced to curb that nonsense?

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to agree totally with the hon. Gentleman's comments about the decision of the Electoral Commission, of which I am aware. I have also been privileged to see the correspondence in which the Speaker robustly asserted the rights of the House in this matter. It is a bizarre ruling on the part of the commission and it carries the risk of undermining its credibility and authority as a body of common sense as well as of legal standing.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Given the current salience of terrorism in the public mind, will my right hon. Friend consider scheduling a debate on the chemical warfare that is being waged—in part, allegedly, using British-produced chemicals—in the southern provinces of Colombia and the adjacent provinces of Ecuador under the auspices of Plan Colombia?

Mr. Cook: I cannot say that I am aware of the matter about which my hon. Friend complains. Plainly, I will consider it and, if appropriate, draw it to the attention of the relevant Secretary of State. My hon. Friend will forgive me if I want to establish the facts before I comment.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): In giving the business for the week after next the Leader of the House did not mention the Chancellor's commitment to publish his pre-Budget report on 27 November. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that it is still the case that the Chancellor intends to make that statement? If he does, will he assure me that thereafter, in the light of the recession in manufacturing industry, the rise in unemployment, questions of affordability about future Government expenditure and falling tax revenues, there will be a debate in Government time about the state of the British economy?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to confirm that it is expected that the Chancellor will give his pre-Budget report on 27 November. It is not normally announced as part of the forthcoming business. The fact that it was not announced should not indicate any change in that plan. I find it breathtaking that any Conservative Member should refer to unemployment, which is as low now as it has been for

a generation. It is still below a million and that compares with 3 million under the Conservatives. If they want to debate unemployment, we will be delighted to do so.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): May we have a debate on the work of the Environment Agency to improve flood defences in various parts of the country? In my constituency at Stockbridge the work to defend land near that part of the River Aire and further north will not commence until next summer, which means that many of my constituents are extremely anxious every time we have heavy rain. They are terrified that there will again be flooding only 12 months after it occurred before. That anxiety is not helped by the fact that some insurance companies have been less than helpful. Their sluggish response has meant that some of my constituents have still not moved back into their homes and one constituent has been told that there will be a £10,000 excess when she renews her insurance policy.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the importance of that matter to my hon. Friend's constituents, and I am glad that she has had this opportunity to raise it, which will be noted by my colleagues in the relevant Department. We have invested a very large sum of additional funds in providing flood defences, and many of those projects have proceeded, but it does, of course, take time to put in place what is often complex and significant engineering work. I very much hope that the project to which she refers will go ahead as soon as possible. In the meantime, I draw the attention of the House to the fact that a debate on flood defences will take place in Westminster Hall next week, in which my hon. Friend and others can raise those matters.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Cannot the Leader of the House understand that hon. Members on both sides of the House believe that the motion to derogate part of the Human Rights Act 1998 is a very important matter, which should preferably be considered in prime time and certainly with a Division straight after the debate? It is his duty, surely, to ensure that that happens. Most reasonable people think that a Division should take place immediately after a serious debate, not on the following Wednesday for the convenience of the Prime Minister's voting record.

Mr. Cook: It is, of course, an important debate, and it seems that I am now hearing the answer to my earlier question: the Conservative party intends that those who are terrorists but who are not being deported—

Mr. Hogg: Not so.

Mr. Cook: Well, that would certainly appear to be the implication of the enthusiasm for voting there and then. It is an important issue, so we should enable as many Members as possible to take part, which is why I robustly think it right to defer the Division.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Further to the Prime Minister's answer to the question that I asked last week, can we expect the Secretary of State for Health or the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, or both, to make a statement to the House on the Government's contribution to the research, to be undertaken by the World Health Organisation, into deep vein thrombosis and air travel?

Mr. Cook: I cannot promise that a statement will be made on that matter, but I will certainly ensure that my hon. Friend receives a full response from the relevant Department.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): You will remember, Mr. Speaker, that yesterday at Prime Minister's Question Time, the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) referred to the campaign that the Haemophilia Society is running in relation to the estimated 5,000 haemophiliacs who were infected with HIV or hepatitis as result of faulty blood transfusions. The Prime Minister gave a woolly reply; he said that he would consider those matters and he promised to review them. We know what the Prime Minister's reviews often turn into. Will the Leader of the House therefore arrange an urgent statement, so that those matters can be addressed on behalf of those very vulnerable people?

Mr. Cook: I recall my right hon. Friend's response, and it was one of great sympathy and understanding of the problems of those who have been infected in that way. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the issue relates to cases that date from the 1980s, when we were not in office, but the conduct of the then Government was entirely correct. They introduced the proper means of treating the products that were being used as soon as it was technically available, and they cannot be held responsible for failing to introduce it earlier than that. It is for that reason that the Department of Health resists a claim for compensation, for which there is plainly no legal liability, but it is, of course, willing to explore other ways in which it can help and in which it can ensure that there is no repetition of what happened in the 1980s.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Does my right hon. Friend join me in celebrating the news that a further 73 police recruits commenced training in the west midlands last week, taking the figure to well over 400 new recruits in the past 10 months? However, does he recognise that there is growing concern about the problems of retention in the west midlands and the transfer of officers to other forces? Can we have an early debate on the problems of retention in police authorities such as that in the west midlands? Can we specifically consider the impact of the regional allowance paid to the Met and home counties forces? Can we consider the cost of training police officers in the west midlands who then work in other police authorities?

Mr. Cook: I certainly congratulate my hon. Friend's local police force on the increase that he outlined, which reflects the fact that we now have a record number of police under training to join the force. I cannot promise to hold a debate on the matter, but I draw his attention to the fact that the Home Secretary will answer questions on Monday, when he may wish to raise the issue.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Earlier this week, the Government published a draft Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill and an implementation plan to take forward the

[Mr. Roy Beggs]

recommendations of the review of the criminal justice system. Does the Leader of the House accept that an undertaking was also given that the Government will review the operation of the Parades Commission and the legislation under which it was established? Can he say when that commitment will be fulfilled and the issue will be brought before the House?

Mr. Cook: I cannot announce such a date to the House, as that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is heavily engaged in ensuring that we fulfil our commitments at the present time. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that a number of reviews are under way, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend has that matter under consideration as well.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): During last week's business questions, I raised with the Leader of the House the issue of the Children's Society withdrawing from all its work in Wales. Since then, I have learned that that decision was made with virtually no consultation with all the other agencies involved in the work. May I appeal again to the Leader of the House to use all his influence with his colleagues to try to get the Children's Society to reverse its decision? The Children's Society has 13 projects in Wales, working on advocacy with the most vulnerable children in care, as a result of the Waterhouse report. Will he convey to those involved the damage that that decision has done to the voluntary sector—not only in Wales, but throughout the United Kingdom—especially given the large amounts of public funding in those projects in partnership with the voluntary sector?

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the reasons for my hon. Friend's concern about that issue, and I congratulate her on the persistence with which she has pursued a matter that is obviously of great importance to her constituents. I am sure that my hon. Friends at the Wales Office will wish to do all that they can, but we do not have any direct control over the matter—after all, she refers to a charitable organisation. It appears not to have had a good record of consulting on its decision, but my hon. Friends at the Wales Office will share her concern and will be willing to assist in any way that is practical for them.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Has the Leader of the House reached any decision on whether he will propose that there should be a short recess between Christmas and Easter, called a constituency week? If he claims, quite understandably, that that depends on the pressure and progress of business, surely that problem could be overcome by making a compensatory adjustment to the long summer recess. Does he accept that it would be extremely helpful to hon. Members on both sides of the House to know as soon as possible whether there will be such a recess, so that we can plan our constituency engagements, which many of us could not carry out if the House were sitting?

Mr. Cook: I totally accept the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. Hon. Members are assisted in making maximum use of such time if that recess is predictable and known well in advance. That is why, in the first week back after the long recess, I announced the recess for the forthcoming Christmas and new year period—not to universal approbation from those on the Conservative Front Bench. Nevertheless I did so, and I can assure the House that I will announce the dates of future recesses as soon as I can.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the demise of Atlantic Telecom, which has gone into receivership? Is he also aware of the fact that Oftel has been absolutely no use whatever to the people who have been affected and that PricewaterhouseCoopers, which is in charge of the receivership, has also been unhelpful? In fact, as they say where I come from, it is about as much good as a chocolate fireguard. Will my right hon. Friend also try to help a company such as BT, which wants to take on the responsibility for the service provided by that company, but unfortunately at a cost? Can we have a debate not just about the fact that Atlantic Telecom and similar companies have gone bust, but about looking after small businesses? Perhaps we could create a body along the lines of the Association of British Travel Agents to look after those businesses and stop them going out of business.

Mr. Cook: I am aware from my constituency experience how difficult it can be for companies that are owed money by one that has gone into receivership. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his vigilance on behalf of his constituents and the enterprises in his area. I will draw his remarks to the attention of the appropriate Secretary of State. My hon. Friend will no doubt wish to pursue this, as he has done today, through the other devices open to him as a constituency Member with an issue to raise and interesting proposals to make.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The Leader of the House will know that the Youth Justice Board is a public body funded by the Home Office, and that it publishes a periodical called *Youth Justice Board News*. The October issue has at its masthead a red box including the words "Pledge met—special pull-out supplement". One turns to the exciting special supplement to find a photograph of the leader of the Labour party, the Labour party pledge card and other Labour party political propaganda. Will the Leader of the House please arrange for a Home Office Minister to come to the Dispatch Box as soon as possible to explain how they understand the difference between public spending and party political spending?

Mr. Cook: It sounds an excellent publication, and I shall instruct my office to put me on its mailing list. I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for drawing to the attention of the House and the public how well we have met the pledges we made in the last election.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on competition policy? This request is prompted by the acquisition of Woodville Airbags in my constituency by an American business which, within 72 hours, announced the closure of the plant and the transfer of its work to plants in Romania, with the loss of 304 jobs. This involves nearly 30 per cent. of the European car airbags market, and means that the Company has effectively bought the order book and

disposed of the work force. That seems like the unacceptable face of capitalism to me. May we have a debate on the issue?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Government hope to improve a number of areas of competition policy, which is why we committed ourselves in the Queen's Speech to an enterprise Bill.

My hon. Friend draws attention to a matter that is of concern to his area, particularly to those of his constituents employed by the company. Having represented companies that have been taken over, I fully understand the deep concern of those who work in a company that is acquired in that way. It is Trade and Industry questions next Thursday and my hon. Friend will no doubt wish to raise the matter then.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I reinforce what was said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) with regard to the derogation order. The Leader of the House knows full well that under article 15, the provision of the convention can only be derogated in time of war or other public emergencies threatening the life of the nation. Surely the matter really should be discussed in prime time.

The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, which has 125 clauses, eight schedules and 114 pages, is to clear the House in seven days. There is no way in which the legislation will be properly scrutinised. If it be true that part of the Bill is really urgent, it cannot be true of the entire Bill. Surely the proper way is to identify that which is really urgent, make it the subject of a very short Bill, and take the remainder of the proposed legislation in the proper way.

Mr. Cook: I would not say to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that I am grateful to his right hon. Friends for having agreed the timetable that he has just attacked. They were right to agree to the timetable because it is important that we demonstrate to the public that we are vigilant in ensuring that we take all steps to provide for their security.

It is true that the Bill covers a wide range of issues, spanning several Departments. That is because our response to 11 September has to be comprehensive. Are Conservative Members who wish to challenge the motion really saying that they are prepared to oppose it? Are they prepared to account for a situation in which terrorists whom we cannot deport are allowed to go free? If they are not saying that, I do not understand their concern.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Does my right hon. Friend accept that those who are as passionately committed to the fight against terrorism as he is and who supported with considerable enthusiasm the efforts of the Prime Minister in the current emergency nevertheless believe that there are different ways of translating that commitment against terrorism into legislation? Some of us have considerable reservations about the path that the Government have chosen. I commend my right hon. Friend's effort to get amendments to the Bill accepted from last Tuesday, but because that effort failed, we are left with an even more constricted timetable than he initially envisaged. I hope that he will listen to Labour as well as Opposition Members who wish to see the matter effectively debated and, if necessary, suitably amended.

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that the motion providing for amendments to be tabled in advance of Second Reading was carried last night. I regret that it was not carried earlier—the reason was that the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham and Sleaford opposed it.

Mr. Hogg: My constituency is Sleaford and North Hykeham.

Mr. Cook: The fact remains that the right hon. and learned Gentleman blocked an extra day for Members to table amendments.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): May I bring to the Leader of the House's attention a problem relating to the taking of legislation in this Chamber as a result of the passing of a Sewel motion in the Scottish Parliament? There are often areas of Executive responsibility that are not part of a Bill but have a bearing on its passage. I refer in particular to the Proceeds of Crime Bill, which is in Committee, and the need for assurances about the operation of civil legal aid north of the border.

I invite the right hon. Gentleman, as Chairman of the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons, to look at achieving a means of rectifying that defect at the earliest opportunity to ensure that there is proper parliamentary scrutiny of Executive actions wherever the Minister is, whether here or in Edinburgh?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to examine the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised. If there is a problem, I am sure that, with good will, we can find a way forward. In general, the process of operating by Sewel motion has worked well on both sides and there has been good co-operation from both sides. Only last week we had a joint ministerial council with representatives of the devolved bodies to discuss an approach on European policy, on which there was strong co-operation. I welcome the fact that all parties are working together to find an outcome that everyone can respect in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): I draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 420:

[That this House welcomes the progress made in paying out compensation to miners and their widows in Wales which has now topped £100 million; notes that £1 million a week is being paid out in Wales; acknowledges that initially the rate of payment has not been as rapid as all would desire; recognises the important contribution of the Welsh Monitoring Sub Group set up by the Secretary of State for Wales; notes that the group by bringing together all the stakeholders has succeeded in pushing forward the prioritising of testing for older miners; looks forward to seeing an increase in more full and final offers being made; and congratulates all those who have campaigned for justice for miners and their widows.]

[Mr. Wayne David]

Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Government on the progress that has been made on miners' compensation in Wales? Will he also urge the Government to make greater progress in making full and final offers?

Mr. Cook: The Government have sought to resolve the issue as best they can. It is a complex issue which, as my hon. Friend knows, affects large numbers of people, including, no doubt, some of his constituents. We hope to complete the work as quickly as we reasonably can, and every possible effort is being made to secure that objective.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I invite the Leader of the House to reflect on the uncharacteristically intemperate reply that he gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), who asked very courteously to have a debate on the economy in Government time. Has it not been the practice of the House to debate the economy in Government time in the autumn ever since the right hon. Gentleman and I came here? Is he seriously suggesting that we should spend the first six months of this Parliament with no debate in Government time on the economy?

Mr. Cook: I have no doubt that we will debate the economy at some point in the future. On 27 November, there will be a very full and lengthy exchange on economic matters when we debate the pre-Budget report.

As Leader of the House, I have to balance the wish of my Treasury colleagues for a debate and their keenness to put before the House what we are achieving in the economy with all the other competing requirements many more of which have arisen during this discussion.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): May I tell my right hon. Friend about an unusual case in my constituency in which a head teacher was suspended from his duties following allegations of interference with the conduct of examinations? He was then subjected to an inquiry by the local authority which was presented to the governing body. That body reinstated the head teacher without making public the results of the inquiry. Does he agree that it casts an interesting light on the new burdens on school governors, particularly in respect of their employment responsibilities? Can he find time in the near future for a debate on the role and responsibilities of school governors?

Mr. Cook: I hear what my hon. Friend says, and I am sure that his constituents have also heard him raise the issue. Given the other pressures on business, I cannot promise a debate on the matter, but I am sure that he will wish to pursue it with the relevant Ministers.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement on yesterday's decision to appoint 100 Labour Back Benchers as so-called ministerial sponsors, a role that has been so effectively carried out in the past by just two people—the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward) and his butler? The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that, to many of us, ministerial sponsorship sounds rather like the London zoo scheme to sponsor a camel or a crocodile, or, in the case of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, a lame duck. Is not this just a scheme to extend the payroll vote by appointing 100 Members of Parliament, who have not gained promotion, essentially to be Parliamentary Private Secretaries to the Parliamentary Private Secretaries?

Mr. Cook: It may be helpful if I assure the House that such appointments will have no involvement in the payroll vote one way or the other. I regard newspaper reports of that as mischievous and untrue, and I am happy to ensure that the press keeps up its high standards of truth and accuracy, which it did not on this occasion. As to my hon. Friends promoting the Government's successes, I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that there was such enthusiasm for the idea that it was passed unanimously by the parliamentary Labour party.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Highly desirable though it is that Afghan women should be able to throw off their burkas, was it for this that we went to war, or was it to apprehend al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden? Are we not in danger of swapping one set of warlords for another, who may or may not help us to apprehend al-Qaeda? Ought we not have a serious debate about that, given that we still have great problems in Pakistan, with its nuclear weapons and the pleadings of the Pakistanis not to continue bombing during Ramadan?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the volume of the bombing has diminished markedly as a result of events on the ground and is much more concentrated on one particular part of Afghanistan. He is absolutely right—nobody at the Dispatch Box has suggested otherwise—that the primary aim is to bring to justice those who perpetrated the appalling mass murders of 11 September and to break up the al-Qaeda network. We are now much closer to being in a position to achieve that than we were a week ago.

I fully share my hon. Friend's concern that no terrorist group should ever get hold of a nuclear weapon. I only say to him that if we had followed his counsel and not taken any action in Afghanistan, that would have been much more likely to happen than it is now.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does not the question from the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the Father of the House, illustrate the point that during the crisis, the Conservative Opposition have given the Government far more solid support for the necessary military action than they have been able to rely on from their own Back Benchers? Does not that mean that when my right hon. and hon. Friends raise questions about whether a vote will take place at the end of a debate or, inappropriately, in a deferred Division, it is not right for the Leader of the House to presume that we, rather than his own rebels, will divide the House, so our point stands?

May I remind the Leader of the House that in answer to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) about the combat effectiveness gender study, the right hon. Gentleman said that as the policy was not going to change, there would

not be a statement? However, the Secretary of State for Defence, who was accurately quoted by my right hon. Friend, said:

"I am currently considering the conclusions of a review on the employment of women in the armed forces and will make a further statement in due course."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2001; Vol. 373, c. 767W.]

Will we get that statement, or must we just continue to read about it in *The Sunday Telegraph*?

Mr. Cook: That is not what I said to the House. I said that the policy on the ground would not change unless a policy was announced, and that that would require an announcement to Parliament. I fully recognise that, and I did not suggest otherwise.

On the other matter that the hon. Gentleman raises, we fully appreciate that the policy has been bipartisan. We welcome the fact that it has had support in all quarters of the House, and not just on the two Front Benches. It has also had the full support of my hon. Friends on the Benches behind me. When we had a Division on the subject, more than 300 Labour Members voted with the Government, and only eight voted against. That is not a basis on which one can erect a major case for a split among Labour Members. There has been overwhelming support for the Government's position from my hon. Friends, as well as from Opposition Members.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): We had a welcome statement from the Prime Minister yesterday on the rapidly changing position in Afghanistan. Does the Leader of the House agree that a primary concern for many hon. Members and, indeed, our constituents, is the fate of the 7.5 million Afghan people who face not only a difficult winter but a desperate situation? They will want to know that effective corridors have now been established from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to northern Afghanistan. They will want to be assured that money will be promised to the Governments of Iran and Pakistan for the succour of those in the refugee camps, and they will want to know that the money promised by the international community is getting through to Afghanistan. Is there is any possibility within the next week of a debate on this subject or a statement by the Secretary of State for International Development, whom I see in the Chamber?

Mr. Cook: This is an issue on which the House has held a full debate on a number of occasions. There has been an even larger number of statements, including one from the Secretary of State for International Development. We shall obviously keep under review the question of when it will be appropriate to provide another similar opportunity.

On the substance of the issue, I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no shortage of money to fund the actions that we need to take to support the refugees who are outside the country and those in Afghanistan who are in need. The United Kingdom has been both early and generous in providing its support. I am pleased to tell the House that the volume of food entering Afghanistan has increased markedly. I am told that over the past week it has averaged over 2,000 tonnes, which is a substantial improvement on the position a month ago. If we can maintain that rate of supply, we will be able to ensure that we have sufficient stocks in Afghanistan. I shall only say to the House that of course we would not be in this position if we had not maintained the military pressure on the Taliban, which has enabled us to open up many more corridors into Afghanistan to reach the people in need.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The Leader of the House will be aware of my interest in Railtrack, First Group and Eurotunnel. Will he advise me on the powers of Select Committees not only to compel witnesses to appear before them but to answer questions put to them?

I do not know whether he has had an opportunity to read the transcript of evidence from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in that Select Committee yesterday. Having admitted that he met the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, the right hon. Gentleman would not tell us when, and having admitted that he had prepared draft emergency legislation to remove the rail regulator's capacity for independent action, he would not tell us when he had done so. Will the Leader of the House compel the Secretary of State to come to the Dispatch Box early next week and answer the questions that he refused to answer in the Select Committee?

Mr. Cook: I do not think that a single member of the Cabinet has appeared here or elsewhere more often to answer the entirely bogus allegations thrown at him by Opposition Members. We had a debate on the matter last Tuesday. Given the way in which my right hon. Friend trounced the points put to him by the Opposition, they would be wise not to attempt to repeat that experiment or to ask me to arrange it.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Can the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the availability of digital hearing aids on the NHS? Many Members have received correspondence on the subject, but so far we have had only a half-hour debate in Westminster Hall. Can he arrange a longer debate so that we can raise an issue that is important to the 2 million people who do not have access to the digital hearing aids that would vastly improve their quality of life? Many hon. Members from all parties have signed the relevant early-day motion on the subject, and we would be grateful for a debate.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman makes his request with clarity and courtesy. I shall bear it in mind along with the many other requests that I have received this afternoon, but not everyone is going to be happy. In the meantime, he will be aware that we are to debate the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill next week. I am sure that the Speaker will allow him to make a glancing reference to that issue.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I want to consider the number of places allocated on the Liaison Committee to the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The Leader of the House will be aware that the Government slipped through in the small print of the Order Paper earlier this week a measure that will result in the hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) or for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) losing their place on the Liaison Committee. Why has the right hon. Gentleman decided to downgrade the Transport, Local Government and the Regions

[Chris Grayling]

Committee, especially as its two active Sub-Committees do as much work as a main Committee? Is that decision a mere consequence of the Government trying to get their revenge for the trouble that they had over the appointment of the chairmanship of that Committee earlier this year?

Mr. Cook: For once, I find the hon. Gentleman's question almost breathtaking. He suggests that we slipped the measure through, but we debated it in prime time. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and I took part in the debate. The Order Paper was in front of us. There was no question of it being slipped through. Not a single Member in that debate made the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised, and he did not turn up to raise it.

As for the treatment of the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, it will be entitled to precisely the same representation as any other Select Committee. It is for it to decide who shall go on the Liaison Committee. Indeed, the terms of the motion before the House do not specify which Committee member will serve on the Liaison Committee. It is entirely possible for my hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) or for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) to represent the Committee. The matter rests in the hands of the Committee. It is for its members to decide who they want on the Liaison Committee, and I would not presume to offer them advice.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—I see her on the Bench beside him—to come to the House to make a statement on the growing disarray of the postal service in my constituency, especially in Bexhill? Since the problem was first raised some three weeks ago by the *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, the problem has snowballed. More than 40 streets in Bexhill are now subject to an appalling postal service and countless letters are going astray, including this week a cheque for more than £50,000 to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which was misdelivered. Given that we stand on the threshold of the busiest time of year for the Post Office, my constituents are rightly extremely concerned and angry at the lack of postal service in our area. Will the right hon. Gentleman please arrange for a statement on that matter?

Mr. Cook: I regret to inform the House that the postal service has never delivered a cheque for £50,000 to me by error. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is with me and heard what the hon. Gentleman said. I am sure that she will pursue it.

World Trade Conference

1.23 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the fourth ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation in Doha, which concluded yesterday. I was joined in the delegation by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for International Development and the Minister for the Environment and my noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment.

I am delighted to report a successful outcome. The Doha development agenda combines the launch of a broad new round of trade negotiations with a package of measures specifically focused on the needs of developing countries. At the same time, we welcomed two important new members, China and Chinese Taipei, into the WTO. Those are landmark achievements and we cannot overstate their economic and political importance. Launching a new world trade round has always been a key priority for the United Kingdom and our European partners. As I told the House last week, it was an outcome that we were even more determined to achieve following the atrocities of 11 September.

In the past few days we have seen significant progress in the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. At the same time, nations have come together in Doha to agree a major step forward in the war on poverty, demonstrating that the nations of the world are determined to strengthen security by sharing prosperity. By stimulating economic growth, a development-focused trade round offers the best opportunity to billions of people in developing countries to escape from poverty. With the downturn in the world economy, this historic deal gives a badly needed boost to economic confidence.

The package that we have agreed brings real and in some cases immediate benefits to developing countries—benefits for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has long been working. We have opened the way to greater access to the medicines that developing countries need to deal with HIV/AIDS and other serious health crises, by clarifying the existing WTO rules without compromising the incentives required to ensure that new drugs are developed for the future.

We have ensured that the European Union will continue to give preferential treatment to imports from African, Caribbean and Pacific countries—an issue that is of enormous concern to more than 50 of our WTO colleagues, including some of the poorest countries in the world.

We agreed on steps—both immediately and in the next year—that address developing countries' concerns over the implementation of previous WTO agreements. We reaffirmed the importance of building developing countries' capacity to participate in the global trading system and we emphasised the need for further capacity building to be an integral part of the new negotiations.

A new round opens the prospect of increased trade in agriculture, in other goods and in services. Such trade is the most secure path to economic progress for developing countries. If we could just halve the trade protection in both developing and developed countries the wealth of

developing countries would be boosted by around $150 billion a year. For the least developed countries we have also agreed the objective of duty-free and quota-free access for their products, extending to other WTO members the principle of the EU's everything but arms agreement.

For developed as well as developing countries, the Doha agreement will provide a significant new push in a number of areas of great importance to the UK. The new trade round, for instance, gives a real boost to reform of the common agricultural policy. In particular, we have agreed to negotiate on reductions of export subsidies with a view to phasing them out. This adds to the pressure that the EU already faces from the prospect of enlargement and strengthens our hand in moving ahead with CAP reform—a long-standing UK objective, now within our sights.

We reaffirmed the importance of sustainable development and for the first time agreed to negotiate within the WTO on environmental issues, in particular the relationship between multilateral environmental agreements and WTO rules. That was a key objective for the UK and all our European colleagues.

We agreed important first steps towards negotiations to help investment flow more freely between countries, and to tackle cartels and other anti-competitive business practices. We reaffirmed the importance of internationally recognised core labour standards, a matter on which the International Labour Organisation leads. However, it is essential that the WTO contributes to the ILO's work on the social dimensions of globalisation. We also agreed negotiations on a number of other important areas including market access and industrial tariffs, transparency of government procurement and trade facilitation, aimed in particular at cutting customs procedures red tape.

The new trade negotiations will be good for British business and good for British consumers. We are the world's fifth largest trader and we stand to benefit directly from further trade liberalisation. Again, if we could halve trade protection around the world the average income of every household in Britain would be boosted by nearly £500 a year.

What was most striking about discussions in Doha this week was the growing confidence of developing countries, with African, Latin American and the poorest countries working together increasingly effectively. At the same time, and in striking contrast to the disaster in Seattle, we saw a growing trust between developed and developing countries.

The new Doha development agenda has involved great willingness from all countries to work together flexibly and constructively to overcome considerable differences in key areas. The result is a tribute to all those involved. Certainly, all of us in the European Union owe a particular debt of gratitude to the skill and persistence of our chief negotiator, Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy.

I pay tribute, in particular, to the state of Qatar for hosting the conference and for its excellent organisation and chairmanship. Conference chairman Kamal and the seven facilitators worked tirelessly for several days—a little longer than originally intended—to ensure that all member countries, including small and developing nations, had the opportunity to be fully involved and that proceedings were as transparent as possible. I also pay tribute to the World Trade Organisation's director-general, Mike Moore, and to its general council chairman, Stuart Harbinson.

I want to thank the tremendous team of civil servants from six different Departments. They worked tirelessly as a team and with Ministers to help to secure our objectives. I also thank the three additional delegation members—Digby Jones of the Confederation of British Industry, Ed Sweeney of the Trades Union Congress and Penny Fowler of the UK non-governmental organisation trade network. They made an invaluable contribution.

The UK and the EU have long sought the launch of a new trade round. We went to Doha seeking a round that would open up free, fair and sustainable trade. I am delighted today to present exactly that result to the House. However, this is just the beginning of the process. We now have to translate the agenda that we have agreed into real results for people all round the world. With more than 140 WTO members, we have taken the vital first steps. We will now work with them to complete the journey.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I thank the Secretary of State for letting me have a copy of her statement in advance and for coming to the House at the first opportunity after her return from Doha, particularly as I suspect that she and her colleagues may not have had much sleep in the past week.

Conservative Members clearly welcome the fact that an agreement was reached at Doha. After the failure of the Seattle meeting, it would have been a disaster if the talks in Doha had broken down. However, as the Secretary of State suggested, what has been achieved marks the beginning of the process and not the end. Is it not the case that what was achieved there was merely agreement in talks about talks, and that the really hard slog has yet to start?

The Secretary of State is right to suggest that a huge prize is at stake. The World Bank estimates that the potential boost to global income is $2,800 billion over the next 15 years. However, does she not find it slightly depressing that already the voices of protectionism are being heard, and that some of the loudest are closest to home?

On agriculture, does the Secretary of State agree that the earlier comments of EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy, in defence of farm subsidies, and the resistance of the French delegation to committing to phasing them out are, at the very least, worrying signs of the battles that lie ahead?

Does the Secretary of State accept that achieving the fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy that is needed is likely to require even more midnight oil to be burned than was the case at Doha, and will she again confirm the Government's absolute commitment to the declaration's aim of reducing, with a view to phasing out, all forms of export subsidies?

Will the Secretary of State give further details of the qualification inserted in the declaration to the effect that non-trade concerns will be taken into account in the negotiations, and make it clear that it should not be used as a means of reneging on those undertakings? Will she also comment on reports that the French agreed to sign the declaration only after receiving an assurance that it did not prejudge the outcome of farm trade talks?

[Mr. John Whittingdale]

On TRIPS—trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights—we welcome the fact that agreement has been reached. However, does the Secretary of State accept that the pharmaceutical industry has never wished to prevent countries in the developing world from accessing vital medicines for tackling diseases such AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis? Will she none the less recognise the industry's legitimate concerns that production under licence in the developing world may lead to back-door imports of those drugs into the markets in the developed world, thus undermining the industry's intellectual property rights? Can she say what measures will be taken to prevent that from happening, and will she also clarify whether any agreement was reached on what constitutes a national emergency? Will that be left entirely for individual states to decide?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the outcome of the talks presents an opportunity for a real opening up of markets for the goods of developing countries and that it is potentially worth far more to them than overseas aid? Does she agree that we should now ensure that the assistance that we give to developing countries is focused on helping them to take advantage of that opportunity? Does she also agree that we will need to do more to persuade some of the campaigning organisations of the real value of what has been achieved?

Finally, does the Secretary of State agree that many countries deserve credit for their willingness to work for an agreement? As well as those that she mentioned, does she agree that particular praise is due to the United States of America for the success? However, does she also agree that the success in Doha in finding language and a text that is acceptable to all must now be translated in the next three years into real agreement to removing barriers and opening up markets. Is not success in achieving that objective just as important to global security and prosperity as the events in Afghanistan that have stolen the headlines in today's newspapers?

Ms Hewitt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and questions.

On agricultural reform, I can of course confirm that the Government remain entirely committed to the objective that we have set out on several occasions—fundamental reform of the CAP, including the elimination of unfair export subsidies. We have made it clear on several occasions that non-trade issues, including issues of animal welfare that are of real concern to our constituents, should not and will not be used for disguised protectionist purposes.

TRIPS and public medicine were referred to in our exchanges last week. We will work with the pharmaceutical companies to deal with the real problem of back-door imports of cheap drugs. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the section in the declaration specifically on public health. It makes it clear that it is up to member states to decide for themselves when a public health emergency exists. A number of Ministers from developing countries made the point that the phrase "public health" crisis is not the right term to use given the fact that HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other diseases are chronically prevalent in many developing countries. Those diseases represent the normal daily condition of public health; they are not what we would think of as an immediate crisis.

I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need to enable people in developing countries to trade their way out of poverty. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and the UK Government have led the world in investing in capacity building in developing countries to enhance their chances not only of taking part in such negotiations but of benefiting from new opportunities for world trade. We can be proud of our achievements.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the attitude of some UK and other western pressure groups towards the agreement. I certainly observed that, whatever the state of the draft declaration as it progressed on the various days in Doha, one of the NGOs represented there regarded anything that was being proposed as an insult to the world's poor. It seemed to have a word-processor that churned out press statements that had absolutely no regard for what was being proposed and agreed. We should pay a great deal less attention to groups like that and a great deal more attention to the Governments of developing countries. Representatives of the Governments of Tanzania, Brazil, Nigeria and many others got up in the final session at Doha yesterday to say what a good deal this was and how much progress had been made for their people and for those of other developing countries.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does my right hon. Friend recollect that when, with good parliamentary manners and good sense, she made her pre-Doha statement, I asked her about the problem of Mindanao in the Philippines, and particularly the Muslim community and its trade in the centre of Mindanao, in the light of the heavyweight Inter-Parliamentary Union Philippines delegation? Were any officials able to make contact at Doha on that genuine problem?

Ms Hewitt: I am delighted to be able to tell my hon. Friend that not only my officials but I myself had two meetings with the Filipino Trade Minister, Manuel Roxas. We discussed the problem to which my hon. Friend refers, which is primarily a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. I shall be drawing it to her attention so that we can see what help we can give.

It was extremely helpful that my hon. Friend gave me advance notice of the problem in the Philippines because it turned out that there was a major issue for that country concerning access for its tuna products to European markets. Difficulties in resolving that issue very nearly unhinged the entire trade round negotiations. I was able to work with the European Commission in proposing an agreement to consult the Philippines on that problem. Its representatives were satisfied with that, and as a result, a potential block on agreement at Doha was avoided.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): May I add my welcome for the statement—in particular, the Secretary of State's belief that a new round of trade liberalisation will be good for Britain, and the strong emphasis on the concerns of developing countries over access to western markets and intellectual property rights? But does she agree that we have been here before? The Uruguay round was launched with a similar flurry of good language, and developing countries in particular felt disillusioned, even betrayed, by the lack of implementation; it is implementation that is now essential. Confidence in

implementation was not helped by the fact that in the key area of textiles, eight Republican Congressmen from the United States were allowed to emasculate the agreement.

On agriculture, is the Secretary of State not embarrassed to have signed up to a form of words that has allowed the European Agriculture Commissioner this morning to crow that no reform of the common agricultural policy is now needed because negotiations will take place

"without prejudice to the outcome"?

Is that not one of many cases of British Ministers allowing themselves to be suckered into weak agreements on agricultural liberalisation?

Following the comments of the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), is the Secretary of State not also embarrassed by the tone of the remarks of the European Trade Commissioner, who made it very clear in his statements this week that his primary responsibility was to represent producer interests in France? If he cannot act on behalf of the EU as a whole, will the Government try to ensure that we have a Trade Commissioner who is more representative of the whole Community?

Ms Hewitt: There is no doubt that one real difficulty in reaching agreement at Doha was the sense among so many developing countries that they had been sold a pup—betrayed—in the Uruguay round. What makes this round so different—I referred to this in my statement—is the effectiveness with which the developing countries, which after all represent more than two thirds of WTO membership, are working together, concerting their negotiating objectives and strategies. There is now a much greater basis of trust between the developing and developed countries, but there is also a very clear requirement for developed countries to meet the commitments that we made at Doha and to fulfil the expectations that we raised. If we do not do so, that trust will be destroyed.

On agriculture, the declaration that we agreed yesterday states that of course there is no prejudging of the outcome of negotiations. We were agreeing the terms of reference of new trade negotiations; we were not seeking to have those negotiations at Doha. To say that we were not prejudging the outcome of those negotiations is merely a statement of the obvious.

The negotiations will be about reductions in agricultural export subsidies, among other matters, with a view to their phasing out. That is very clear language. It was not only supported by all European Union member states but it has raised clear expectations in developing countries, where access to developed markets in agricultural products is essential to their farmers and all those who depend on them. We shall have to meet those expectations. That means that there is enormous pressure on the EU, added to the pressure from the prospects of enlargement, for radical reform of the CAP.

I am not aware of any such comments being made by the Trade Commissioner. Not only over the past week but in preceding months, I have observed outstanding work from Commissioner Lamy in negotiating with immense skill and toughness on behalf of all EU members.

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I congratulate the Secretary of State and her ministerial colleagues on the successful outcome in Doha and join her in praising civil servants for their superb work there. On behalf of the very large number of representatives of United Kingdom non-governmental organisations in Doha, I thank the ministerial team for the daily briefings and the way in which the delegation listened to the detailed points made by NGOs. I believe that the UK was the only national delegation to offer such facilities to NGOs in Doha. What time scale will the Doha development round work to, and which issues does she believe that the round should prioritise? I suggest fairer trade for developing countries.

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. The NGOs certainly played a very helpful role in almost every case in enabling us to achieve such a good outcome. Negotiations will begin early in the new year. There is a two-year time scale of preparatory work for the new issues—notably investment and competition—and, if I remember correctly, a five-year time scale for the negotiations themselves. I agree that the priority should be to deal with market access barriers and tariffs on both agricultural and industrial products and services, which are of particular importance to developing countries.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I thank the right hon. Lady for her statement and the access that she gave all of us in Doha. She not only talked to us but listened to us. Will she thank the Minister for the Environment, who was the only Environment Minister from the European Union to be present? He played an important part in pressing environmental issues. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is remarkable how many environmental issues were included in the statement, and that none of us expected to do as well? Is it not true that that is very much the result of the work of the EU, working as a united force, without which such agreement could not have been achieved? The commissioner concerned showed a steadfastness that very few of us expected. He, too, ought to be congratulated on his work.

Ms Hewitt: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; it was a pleasure to see him in Doha. I am very pleased that he singled out the breakthrough that we have made on of the environment. I believe that we would not have made such a breakthrough had it not been for the EU. We were the ones pressing for serious attention to be paid to environmental matters. The persistence of Commissioner Lamy on that matter was excellent. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about the importance of the EU will be noted with great interest in the more Eurosceptic sections of his party.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Will my right hon. Friend say when negotiations on reducing export subsidies on agricultural products are likely to start, who will be negotiating on behalf of the United Kingdom and whether there is some deadline for them to end to prevent the French dragging them out ad infinitum?

Ms Hewitt: In responding to my right hon. Friend's question, I shall correct a point that I made a minute ago. In fact, the declaration commits us to concluding negotiations by 1 January 2005. In other words, there is a three-year time scale for all the negotiations to which we

[Ms Hewitt]

signed up in the Doha agreement, including the negotiations on the reduction of agricultural tariffs and subsidies.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I add my welcome for the positive outcome and the statement of the Secretary of State. Will she amplify the implications of phasing and the timetable? I understand that there is a commitment to a fifth WTO ministerial conference in 2003. I asked a question on investment and competition policy when the Secretary of State made a statement before the conference. The implication is that some of those matters will be prepared for the formal opening of negotiations at the fifth conference. Does that mean that there is a risk of some loss of linkage between those matters and, for example, the tightening of rules on anti-dumping measures and the reduction of industrial tariffs? Or will we be able to make sure that progress on one is directly linked to progress on investment and competition?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. As I said earlier, we agreed that there will be two years of preparatory work on investment and competition. We have an enormous amount to do to ensure that all members of the WTO have a common understanding of the framework of investment and competition rules that is required, particularly to increase foreign direct investment in developing countries.

That will take two years, then there will be a report to the fifth ministerial conference in 2003 with a view to opening negotiations on those matters, subject to consensus on the modality of negotiations, to use WTO-speak. As that preparatory work proceeds, we will need to ensure that it runs in parallel with, and is related to, work going on in the substantive negotiations themselves.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Clearly, developing nations need access to developed nations' markets. A great deal in my right hon. Friend's statement shows that that is under way; that is most welcome. What about the other side of the coin and the markets of underdeveloped nations? They often need protection to develop their own productive forces and may need to be in agreement with one another about, for example, the sale of primary products, which may be seen as anti-competitive according to certain arguments. Were the principles that I am propounding taken into account at the WTO conference?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Running through our discussions and the declaration is a commitment to take into account the particular needs of developing countries including, above all, the least developed countries and small countries. The concerns of my hon. Friend will indeed be taken on board.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): If the words "without prejudging the outcome" only state the obvious, why does the Secretary of State think that the French spent so much time insisting that they should be included in the final declaration? Does she believe that the French have committed themselves to phasing out farm subsidies?

Ms Hewitt: I am really not here to answer for the French Government. All members of the European Union have signed up to the declaration.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her statement, in which she mentioned 11 September and its impact on the talks. Given that that was the background music to the talks, is she confident that the agreements made on behalf of developing nations, particularly on the matters raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), will stick once the music fades and that we will see genuine improvements in trade so that countries can trade their way to a further economic base?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The background of world events was uppermost in everybody's mind at Doha. I have no doubt at all that the events of 11 September and the conflict in Afghanistan made it easier, in a sense, to reach an agreement; there was even more understanding of the importance of doing so at the conference. I am certain that the agreement will stick, provided, as I said earlier, that the developed countries live up to the commitments that we made in the declarations. I know that the Government, for one, intend to do so.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The Secretary of State will be aware that before the Doha meeting, Christian Aid and others called for a review of existing agreements prior to embarkation on another round. Clearly, that has not happened. Are any mechanisms in place to review the delivery of promised improvements to developing countries?

Having said that, I warmly welcome the agreement on medical supplies in developing countries and congratulate the Secretary of State and Ministers on achieving it. It is only a partial agreement: there is no agreement on compulsory licensing in third countries, which may mean that developing countries without a drugs industry will be disadvantaged. Is the Secretary of State prepared to publish a detailed assessment of the agreement, particularly on TRIPS and key medicines, and say what efforts the United Kingdom Government will make to improve the situation?

Finally, when the members of the delegation were listed, there was no mention of any member of the Scottish Executive. The Secretary of State gave a holding answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) this morning, but can she now say whether any member of the Scottish Executive was part of the delegation?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for at least some of his remarks. There was no representative of the Scottish Executive in the delegation: world trade is a reserved matter. As for the agreement on TRIPS and medical access to drugs, the declaration clarifies the meaning of TRIPS—the intellectual property agreement—and therefore the rules of the WTO to ensure that people in developing countries have access to the

drugs that they need without compromising the incentives to pharmaceutical companies to invest in the research and development required for new drugs in future.

There is, however, much else that needs to be done to deal with the appalling health situation in developing countries. Last week, I referred to the £1 billion investment that the Government have already made in the development of primary health care in developing countries and the $200 million that we have contributed to the global health fund, designed specifically to make those essential drugs affordable for people in developing countries. We have made an enormous advance on the matter raised by Christian Aid and the suggestion that there should be an assessment of achievements so far before entering new negotiations. However, that matter was not particularly raised by developing countries at the conference.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Doha represents a historic moment for developing countries because it is the first time that they have significantly shaped the global economy? Is not that because of the WTO, not in spite of it? On agriculture and the phasing out of export credits, will she push for the European Union to reduce its protectionist tendencies regarding the common agricultural policy, and is that more likely after the French elections?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right on both counts.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): May I welcome the statement and the right hon. Lady's answer about the Philippines? It is a delight to hear that Chinese Taipei has been received into the WTO. Does she agree that the example that it has given both in helping developing countries and in the political sphere of a smooth transfer of power from one party to another last year is an example for many developing nations and others?

Lest some of my constituents and others should be in touch with Members, perhaps having picked up from the media that the average home will be richer by £500, will the right hon. Lady explain where that money will go? I have a suspicion that the average home will not see it.

Ms Hewitt: When I was in Doha, I had the pleasure of meeting the Trade Ministers both from China and from Chinese Taipei. I have no doubt that both will make an enormous contribution to the WTO. The accessions represent a real strengthening of the organisation. With the accession of China, we can for the first time regard the WTO as a truly global organisation.

The benefits that will flow from trade liberalisation to families in Britain depend upon a successful outcome of the negotiation. It was once said that Britain was a nation of shopkeepers; it might be truer now to say that we are a nation of shoppers. All of us who shop, especially in supermarkets and markets, enjoy the benefits of world trade in the form of a wider choice of products and lower prices than would otherwise be the case. I have no doubt that as we enter into negotiations—it will be hard work—and as we bring them to a successful conclusion, we shall see significant benefits flowing through to British families and to British exporters.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the agreement. It gives hope to many of my constituents who have been arguing for a long time that the circumstances of the poorest nations should be improved.

I accept that the agreement is only a beginning. We must ensure that the developed nations carry it through and ensure that we create conditions which, like the coalition against terrorism that has created so much success in Afghanistan, enable the coalition for the fight against poverty to produce the same sort of result. If we do not do that, we shall be failing.

TRIPS is an extremely important matter. I press my right hon. Friend on the progress that we can make to ensure that underdeveloped countries can enjoy freedom from a disease in the same way that an ordinary civilised society can. If she can give me an assurance on that, I shall be grateful.

Ms Hewitt: I know that my hon. Friend has done a great deal of work with churches in his constituency on issues that directly concern developing countries. There was a clear sense at Doha, among us all, that security in the world must go hand in hand with the sharing of prosperity.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has already ensured that the UK Government are playing a significant role in spreading access to medicines in developing countries. This is only in part a matter of WTO rules on intellectual property. Nine out of 10 medicines on the World Health Organisation's essential medicines list are generic drugs and outside patent protection. Even if they were all free, there must be an infrastructure of primary health care in developing countries that can ensure that medicines are properly prescribed and delivered to those who need them. That is why the investment that the Government have been making and will continue to make in primary health care in developing countries is even more important than the agreement that we reached at Doha.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I welcome the progress that has been made, and support the comments made about the importance of the agreement in that it will lead to positive benefits in the developing world. I ask the Secretary of State to address in more detail the accession to membership of the Chinese. In the past, there have been considerable difficulties with China over trading, not least in the sphere of intellectual property. I would be interested to hear about the Chinese contribution at Doha, and how she feels now that trading and China will move forward in the context of this round.

Ms Hewitt: As a new member whose accession was formalised at the WTO only this week, and which has not yet been ratified by China, China did not play a direct role in this week's proceedings. It was not part of the discussions. It was clear, certainly in the discussions that I had with the Chinese Trade Minister, that he and his colleagues recognised the enormous challenge to China in becoming a full member of the world trading community and in ensuring compliance with the rules of the WTO. Even more important, China recognises the enormous benefits that opening up to trade will bring, especially in

[Ms Hewitt]

seeking to spread prosperity between Shanghai, Beijing and other parts of the eastern seaboard across to the desperately poor rural areas of the western provinces.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Has my right hon. Friend made any assessment of the plight of the people of Tibet, following China joining the WTO? Another factor to consider is the aggression that has always been shown to Chinese Taipei. With the two countries joining the WTO, perhaps an assessment has been made of relationships between the two. I am sure that she will work hard for countries outside the WTO to ascertain how we can encourage more countries to join in the next round of talks.

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. China will become a member country in 30 days now that the Doha agreement has been concluded. China and Chinese Taipei have had a long and difficult history. I made the point last week that after the second world war the central motive for the establishment of the European Union was the belief that close economic and trading links between countries were likely substantially to reduce the risk of violent conflict between them.

My hon. Friend talked about encouraging other countries to join the WTO. There are 28 other candidates seeking accession to it. The critics of globalisation who regard the WTO as some sort of evil plot against developing countries should take stock of their views in the light of the Doha development agreement and recognise that, far from seeking to escape from the WTO, developing countries are joining it at a rapid rate. That is a good sign for the future of world security and prosperity.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): I certainly recognise the benefits and the positive things that happened at Doha. The Secretary of State referred to the creation of a free, fair and sustainable trade platform. Does that include the bilateral trade agreements that we have seen over recent weeks, particularly that conducted with Pakistan—which will be very detrimental to a section of the UK's trade—in the absence of any parliamentary discussion of the topic? Was the matter discussed at Doha?

Ms Hewitt: The Doha declaration makes it very clear that there is a role for bilateral and indeed for regional trade agreements within the context of the multilateral agreements led by the WTO. There is a proposal from the European Commission for a bilateral agreement between the European Union and Pakistan on textiles, which are of course enormously important to that country. The United Kingdom Government have considered the agreement very carefully and we support it. We believe that it is absolutely right to recognise Pakistan's outstanding contribution to dealing with the terrorist threat from within Afghanistan.

I have personally discussed the matter with the employers and the trade unions in the textile and clothing industry. As I said to them and am happy to confirm to the House, we shall continue to work with our textile and clothing industry to enable it to become more competitive and to specialise in sectors in which we still have competitive advantage. We have already made further changes to the help that we give our industry, to ensure that it can penetrate markets abroad.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will be interested to hear that I recently participated in a simulation exercise with a number of school children on the issue of world trade and developing countries. Can she tell me and my constituents what benefit we derive from working with our European Union partners within the World Trade Organisation?

Ms Hewitt: We derive enormous benefits from our membership of the European Union: half of our own trade is within the European Union. At Doha, we also saw the strength that we obtain as a member of that larger organisation, in securing a new world trade round that is good not only for Europe but for the developing countries of the world.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I welcome the Secretary of State's references to the importance of capacity building for developing countries. Will she say precisely what action she believes needs to be taken to ensure that developing countries can adequately represent themselves in the next round of talks? I am sure that she will agree that such action seems to be the key to ensuring that there is genuine and fair negotiation between the developing world and the rich northern nations.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is right. The United Kingdom Government had already committed £15 million to capacity building in developing countries, and last week my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development announced a further £20 million of programmes. Talking in Doha to Ministers from developing countries, it was very clear that they are enormously pleased by that investment, which is helping them to train officials to take part in often very complex negotiations. I think that we saw this week at Doha very mature and increasingly sophisticated leadership from the developing countries, which, as I said, were able to concert their negotiating strategy in pursuit of their objectives. Consequently, we have achieved at Doha an agreement that is good not only for the developing countries but for us as well.

Points of Order

2.12 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, of which I have given Mr. Speaker and the relevant Minister prior notice. I wish to address the manner in which the Government have announced a relaxation of the rules banning hunting in areas that are free from foot and mouth disease.

Yesterday afternoon—Wednesday—I received from the Minister for Rural Affairs a substantive response to three questions from three hon. Members, including a question from me that had already received a holding reply. My copy appeared on the board after 6 pm. The answer clearly implied that it would be some time—I took that to mean at least a few days—before an announcement on the matter would be made. Driving home last night, however, I heard on the BBC Radio 4 10 o'clock news that an announcement would be made today, Thursday. That news came just four hours after I had received my answer. I believe that earlier bulletins carried similar reports although I did not hear them myself.

The policy was confirmed in an interview with the Minister on this morning's "Today" programme. Indeed, I have now learned that a press conference to announce the decision was held this morning, and that invitations to that press conference were issued shortly after lunch time yesterday. Although the Minister tells me that he regrets the fact that the decision itself leaked, the fact remains that the outside world was being told a very different thing from the information given to hon. Members.

Although my constituents will be pleased with the decision itself, I am left with the clear impression that the Government sought to avoid making the announcement to Parliament and indeed came perilously close to misleading the House. I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you will deplore the seriously incomplete statement made in answer to my question—the answer should have indicated that publication was due today—and accept that it is compelling evidence that the Government now routinely prefer to communicate their policy to the media rather than to the House.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Is it on the same topic?

Mr. Gray: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. On 25 October, I asked a parliamentary question on the very same subject—when the risk assessment would be published—and received a holding reply on 30 October. Although I have heard no more from the Minister since, on Monday morning, I was amazed to read in *The Daily Telegraph* an extensive briefing, which turns out to be extensively correct, on precisely what would happen when the risk assessment was received. I have still not received any response from the Minister to my perfectly legitimate question on the risk assessment. That seems to be clear evidence that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) has correctly said, the Government are more determined to spin the story in the press than to inform hon. Members. Is that not disgraceful?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr. Speaker has made inquiries about these matters and has authorised me to make the following observations on his behalf. I understand that copies of the papers published by the Minister this morning were placed in the Vote Office at 9.30 am today. As Mr. Speaker has told the House before, he deprecates the making of announcements of new policy to the media before the House has had an opportunity to be informed. In addition, in this case Mr. Speaker has asked me to say that he deplores the fact that Ministers did not take the opportunity when replying to written questions on the subject yesterday to indicate that an announcement was to be made today.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you know, many of my colleagues see you and your colleagues in the Chair as the guardians of the interests of the House and of hon. Members, so I seek your guidance on how we should respond to questions of accuracy in relation to ministerial statements to the House.

The House will be aware that on 5 November the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions made a statement to the House in which he made it clear that at a meeting on 25 July with the chairman of Railtrack, the chairman of Railtrack had sought extra financial assistance from the Government. However, in further comments in the Chamber on Monday and in specific evidence to the Transport Sub-Committee yesterday afternoon, the Secretary of State made it clear that no such request had in fact been made. In a case like this, where there is prima facie evidence at the very least that the Minister has made a misleading statement to the House, how should hon. Members such as myself respond?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That matter should really be directed to the Minister himself—

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Where is he?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There are ways in which the hon. Gentleman can pursue this matter and I am sure that he will be advised of those by his colleagues.

Orders of the Day

Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill
[*Money*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

2.17 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown under the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.

The money resolution concerns the private Member's Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). On Second Reading, the Government indicated that they were content for the Bill to proceed into Committee and that was agreed by the House. As I outlined on Second Reading, the Government have great sympathy with the aims and objectives of the Bill and again I pay tribute to him for his choice of subject. I assure the House that, subject to suitable amendment, the Government are happy to allow it to proceed—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), who is all too willing to cavil before he has sight of the detail, would be well advised to hold his peace.

The Bill's primary purpose is to establish a mechanism for the designation of marine sites of special scientific interest. As drafted, the Bill places obligations on the Government and the statutory conservation agencies—English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales—to identify, designate and take account of such marine sites when authorising activities. That will have expenditure implications for the Treasury purse and therefore a money resolution is required.

The main cost of the Bill will be placed on the statutory conservation agencies, because they will be responsible for identifying, managing and monitoring nationally important marine sites. Estimates indicate that the cost per site of establishing selection criteria, surveying, notification, consultation, drawing up a management scheme and monitoring will be in the region of £200,000. Of course, until criteria for site selection are devised, it is impossible to judge how many sites will be selected, but it is currently estimated that the total initial cost will be some £8 million over 10 years. Further costs will arise for those statutory authorities that are responsible for controlling and regulating activities in the marine environment. I commend the resolution to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Matters Sub Judice

2.21 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I beg to move,

That the Resolutions of 23rd July 1963 and 28th June 1972 be rescinded and the following Resolution be made:

That, subject to the discretion of the Chair, and to the right of the House to legislate on any matter or to discuss any delegated legislation, the House in all its proceedings (including proceedings of committees of the House) shall apply the following rules on matters *sub judice:*

1. Cases in which proceedings are active in United Kingdom courts shall not be referred to in any motion, debate or question.

(a)(i) Criminal proceedings are active when a charge has been made or a summons to appear has been issued, or, in Scotland, a warrant to cite has been granted.

(ii) Criminal proceedings cease to be active when they are concluded by verdict and sentence or discontinuance, or, in cases dealt with by courts martial, after the conclusion of the mandatory post-trial review.

(b)(i) Civil proceedings are active when arrangements for the hearing, such as setting down a case for trial, have been made, until the proceedings are ended by judgment or discontinuance.

(ii) Any application made in or for the purposes of any civil proceedings shall be treated as a distinct proceeding.

(c) appellate proceedings, whether criminal or civil, are active from the time when they are commenced by application for leave to appeal or by notice of appeal until ended by judgment or discontinuance.

But where a ministerial decision is in question, or in the opinion of the Chair a case concerns issues of national importance such as the economy, public order or the essential services, reference to the issues or the case may be made in motions, debates or questions.

2. Specific matters which the House has expressly referred to any judicial body for decision and report shall not be referred to in any motion, debate or question from the time when the Resolution of the House is passed until the report is laid before the House.

3. For the purposes of this Resolution—

(a) Matters before Coroners Courts or Fatal Accident Inquiries shall be treated as matters within paragraph 1(a);

(b) 'Motion' includes a motion for leave to bring in a bill; and

(c) 'Question' includes a supplementary question.

The motion stems from the report in the previous Parliament of the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege, one of whose members, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), is in his place. The Joint Committee was chaired by Lord Nicholls and was set up to review parliamentary privilege and to make recommendations. Parliamentary privilege is important, and should be used well. I am grateful to all those, both in this House and the other place, who served on the Joint Committee, and the many distinguished witnesses who assisted in its work.

The Joint Committee addressed free speech in Parliament as part of its inquiry. It noted that freedom of speech

"is the single most important parliamentary privilege".

I am sure that we all agree with that. Members may wish to note that the Joint Committee recommended that there should be no action to limit parliamentary freedom of speech in respect of court injunctions, or in respect of the Official Secrets Acts. Those rights remain absolute, and the good sense of Members of Parliament will continue as the best guard against their misuse.

The Joint Committee also looked at the sub judice rule and recommended that the sub judice resolutions of both Houses of Parliament should be brought up to date, and into line with one another. The House of Lords has already implemented the Joint Committee's recommendation and I now invite this House to do the same. I stress that the new motion does not significantly alter the rules on sub judice. Before I turn to the motion itself, it might be helpful if I remind the House of the reason for the sub judice rule.

A fundamental feature of our constitution is that Parliament and the courts each keep to their appropriate functions. It is for Parliament to make the law; it is for the courts to interpret it. Article 9 of the Bill of Rights provides

"That the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament."

Rightly, we have absolute privilege for anything that we say in Parliament. The courts cannot interfere with what we say or do in the course of proceedings in Parliament.

That absolute privilege must not be abused, and the sub judice rule is a means to prevent abuse. As the Joint Committee said,

"the rule provides that matters awaiting adjudication in a court of law should not be brought forward on motions, debates, questions or supplementary questions."

The rule is not absolute. As the Joint Committee said, it tries

"to strike a balance between two sets of principles. On the one hand, the rights of parties in legal proceedings should not be prejudiced by discussion of their case in Parliament, and Parliament should not prevent the courts from exercising their functions. On the other hand, Parliament has a constitutional right to discuss any matters it pleases."

The sub judice rule is necessary not only to preserve proper relations between courts and Parliament, but to ensure that trials are not prejudiced by parliamentary comment. I acknowledge that it can be frustrating for Members when the sub judice rule restricts comment in this House more stringently than comment in the media, but that is unavoidable. Media comment is constrained by the Contempt of Court Act 1981 and if such comment oversteps the mark, legal action can be taken.

Article 9 of the Bill of Rights gives us absolute protection in this House, and that should make us cautious about what we say in this place. Moreover, as the Joint Committee said,

"it is important constitutionally, and essential for public confidence, that the judiciary should be seen to be independent of political pressures".

However, we should not limit parliamentary debate more than necessary, and there are three important provisions in the motion that stop the sub judice rule doing so.

The first is that the application of the rule is

"subject to the discretion of the Chair".

As the Joint Committee said,

"the key to the successful operation of the sub judice rule over the years in the House of Commons has been the sensitive use by the Speaker of discretionary powers."

Successive occupants of the Chair have had to grapple with the application of the rules in often difficult and delicate circumstances, and have demonstrated the importance of having a rule that does not seek to anticipate every situation that may arise but leaves considerable discretion to the Chair. This new rule would, of course, preserve that discretion.

Secondly, the House remains free to legislate on any matter. When it appears that the law needs changing, the sub judice rule does not prevent us from making changes even as cases go through the courts.

Thirdly, the rule does not apply to cases in which a ministerial decision is in question in the courts—that is, where a decision is being judicially reviewed. In fact, the new sub judice rule will relax the practice of the Commons on this matter and bring us into line with the more permissive rule that has applied in the Lords.

The existing rules refer to decisions that

"cannot be challenged in court except on grounds of misdirection or bad faith, or concern issues of national importance such as the national economy, public order or the essentials of life".

The new proposal has no such restrictions, and that must be right. The purpose of the sub judice rule is to protect the courts from parliamentary interference; it is not to provide Ministers with a convenient protection against questioning in the House. I commend this substantive alteration to the House.

The other alterations to the sub judice rules recommended by the Joint Committee are technical rather than substantive. First, it cannot be right to have the rules contained in two resolutions, rather than one, or to have different rules in one House of Parliament from those that apply in the other. That is rectified by the proposal before the House.

Secondly, although it is accepted that the sub judice rule applies to Select Committees, in the past that has not been clearly stated. It will now be explicit that the application is also to the Committees of the House.

Thirdly, changes to court practice mean that many of the references to specific courts in the existing rules are out of date, and need to be changed. The redrafted rules do that.

I hope that the House will agree to follow the Lords and adopt this updated and comprehensive sub judice rule.

2.28 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): My guess as I look around the Chamber is that the Minister is likely to get approval for the motion, although we shall have to wait and see. I have no doubt that the debate will be tense, exciting and thrill-packed. That is the way of the House.

I welcome the motion, and I especially welcome the fact that, as the Minister noted, in this matter we are following the lead given by the other place. There is a tendency these days to assert over and over again what is known in the parlance as the "primacy of the Commons". However, every now and then we get examples of how the House of Lords can take a lead, and this is one such. I am happy to follow the Minister's recommendation that we follow the lead given by their Lordships.

I also welcome what I would describe as the saving provisions in the motion, to which the Minister drew attention, and I welcome especially the one that refers to the "discretion of the Chair". Although we must update the provisions relating to sub judice matters, it is also important that we reassert the ultimate provision that the House, through the Chair in this case, has the last word

[Mr. Eric Forth]

on such matters. In that way we can rightly set out the normal rules and provisions, but with that very important discretion retained for the Chair.

Mention was made of the reference to where a ministerial decision is in question or, in the opinion of the Chair, a case concerns issues of national importance such as the economy, public order or the essential services. That is particularly relevant in the current circumstances, but it will always be reassuring to know that where there is an overriding requirement, the thrust of the motion may be set aside.

With those brief comments, I am more than happy to recommend to the massed ranks of hon. Members that we accept the motion.

2.30 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I support the motion because it relaxes the sub judice rule and tidies it up somewhat. Also, as the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said, it brings the rules of the two Houses into line.

I underline my hon. Friend the Minister's point that the rule has important constitutional significance. It is important because, as he said, sometimes the House is frustrated by the impediments to discussion that the rule places on us. During the Pinochet case, hon. Members were frustrated because every person and his dog outside the House were commenting on it, but the rule, and Madam Speaker's specific ruling, meant that there could be no comment here. The constitutional foundation of the rule is important because it directs attention to cases where the application of the rule is justified and, conversely, where it might be wrongly invoked to stifle debate.

The constitutional foundation is, as the Minister said, the principle of the independence of the judiciary. That means basically that judges have to be in a position where they can make decisions in accordance with the law and not because they are swayed, suborned or intimidated by Government or Parliament. Only thus can the courts act to ensure that the decisions and actions of the other two arms of government, as they affect individuals, are in accordance with the law.

We have only to look at the situation in places such as Zimbabwe to see how the independence of the judiciary can be compromised, with the result that individual rights are negated and lawlessness encouraged. There are various protections for the independence of the higher judiciary, such as the legislative guarantee dating back to the Act of Settlement of 1701 that they hold office during good behaviour, subject to removal by an address by both Houses.

Among the other contributions that this House makes to the independence of the judiciary is the sub judice rule. It recognises, as the Lord Chief Justice has said, the mutuality of respect between two constitutional sovereignties. For example, as the Minister said, the courts respect parliamentary privilege and, conversely, we ensure, by our procedural rules, respect for the proceedings of the courts within their own sphere. Paragraph 192 of the excellent report of the Joint Committee gives the justification for the rule very clearly.

There is no need to canvass the motion; it updates and rationalises the rules in this and the other House. I shall make only one point. The operation of the rule in the House is always subject to the overriding discretion of the Speaker, a point made by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst. With respect, the Speaker and his predecessors have always received and accepted sound advice on the operation of the rule from those who advise them. There is an important balance to be struck between the right of debate in the House on matters of public concern and the respect that we must accord judges. Sometimes, that demands a restraint on our debate, although the debate might fall permissibly within the express terms of the rule.

Conversely, the rule must not be used to stifle debate. As I pointed out, I have no quarrel with—indeed, only praise for—the way that the rule has been administered by successive Speakers. However, a casual perusal of *Hansard* suggests that there might occasionally have been instances when Ministers do not seem to have taken the Speaker's advice and have sought to invoke the rule to close down debate, on the basis of a misunderstanding of the rule. That is wrong, especially given the change in the rule that recognises that matters can always be subject to debate where ministerial decision is involved and where simultaneously there is a judicial review. Ministers have to be encouraged to take advice on the application of the rule and to follow it.

I support the motion. It will update the rules and it is a thoroughly soundly based constitutional provision.

2.36 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): As the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office said, I served on the Joint Committee for about 18 months. It frightened the life out of me, because almost all the other members of the Committee held some sort of qualification. I mean no disrespect to the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) when I point out that now that we have fewer lawyers in the House, we probably do a better job. However, on occasions such as this, we need that legal advice and I want to follow up the point that he has just made.

In the past, Ministers have all too often hidden behind an alleged, possible sub judice restriction to avoid difficult questions, and have not taken direct legal advice from the Chair or the Clerks. Most of us do not have that legal expertise, so in future, now that we have clarification and codification between both Houses, I hope that the situation will be slightly clearer, both for lay Members and for those learned Members who have greater expertise. As a result, I hope that Ministers will not be able to get away with some of the excuses that they made in past.

As the Minister said, although this subject is fascinating only to an elite and intelligent minority, it is important. It is all about the relationship between Parliament and the judiciary. The Minister spelt that out extremely well. However, some elements of the situation remain complex, despite the helpful clarification; for example, most laymen find the whole issue of judicial review complicated.

One of the things that the motion will deal with was not mentioned by the Minister: under the new rule, once a pre-trial issue has been settled, the sub judice rule will

be lifted until that case becomes active again. That is the sort of minefield that some of us might stray into—we might not be sure where we are in that process. I hope that that piece of advice will be heavily underlined for the benefit of the Minister's colleagues.

We should examine the relevant responsibilities in our handling of these matters and their handling by the media—a point that has already been made. After all, the media are the media; they are not part of our constitution. I hope that it is still true not only that the courts, but the public at large, take a little more notice of what the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) says than of leaders in *The Sun*. I am not sure about that, but I hope that they do. We must be a little more careful than the editors of national and local newspapers or the editors and producers of television programmes.

The fact remains that Parliament has the privilege of defending the rights of our constituents. That is not a privilege that we exercise on our own behalf; it is to defend the right of our constituents to be heard and to have their concerns aired in this place—with much greater freedom than out on the street or, indeed, in the television studio. I hope that we can still endorse and support that self-discipline because it is important.

Of course, it is important that the independence of the judiciary is recognised. That, too is an important feature of the motion. However, my anxiety is that sometimes ignorance is treated as bliss, and I think that occasionally Back-Bench Members in the House, and Ministers, may push their luck with a sub judice example. After all, the word can pop out and the reference can be made before the Chair has an opportunity to discuss matters with the learned Clerks, let alone with Speaker's Counsel. It is incumbent on us, if we believe that we may be running into trouble, to try to take advice in advance of making a comment, whether it be in Committee—the Minister rightly referred to the fact that the rule will now apply explicitly in Committee where it was implicit before—or in the Chamber.

However, we must also look at the matter the other way round. Members or Ministers must not be over-zealous in this matter to the extent that we do not have a free Parliament discussing issues that we are free to discuss. My anxiety is that we get that balance right.

I recall that evidence was given to the Joint Committee that the Speaker—and, through the Speaker, the Speaker's Counsel—was available to give advice. My worry is that perhaps, in a borderline case, most of us will take the view that it is better to try our luck than to take what may be very cautious—dare I say it, very conservative—legal advice. Although I accept that ignorance is no defence in those circumstances, I would hope that, in a borderline case, we do not find that the legal advice that we are given is so absurdly over-cautious that Parliament is prevented from doing its proper job.

2.42 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I am delighted to take part in what, I concur with the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), is a very important debate, even though there are not very many of us in the House. The issue goes to the heart of our constitution and the constitutional position of the House in our arrangements, but I shall be brief because I agree with everything that I have heard so far.

I apologise to the Minister for not hearing his opening remarks from a Bench in the Chamber. I did have the benefit of seeing him make them on the television in my room before I came to the Chamber.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is not supposed to say that.

Mr. Howarth: My right hon. Friend may say that, but, having voted assiduously against televising the House, I must say that I am now taking advantage of it.

As the hon. Member for North Cornwall mentioned, the Bill of Rights of 1688 was a very important constitutional measure and it is as valid today as it was in 1688. Parliament fought hard against the Crown to establish its right to be free from any kind of oppression from the Crown to express its view, and to ensure that Members themselves should be free, not on their own behalf but on behalf of their constituents and others, to make a case free from the fear of being oppressed by the Crown or—even worse—locked up or jailed. We should be conscious of that privilege, which was won so hard so many years ago, but we must also be conscious of the need to exercise if responsibly. That is the gist of the Minister's case.

I hope that we have achieved the right balance in the motion before us. It is important that we ensure that there is a separation of powers, and that we ensure that the courts have freedom to interpret the legislation as passed by Parliament—although I must say that I am becoming increasingly alarmed at the way in which the judges are becoming politicised and seeking in too many cases to usurp the duties and responsibilities of Parliament to make the law, by seeking to stretch their interpretation to such an extent that they are almost defying the will of Parliament. However, that is a bigger argument than that with which we are faced today, so I shall not proceed too far down that avenue, except to say that I think that it is not simply a question of being purist about the right of the courts to determine issues without Parliament being in contempt of the courts by raising those issues which could not be raised otherwise.

On the point about Ministers trying to hide behind the sub judice rule, I saw the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office nodding earlier to show that he is of the view that Ministers should not seek that refuge.

The hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) was right to allude to the Pinochet case as being a good example of the difficulties that the House has faced and that we want to resolve. It was absurd that all the newspapers were discussing that case, it was being discussed on television and radio—everyone was talking about it—and that this House was the only place that was not allowed to discuss it.

The Home Secretary had finally to make a judgment. I am entirely happy about the exercise of that discretion. It should not have been left to the courts; it was an issue of national importance in which leaving it to the discretion of an elected Minister of the Crown was the right way to proceed. However, it was nonsense that we could not question the Home Secretary, who was to make the final decision, when all the newspapers and everyone else were making their representations to him.

[Mr. Howarth]

The compromise reached, which is that

"where a ministerial decision is in question, or in the opinion of the Chair a case concerns issues of national importance such as the economy, public order or essential services, reference to the issues or the case may be made in motions, debates or questions",

is the right way to proceed.

Since the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North raised this matter on behalf of the Labour party, as did the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on behalf of the Liberal Democrat party, perhaps I can do so on behalf of the Conservative party, so that we have a united front in declaring to the Chair that we wish to place it firmly on the record that it is the view of the House as assembled here today—given the massive number of Members present—that we hope and expect the Chair to be robust in interpreting this resolution in favour of the House so that it has an opportunity to debate issues in the manner set out in the motion. If there is an area of doubt, I hope that the Chair will err on the side of the House rather than that of caution.

2.47 pm

Mr. Stephen Twigg: As the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) implied from the Conservative Front Bench, I am getting used to these debates of great national importance and to crossing swords with him and other hon. Members on these matters. I assure the House that on the doorsteps of Enfield, Southgate in June no more important issue came up than the changes to the sub judice rule. Perhaps that is reflected in the turnout here this afternoon. I am grateful to hon. Members on both sides of the House for their constructive contributions to our short debate.

When I was asked to propose this motion today, I had a similar sense of trepidation to that described by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler)—that we would have a debate full of lawyers. In fact, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) was the only lawyer to speak and he made a useful and constructive contribution. I do not intend to cover ground that was covered in my opening remarks. I simply thank all hon. Members for their support.

I very much agree with the hon. Member for North Cornwall, who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, that we are seeking greater clarity and also balance. That is important and it is also central to the matter. I also agree with the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) that there is real concern about the balance being right and the fact that sometimes it is not. I will not be tempted to take the route that he was not tempted by, but we want a proper separation of powers and a proper understanding on the part of the judiciary as well as here in Parliament about the roles that we have under our constitutional arrangements.

I am sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you heard what the hon. Gentleman said. I can reiterate that there is clearly cross-party support for a strong and robust stance from the Chair, both in the Chamber and in Committees. I am pleased that we have such broad and strong support for this proposed change and, therefore, I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Resolutions of 23rd July 1963 and 28th June 1972 be rescinded and the following Resolution be made:

That, subject to the discretion of the Chair, and to the right of the House to legislate on any matter or to discuss any delegated legislation, the House in all its proceedings (including proceedings of committees of the House) shall apply the following rules on matters *sub judice:*

1. Cases in which proceedings are active in United Kingdom courts shall not be referred to in any motion, debate or question.

(a)(i) Criminal proceedings are active when a charge has been made or a summons to appear has been issued, or, in Scotland, a warrant to cite has been granted.

(ii) Criminal proceedings cease to be active when they are concluded by verdict and sentence or discontinuance, or, in cases dealt with by courts martial, after the conclusion of the mandatory post-trial review.

(b)(i) Civil proceedings are active when arrangements for the hearing, such as setting down a case for trial, have been made, until the proceedings are ended by judgment or discontinuance.

(ii) Any application made in or for the purposes of any civil proceedings shall be treated as a distinct proceeding.

(c) appellate proceedings, whether criminal or civil, are active from the time when they are commenced by application for leave to appeal or by notice of appeal until ended by judgment or discontinuance.

But where a ministerial decision is in question, or in the opinion of the Chair a case concerns issues of national importance such as the economy, public order or the essential services, reference to the issues or the case may be made in motions, debates or questions.

2. Specific matters which the House has expressly referred to any judicial body for decision and report shall not be referred to in any motion, debate or question from the time when the Resolution of the House is passed until the report is laid before the House.

3. For the purposes of this Resolution—

(a) Matters before Coroners Courts or Fatal Accident Inquiries shall be treated as matters within paragraph 1(a);

(b) 'Motion' includes a motion for leave to bring in a bill; and

(c) 'Question' includes a supplementary question.

Human Rights (Joint Committee)

2.50 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I beg to move,

That Standing Order No.152B (Human Rights (Joint Committee)) be amended, as follows:

Line 40, at end insert the words ", except that for the purposes of taking evidence, the quorum shall be two".

I hope that the motion is self-explanatory. We set up the Joint Committee on Human Rights, as we explicitly said, on the lines of the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege, which had a membership of six from each House and a quorum of three from each House, making a total quorum of six. Under the motion, that quorum will be reduced to two, for the purpose of evidence taking only. I understand that a similar change is likely to be made in another place.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Why?

Mr. Twigg: The motion has been tabled in response to representations from the Chairman of the Committee on the basis that it will assist the Committee in its work. It is a new Committee, and I hope that the House will support it and agree to its Chairman's request. On that basis, I move the motion.

2.51 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I am more than a little disappointed at the what the Minister has said. Simply to say that the Committee Chairman wants fewer people to attend its sittings so that it can do its work does not seem remotely satisfactory. In fact, I am rather suspicious about this. In any case, I have suspicions about the concept of a bifurcated quorum. That is probably a bad way to do things, and we should not encourage it.

Generally speaking, any Committee should do its work with the maximum number of its members available. In fact, if we were to divide the House right now to test its opinion on the motion, 40 hon. Members would need to be present. I wonder whether the Government would like that to happen or whether they would feel confident about it.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): My right hon. Friend will correct me if I am wrong, but I cannot see the Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Jean Corston), in the Chamber. It might have been polite if she had been available to explain her request to the Government.

Mr. Forth: I agree with my hon. and learned Friend. Not only would it have been a courtesy, but if the Chairman had bothered to turn up to make the case that the Minister has tried valiantly to make, the House might have been convinced. Perhaps understandably, he has failed to be his usual persuasive self. Perhaps he assumed that the Chairman would turn up and explain why she thought that we should agree to this extraordinary motion. As I have said, I am uneasy about the idea of having two quorums for different aspects of the Committee's business. That, in itself, requires some explanation.

Ah, the Chairman of the Committee is now in the Chamber; I welcome her to the debate. Unfortunately, the rules of procedure do not allow me to resume my seat, listen to what she has to say and then make my speech appropriately, so I will have to deliver the rest of my speech on an entirely speculative basis, wondering what on earth she will say to persuade the House why she thinks not only that the Committee needs a quorum of two, but that it can legitimately conduct its business on that basis.

I clearly recall our being told when the Committee was set up how extraordinarily important it would be, what extraordinarily important work it would do and that hon. Members would very much welcome its deliberations. Some hon. Members—I was not one of them—swallowed that argument hook, line and sinker. Now, according to the Minister, the Chairman thinks that the Committee's work is so vital that, occasionally, only two of its members may be around to conduct its business.

I suspect that that says much about the Committee and, regrettably, about the attitude that is increasingly prevailent among some hon. Members about how seriously they are prepared to take the work of Committees and the House.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Is not my right hon. Friend puzzled that the Government are seeking to do this at a time when they have had to tear up part of the Human Rights Act 1998, which came into force only last year? It is somewhat of an insult to suggest that on this important matter, when the Government have had to renounce measures implemented as recently as last year, only two people will be able to consider the evidence—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Some of the hon. Gentleman's remarks are outside the terms of the motion.

Mr. Forth: I am cognisant of the points that my hon. Friend makes. I am not entirely sure that the Minister presented his case with his normal oomph and enthusiasm. He may have been technically relaying what he thought the Chairman had thought so that the House could consider the matter. We must now wait with bated breath to hear the Chairman explain how the Committee, allegedly important as it and its work is, cannot muster not only its full membership for the deliberation of its business but even a normal quorum of three.

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I apologise if I was insufficiently enthusiastic in presenting the proposal to the House. Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that it does not mean that we would have a Joint Committee with only two people taking evidence? It would be two Members from the House of Commons, with a similar change being made in the other place. Will the right hon. Gentleman also acknowledge that this is a narrow and focused proposal that does not cover the full range of the Committee's work, but applies simply to the evidence-taking part?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Minister, and of course I accept what he says. He is saying that as many as four out of the membership of 12 might participate in the work of the Committee. I expect that he means me to be impressed by that. Regrettably, it does not impress me at

[Mr. Forth]

all. This rather sums up the attitude of all too many hon. Members. We seem to have arrived at a position that is redolent of what is prevalent on the Labour Benches. You would not allow me, Madam Deputy Speaker, to divert myself into the issue of counselling Members, whether attending Committees or not, and how the delicacy of Labour Members has to be looked after, not least by the Chairman of the Committee. You can be assured, that I will not elaborate on those points.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North) *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not tempt me to do so.

Mr. McNamara: I would never do that.

Mr. Forth: On that understanding, I give way.

Mr. McNamara: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that one of the difficulties that we have had is that a Conservative Member is yet to be nominated to the Committee? What is the percentage of Members required for a quorum on other Committees?

Mr. Forth: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that, happily, there is a motion on the Order Paper this very day nominating my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) for membership of this Committee.

Mr. McNamara: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, but he is not answering my question. We are now in November and the Committee has not had a Conservative representative. The very important legislation to which the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) referred was discussed without any Conservative Member being present.

Mr. Forth: That is a matter for my colleagues to consider. Perhaps it reflects the lack of interest in the Committee, not only on Conservative Benches but, because of the nature of the resolutions before us, more generally. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's comments accurately reflect the value that the House places on the Committee. If it is expected that we can muster only two out of six Members of this House to do the Committee's allegedly very important work, we can draw our own conclusions.

Mr. McNamara *rose—*

Mr. Forth: If the hon. Gentleman wants to keep worrying away at the point, I will indulge him.

Mr. McNamara: I will worry away at it, because I would not like it to appear that my colleagues on the Committee from this House have been found wanting in any way, when this is really to do with the other place.

Mr. Forth: I will certainly not be drawn into casting aspersions on Members of another place; I will leave that to the hon. Gentleman.

My point, and I shall stick to it narrowly because it is important, concerns the attitude behind the motion, which is that we must anticipate that fewer and fewer Members of the House will turn up to do the work of Committees.

Mr. Garnier: It may well be that between now and Monday, when a derogation from the European convention on human rights is to be discussed, the Chairman intends to hold a meeting of her Committee so that, with the three other members who will be needed to form the quorum, she can take evidence on that derogation.

Jean Corston (Bristol, East): We did that last night.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Lady says that she took evidence last night. No doubt she will publish that evidence before we discuss the matter on Monday. My right hon. Friend may find that information helpful in alleviating his concern.

Mr. Forth: That may be the case. I would be even more impressed if the Committee were to deprecate the fact that on Monday evening the matter will be dealt with by the ghastly deferred Division process. I hope that the Committee is prepared to express strong views about that, and I await the moment, but I will believe it when I see it.

I return to the point at issue. Why does it now appear that a very important Joint Committee of this House and another place should have a reduced quorum? I have no doubt that the Chairman will seek to persuade us that she is so lacking in confidence about her very important Committee, which deals with very important matters, that she wants to provide for the possibility that only two people may be available to take evidence.

Worse, we are to have this peculiar bifurcated quorum, which means that although two people may be present to take evidence, three will be needed to make a substantive decision. As with deferred Divisions, the people who sat and listened to the evidence may be rather different from those who will vote on the matter for which the evidence was taken. The whole business is starting to become not only bizarre but rather unsatisfactory. Unless the Chairman comes up with some convincing answers, I doubt that the House will be very happy with the proposal.

I suspect that Government Members thought that the House would give a casual nod and wink to the motion in conspiratorial acceptance of the idea that fewer and fewer of us need turn up to do any of our business. Of course, that is very much the attitude of many Labour Members, as we know from their words and their behaviour, and that is very much to be regretted. However, in this case there may be special considerations that I have been unable to anticipate, so I look forward with more than usual relish to what the Chairman of the Committee now has to say.

3.3 pm

Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I apologise for not being in the Chamber at the start of the debate. You will no doubt be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there was a meeting of the Liaison Committee, and I had expected this business to be taken a little later.

I take full responsibility for the motion, which is in my name as I have the privilege of chairing the Joint Committee on Human Rights. As its name implies, it is a Joint Committee of both Houses. It is rather unusual in that it has an equal number of members from the Government and the Opposition—six of each—and an equal number from each of the two Houses, six MPs and six Lords. No doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is, like me, delighted that at long last we will be joined by a Conservative Member of the Commons. The absence of such a Member has been noted.

The Committee is unusual also in that its quorum is 50 per cent. of the membership.

Mr. Forth: Good.

Jean Corston: I have never yet heard the right hon. Gentleman or any other Conservative Member complain about the fact that the normal quorum for a Select Committee is three out of 11 members, which is far lower than what I am proposing on behalf of the Committee.

There is another reason why the quorum is appropriate. Members of the House of Commons should be here to attend a Select Committee meeting whenever the House is sitting or during the recess. However, many of our colleagues on the Joint Committee who are from the other place have outside jobs and interests. We have a civil service commissioner, the deputy chairman of the Independent Television Commission, a lawyer and a university lecturer.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Is that not also a problem with Conservative Members of this House who do not always turn up because they are somewhere else doing something else?

Jean Corston: That may well be the case. Attempts were made through the usual channels to ensure that Conservatives were represented on the Committee. They had the opportunity from June onwards to contribute to the Committee when, as the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said, we dealt with legislation of the most fundamental importance in terms of human rights and the emergency situation. It has been a great failing on the part of the Conservatives that not one of their Members from this place was present.

Mr. Garnier: Having criticised the hon. Lady, I of course, fully accept her apology and explanation for not being present at the outset of the debate.

The hon. Lady is confusing me slightly. I was under the impression—it may be my fault for being obtuse—that we were discussing the quorum of Members from this House, not of the overall Committee. The fact that we are reducing the quorum to two is a reference to membership from this House alone. She may well be misleading herself and not doing her case justice by making such wide-ranging attacks when dealing with this narrow issue.

Jean Corston: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for that comment. It is true that I am proposing two members out of six for the Commons quorum, which is a third.

Mr. Garnier: On that basis, the hon. Lady's remarks about noble Lords being members of other bodies—civil service commissioners or whatever—are beside the point. It is interesting, but not relevant.

Jean Corston: It is entirely relevant because a Joint Committee by its very name and nature must have an equal number of members from each House. If two Lords members are to serve as a quorum, there should be two Commons members, and vice versa. That has been the basis of the reasoning. For understandable reasons, such as academic or court commitments, Lords members have found it difficult to be present at the beginning of a meeting or during the deliberations. That makes it difficult for the Committee to function if it is examining a Minister in an evidence-taking session—that has happened.

I am not suggesting that members from the other place do not do their best to be diligent in their attendance. There are two Conservative members from the other place, one of whom, as the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst may know, is the head of an Oxford college who finds it difficult to attend a meeting if it is held at an extraordinary time. A quorum of a third of each House is reasonable and, indeed, higher than in Select Committees in the House of Commons, which require a quorum of three members out of 11. I am proposing two out of six.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Lady may not know—there is no reason why she should—that I raised the issue of inadequate quorums regularly in the context of these very debates in a previous incarnation on the Floor of the House. It has concerned me for some time, so I am being reasonably consistent.

For the hon. Lady to say that Members of another place are very busy people with important outside work to do and that we must understand why they cannot make it to meetings of an important Committee is simply not good enough. Committee members—whether Lords or not—should not accept the commitment of being on the Committee if they are regularly too busy to attend. That is not an acceptable excuse. Lords or not, Committee members should take responsibility for reviewing their commitments and making appropriate adjustments rather than asking us to reduce quorums to accommodate people with other priorities.

Jean Corston: I always find that trying to debate with the right hon. Gentleman is like trying to stir a bucket of treacle with a matchstick. It is entirely pointless. I merely make the sensible point that to insist on a quorum of 50 per cent. of the membership of this Committee—which is unlike any other Committee in this House or the other place—would be to place too great a burden on the Committee. For example, if one or two people were unwell, it would be difficult to hold an evidence-taking session with a Minister or with anyone else from whom we might want to hear evidence in public.

All the members of the Committee—Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour—are of the same mind. Our Committee has functioned well. In the short time that we have existed, we have published reports on legislation, such as the Bill that became the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, and we are in the course of producing a report in what might be record time on the emergency legislation that the House will consider next week. We are proud of our record. However, we do not want to be placed in a position where, not for reasons of sloth or lack of interest, we cannot function.

3.11 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I have great respect for the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Jean Corston), who is the Chairman of the Committee. However, I am now more confused than I was at the beginning of the debate.

As the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) pointed out, the number of Lords necessary to form a quorum on their side is irrelevant to this debate. As far as I know, nothing is written down to suggest that the quorum from the two Houses in a Joint Committee has to be identical. That point is taken care of at the outset.

The original proposal was to reduce the quorum for all the Committee's sittings, and not just the evidence-taking sessions. That would have been even worse, but we could try to reach a sensible conclusion that means that the quorum for all sittings is the same. All Select Committees often move straight from taking evidence into a deliberative session because that is a good way of ensuring that the points raised by the witnesses are immediately addressed. One would assume that the same quorum would be appropriate for both types of session.

The Joint Committee is very important. In the previous Parliament, I spent much time trying to persuade the then Leader of the House to appoint the Committee. The Government had committed themselves to doing that, but its appointment was long delayed. Given the fact that the Committee represents both Houses, I also argued that its numbers should not be restricted to 12. That would have sorted the problem out. If my suggestion of 18 members had been accepted, it would have ensured a reasonable spread of representation from both Houses, and the problem of small quorums would not have arisen.

Another problem has been mentioned in the debate. It was felt necessary that a Government Back Bencher should chair the Committee, so that the Government would have a majority if a decision came to a casting vote. That is true when the Committee has 12 members, but it would not follow if my suggestion had been accepted. The hon. Lady does not seem to agree, but I assure her that the negotiations that I had with the then Chief Whip took place on that basis.

Jean Corston: I inform the hon. Gentleman that there is no casting vote in the Committee.

Mr. Tyler: If that is the case, the then Chief Whip's argument that it was necessary for a Government Back Bencher to chair the Committee is blown out of the water. As has been pointed out, a membership of 12 means that the Government and Opposition parties are evenly split. I have argued—I maintain this argument—that a significant scrutiny Committee such as the Public Accounts Committee can do its job well only if its Chairman is completely free from Government influence.

The hon. Lady is a distinguished chair of the Committee. However, when she was appointed, she did not have any other responsibilities. She is now chair of the parliamentary Labour party and that puts her in an awkward position not just in relation to this Committee but in relation to the Liaison Committee. An extraordinary anomaly exists.

As the hon. Lady said, the Committee is examining on our behalf the most controversial issues before the House. I welcome that; I am sure that it is doing so conscientiously. It took evidence from the Home Secretary yesterday, and I understand from the hon. Lady's comments that before our debates in the Chamber on Monday, it will produce a report on the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill and the derogation from the Human Rights Act 1998. Such matters could not be more important. This is therefore an extraordinary moment effectively to propose that we diminish participation in the Committee's deliberations.

I think that the answer—if we are allowed to reopen the issue so soon after the appointment of members of the Committee—is to increase the membership from 12 to 18. As I understand the arithmetic in the two Houses, that would ensure that the Government retained their majority and it would no longer be necessary for a Government Member to chair the Committee. That would deal with the hon. Lady's dilemma over where her loyalties should lie and at the same time mean that more Members from both Houses were available for the deliberative and evidence- taking sessions. That seems a sensible solution. If the Minister's argument is, "Oh well, we do not want to disturb what is after all a fairly new Committee," why is the motion before us?

3.16 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): First, when the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) reads the Committee's report, he might want to reconsider his argument. Secondly, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Jean Corston) was elected as Chairman of the Committee on the nomination of Lord Lester of Herne Hill, who, I understand, takes the Liberal Democrat Whip. Moreover, she was unanimously re-elected.

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that that decision was taken before the hon. Lady became chairman of the parliamentary Labour party?

Mr. McNamara: I think that the decision was taken after that. My hon. Friend was elected as chairman of the PLP at the start of this Session, before the Select Committees had been re-established. She was then elected as Chairman of the Joint Committee. I am sure that my chronology is correct; if it is not, I apologise to the House.

I have some sympathy with the point about the size of the Committee, but no amendment has been tabled to that effect. The House must think very carefully about whether Members serving on the Joint Committee will have greater demands made of them than of those serving on an ordinary Select Committee. Three members out of 11 is just over 25 per cent. If the motion is not passed, we shall be demanding 50 per cent. of the Members of this House who are members of the Joint Committee to attend its sittings. I am certain that that is unfair and in many ways improper. It is right that we should agree the motion.

On the point about the logic of deliberating with such a small number of members, I see no difficulty in an amendment to that effect. I hope that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) tables such an amendment, and that if he does not do so, my hon. Friend the Minister will. In demanding that there are four members to reach a conclusion, we are in any event asking for one more than that required in any Select Committee. Where is the logic in such a suggestion?

I would go further: I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will think in terms of establishing Sub-Committees of the Joint Committee because there is

a great deal of work before it. That would enable us to consider specific pieces of legislation that cover a variety of fields in which different Members have an interest. People have various interests and expertise, including criminal law, health law, housing and a whole range of issues, and could report back to the full Committee. We are told that that can be done informally, but that is not the proper way of dealing with the matter; we have to have proper Sub-Committees.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman is arguing, not unreasonably, on the basis of consistency across Committees. Does he agree that we should increase the quorum on Commons Committees so that Members take them more seriously? If their work was regarded more seriously, that might counter the view that a tiny rump of member can be expected to do the work of an entire Committee.

Mr. McNamara: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will deal with the Committee attendance of Conservative Members. I would be happy if he suggested that we increased the Commons representation on a Joint Committee to match representation on other Committees, which would help even more to deal with Sub-Committee work. If he did so and if we maintained the quorum that we have in the Commons, that would be acceptable.

As a member of the Joint Committee, I believe that we should support the motion. It is important that the amendment to the Standing Order is agreed. As the hon. Member for North Cornwall suggested a moment ago, we should not denigrate the work of Select Committees, whether their membership is drawn from the Commons, the Lords or both Houses.

3.22 pm

Mr. Stephen Twigg: First, I reiterate the point made by a number of Members by paying early tribute to the work of the new Joint Committee. I know that some Members did not support the passage of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the incorporation in British law of the European convention on human rights, but that had overwhelming support in both Houses.

The establishment of the new Joint Committee is important. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Jean Corston) and her colleagues in all parties in this House and the other place for moving quickly so that it could begin work. I have no doubt that if the fifth motion on the Order Paper is passed, the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) will be a valuable addition to the Committee. Having served alongside him on the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons, I know that he is an assiduous and articulate Committee member; I am sure that he will make a positive contribution to the work of the Joint Committee.

From the Government's point of view, it seems that we cannot win. We have had a cross-party request from a Committee. Had we resisted that proposal or suggestion, we would have been criticised by the Opposition for obstructing Committee work. Instead, we have offered the House a sensible proposal, for which we have been attacked. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has said on several occasions, the Government believe that good scrutiny makes for good government; our proposal attempts to provide a sensible balance, as has been said by those of my hon. Friends who are members of the Joint Committee. I particularly welcome the fact that our proposal has clear cross-party support within the Committee; that is especially true of Lords members. Our proposal is about making the Joint Committee work and ensuring that it can succeed.

There have been a number of Joint Committees; some have had quorums of three members from each House, others a standard quorum of two. We are not proposing such a standard quorum; we are simply proposing that a quorum should exist for the purpose of evidence taking. When decisions are considered by the Committee, the quorum will be larger, as originally agreed when the Committee was established. There is no question of casting votes in the Joint Committee. If such a Committee is to be successful, it is important that it works by consensus. If five votes were cast against five, or six against six in the Committee, that would suggest that it was not progressing as originally envisaged.

I took note of what my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said about Sub-Committees; we shall probably wish to return to that matter later. For all that we have heard from the Conservative and Liberal Front Benchers this afternoon, this is a sensible and modest change that will enable the new Joint Committee to work more successfully. On that basis, I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As the next item of business is set down for 4 o'clock, I suspend the sitting until that hour.

3.26 pm

Sitting suspended.

City of London (Ward Elections) Bill

4 pm

On resuming—

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [7 November],

That the promoters of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill which originated in this House in the last Parliament but had not received the Royal Assent may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the bill in the present session of Parliament; and the petition for the bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable to it shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the bill shall be presented to the House by deposit in the Private Bill Office no later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day;

That a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the bill, stating that it is the same in every respect as the bill presented in this House in the last Parliament;

That on the next sitting day following presentation, the Clerk in the Private Bill Office shall lay the bill on the Table of the House;

That in the present session of Parliament the bill shall be deemed to have passed through every stage through which it has passed in the last Parliament, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having passed those stages;

That no further fees shall be charged to such stages.—[*Sir George Young.*]

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) *rose—*

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is impolite of me to raise a point of order without giving you notice, so may I say that there is a range of points of order relating to compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998, the publication of the statement by the promoters, the declarations of interest relating to the Bill and the hybridity issues in relation to any changes in the Bill that I will not raise today because I have not given you notice but which, if the Bill proceeds, I will raise at a later date?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I have noted the points that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Sir George Young: As hon. Members who were present for the debate—or rather, the debates—in the previous Parliament will know, the Bill has an element of the controversial about it. Those debates were replied to, with great wit and courtesy, by Peter Brooke—now Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville—the City's MP in the last Parliament. I have to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), his successor, that sponsoring a measure such as the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill is not the best initiation for any hon. Member, however able, in his first parliamentary Session.

John McDonnell: Why has the right hon. Gentleman been selected for this honour?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman anticipates my very next sentence. As a Minister at the Department of the Environment and subsequently as a Treasury Minister, I had frequent contact with the City, as I did as Transport Secretary. Also as a former London MP, a former borough councillor and indeed a former Greater London council member, I hope that I can satisfy the hon. Gentleman that I am acquainted with local government in the capital. Therefore, when I was asked to sponsor the Bill, I readily agreed.

John McDonnell: May I suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that on the basis of his experience he should know better?

Sir George Young: I could not disagree more strongly. It is my knowledge of the background to the Bill, dating back to the Herbert commission in the 1960s, which decided that the City of London should remain as a corporation, that gives me renewed conviction to carry on the Bill in the footsteps of Lord Brooke.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: May I make some progress? I am familiar with the pattern of these debates. I should like to get a little mileage on the mileometer before I give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster will, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, deal with some constituency aspects relevant to the merits of this revival motion, and will pick up on points made in other hon. Members' contributions towards the conclusion of the debate.

As this is a debate on revival, not a general debate on the Bill's merits, I will not risk your displeasure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by roaming at large over its provisions. I should, however, in addition to the procedural case for revival, like to refer in passing to the features of the Bill that have led the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) to contend, through the early-day motions that he has tabled this Session, that no further parliamentary time should be allocated to it. I should also like to refer to the amendments that will be proposed by the promoters if the revival is agreed by the House, as they may well be relevant to hon. Members' views of the merits of the motion before the House.

Jeremy Corbyn: There is a sense of deja vu about the Bill, dating back to November 1998, because we are now in our fourth year of discussing it. However, in the light of the right hon. Gentleman's considerable local government experience, does he not find it odd that he should be promoting a Bill that reduces the democracy of local government and increases the autocracy of the business vote in local government? Will he tell us what these wonderful amendments are that are about to be brought forward?

Sir George Young: I said a moment ago that I would like to refer to the key amendment. I slept easily in my bed last night, knowing that I was going to propose the revival motion, because I do not find the Bill offensive in the way that the hon. Gentleman alleges it to be.

The proposition that a private Bill might be continued from one Parliament to the next on a revival motion is unexceptional. By way of example, the House currently has before it the Barclays Group Reorganisation Bill, the Greenham and Crookham Commons Bill and the National Australia Group Europe Bill. Those are all private measures, that originated in the last Parliament, fell with the general election and have been revived again this Session. As the cognoscenti among hon. Members will know from "Erskine May", edition 22, page 928, motions have even been made to revive a number of private Bills en bloc. The motion before the House is of a more exclusive nature, but can claim no other distinguishing features.

You may think it right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for me to refer to one procedural aspect that had a significant bearing on the promoter's ability to make progress during the last Parliament and on the enhanced ability to make progress in the current one if the Bill is revived. That is the issue of human rights, to which the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington referred in his point of order, or rather the procedures to be applied to private legislation under the Human Rights Act 1998. That issue took up virtually all of two of the previous three-hour debates allocated to the Bill, the last being on 11 January. A substantial amount of time was also spent on points of order during the other debates. The House agreed the procedures to be applied to private Bills on 2 May and I know that that will be a relief to the hon. Gentleman, who has devoted a good deal of time to the subject during earlier debates.

I note that the Standing Order changes were adopted by the House on 2 May without objection. If the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill is revived, the promoters will of course comply with the procedure that the House agreed.

John McDonnell: On a point of clarity, it is true that, as a result of the labours of Members on the Labour Benches in this Chamber, our procedure has changed. However, the fundamental point remains that the Bill strikes against fundamental human rights, which base democracy on one person, one vote.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman may have his own reservations. The promoters propose to comply with the new Standing Orders that were adopted by the House without dissent.

With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall draw two remaining aspects to the attention of the House as they are relevant to consideration of the revival motion. The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington sponsored two early-day motions. The first, early-day motion 112, proposes that

"no further time of the House should be wasted on this measure"

because it

"offends against basic democratic principles by extending the business vote".

I should record that, contrary to what he implies in his motion, the practice of Parliament since the Great Reform Act of 1832 has been to extend the City's non-domestic franchise to meet changing circumstances. For example, business voters are no longer required to live within a particular distance of the City as they were at the time of the great reforms, and changes made as recently as 1995 have extended the City's business vote to European Union nationals.

The hon. Gentleman's other motion, 265, argues that no further parliamentary time should be given to the Bill because

"many of the companies implicated in laundering terrorist funds via the City of London's financial institutions will gain a vote in the running of the City Corporation".

This is not the occasion to debate the substance of that assertion, but as those entitled to vote in ward elections will, according to the Bill, be confined to British subjects and citizens of the Republic of Ireland plus those of other EU states, the promoters are not confident that they fully understand the point that he is trying to make. On behalf of the City I should, however, record the view that the sentiment expressed in the motion is somewhat tasteless.

The Bill plainly does not enjoy the support of all hon. Members. It does, however, enjoy cross-party support and in previous debates the Government's attitude to it has been consistently supportive. The Minister for Local Government may wish to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I will remind the House of what the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill) said when, as Minister with responsibility for London, he contributed to the last debate on a carry-over motion. He said:

"The Bill's changes to the electoral system recognise the unique nature of the square mile and the need for an inclusive form of local governance that reflects . . . all those who have an interest".—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1999; Vol. 337, c. 190.]

Jeremy Corbyn: It would be helpful if the right hon. Gentleman could explain to the wider world what possible justification there may be for the City of London to have a totally different electoral system for local government from that of the rest of the country, or is it a pattern that he and some of his friends wish to be repeated elsewhere?

Sir George Young: I have taken the opportunity of reading *Hansard* accounts of revival motions. On an earlier occasion, the Deputy Speaker was anxious that the debate should not stray beyond that motion and into the merits of the Bill. I do not want to fall foul of the Chair, by dealing in detail with some of the issues in the Bill. If the hon. Gentleman wants to discuss the Bill in detail, the best thing that he can do is to agree to the revival motion so that we can debate at a later stage the issues that excite him.

Jeremy Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) has obviously gone way beyond the revival motion in describing the Bill's merits and you have accepted that, so presumably it is in order. It would surely be in order, therefore, for him to reply to the point that I made in my intervention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have listened carefully to the points that the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) is making in his opening remarks, and he has not yet strayed far enough away from the revival motion to incur my displeasure. Indeed, I agree with the remarks that he has made to date, and I shall listen carefully to the contributions of other hon. Members.

Sir George Young: That is a great relief to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Finally, I wish to say a few words about the amendments that the promoters will propose if the House agrees to revive the Bill, as that may assist the House in reaching a view on the merits of the motion. One of the principal objections advanced by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington and others has been to the extension of a property-based vote through rateable values. The reason that that route was taken by the promoters is a matter of record and has been debated extensively. The promoters have sought to deal with that objection, given the constraint that any form of general commuter vote would swamp the existing residential vote and would therefore be unacceptable to City residents.

The promoters now believe that an alternative to rateable values could, however, be introduced as the basis for the voting entitlement that would be conferred by the Bill. So, if the House agrees to the revival motion, amendments will be introduced to remove the proposed voting entitlement based on the rateable value of premises and replace it with a scheme that relates voting entitlement to the number of people who work on the premises. If the House agrees to the motion, as I hope that it will, hon. Members will have a full opportunity to examine the proposals and take a view on them.

The failure of the House to agree that the Bill should be revived would derail the reform movement in the City of London as the Bill would be lost in its entirety. Neither the City of London, nor Labour Members—indeed, no one—agrees that the status quo is satisfactory, but that would remain unchanged if the Bill were not revived. I hope that the House will agree, by supporting the motion, that the status quo should not remain unchanged.

4.12 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I welcome all hon. Members present—especially yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker—to our fourth year of discussing the Bill. This is not an evening for long discussion, and I hope that we shall all soon be able to head off to our respective constituencies to meet our constituents.

We are considering a tainted piece of detritus, which has been introduced by the City of London corporation and promoted by the usual group of freeloading freemasons. We need to consider the motion with the conciseness of the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), who is now sponsoring the Bill—the second Member to do so during the fourth year of our considering it. We will miss the eloquence of Peter Brooke, who has now gone to the other place.

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend will have heard the Bill's sponsor say that a substantive amendment will be introduced, changing the basis of the Bill. Does he agree therefore that the Bill will take a rather different form and that we should consider a new Bill, not the old one?

John McDonnell: I shall shortly deal with that point because it is fundamental to the consideration of the motion. There have been proposals, which may constitute a new Bill if taken at their face value. However, anything that the City of London corporation has told the House cannot be taken at face value.

I preface my remarks with a note of caution to those on the Government Front Bench. I am not superstitious, except about two things. First, I never sit in the stand when Hayes football club plays, because they always lose when I do so. I usually stand near the corner flag; they still lose, but I do not get the blame. Secondly, I am superstitious about the Bill. Ministers have been brought forward, by No. 10, to defend the Bill. It should be made clear that the motion is supported by the Government; it is not some naive motion produced by the promoters themselves. The Bill would not even appear on our agenda today without the Government's support, as has been made clear in debate after debate. However, having looked at the sequence of Ministers who have made various arguments to carry over and promote the Bill at different stages, I have to express a note of caution. For instance, within months of his support for the Bill, the mayoral ambitions of my right hon. Friend the Minister for local Government came, tragically, to nothing—a result, I believe, of his association with the Bill.

I think that the Bill is cursed. Let us consider the Ministers who have laid down various procedural motions to carry it forward. I have mentioned my right hon. Friend, who is condemned to labour in the Siberia of standard spending assessments for the rest of his ministerial career. We have been through four Ministers and three Whips.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not carry on in this vein and will soon get to the reasons why the Bill should or should not be revived.

John McDonnell: One of the main reasons for not reviving the Bill is that it is a dangerous Bill with which to be associated. That has been demonstrated on numerous occasions by Ministers who have promoted it. My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill) was the next Minister who came forward to promote the Bill, and he is now Deputy Chief Whip in the Whips Office. He lost a ministerial position, where he could have made policy, and is now part of a partnership with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy).

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): My hon. Friend presents the facts in a slightly curious way. An objective appraisal of the careers of the two Ministers who have spoken for the Government on the Bill is that both have subsequently been promoted.

John McDonnell: I do not believe that removal from a ministerial job to the Whips Office in such a way would be considered promotion. Indeed, the Whip who was associated with the Bill is no longer in the Whips Office. Any Minister who comes forward is dragged here as a result of the demands of No. 10. However, I do not want to go into the careers of the Deputy Prime Minister and other Ministers who have been moved from the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to the Home Office.

Let us consider the motion paragraph by paragraph. I hope that we can bring it to the vote fairly quickly and reject it and that we will be able to convince right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House that the Bill should not be revived on the basis of the motion's proposals, which I shall take in reverse order.

The last proposal in the motion is that no further fees shall be charged at any stage as a result of the carry-over. That is outrageous. Fee charging for private Bills performs two functions. First, it is an income to the Exchequer—admittedly, it is only a few hundred pounds, but it is not insignificant. Secondly, it covers some of the costs of presenting and publishing the Bill and the administration—the Bill's handling charge, as it were. The maximum amount, which is adhered to for all such private Bills, is a fairly minimal sum.

The City of London's budget is billions of pounds. I do not even want to enter into discussions about the City cash, which is part of its budget, whose accounts are neither audited nor published. That is another matter for another debate. However, we know from its published budget that the City of London corporation is a wealthy local authority. In my view, for the motion to argue that the fee should not be paid as a result of the carry-over is a disgrace. Might I suggest that the City of London corporation reconsiders its refusal to pay this paltry sum? It might even indicate to the Bill's promoters that the sum will either be paid or donated to a charity, such as Harlington hospice in my constituency. That is a good cause, related to the interests of London.

It is time to reconsider such motions, because it is a disgrace to charge a corporate body of this size a standard fee, and then to waive it when the Bill is carried over. We should be arguing now for a sliding scale of fees, dependent on the size of the corporate body and on how much it is able to pay. For the Corporation of London, it should be a case of "can pay, will pay". The fee should not be waived; it should not only cover the administrative costs of the Bill's passage through Parliament but make a substantial contribution to an associated cause.

If we had a sliding scale of fees, instead of this proposal to waive the fee altogether, the amount could be based on a percentage of the corporation's overall budget. For example, even if the percentage were very small, it would produce £2 million or £3 million for regeneration initiatives on the fringe of the City. I will not even suggest that the money should be invested in Hayes, Hornchurch, or Islington, North or in the north-east of the country. Fees could be related to the amount that the corporation can pay and donated to an associated cause. Even a donation to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy might help and, in this case, it would be a relevant cause.

If for no other reason, the motion to revive the Bill is not acceptable because of the refusal to cover what will be a cost to this House. Donations by the corporation would assist in smoothing the Bill's path. If that sounds like the corporation's usual practice of buying influence, I suggest that a better comparison is with planning agreements under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, in which donations are made to local authorities in return for planning application approvals, and those donations are passed on to appropriate or associated local initiatives. I suggest that the House should not agree to the motion because of the proposal to waive the fee.

I am going through the proposals in the motion in reverse order, so I turn now to the fifth paragraph, which says:

"That in the present session of Parliament the bill shall be deemed to have passed through every stage through which it has passed in the last Parliament, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having passed those stages".

This is a new Parliament, and many new Members were elected at the last general election. They may well have wanted to serve on the Committee that scrutinised the petitions for and against the Bill, but they will not now be given the chance because, if the motion is passed, we will go straight on to consideration of the Bill by the whole House. No further petitions will be allowed. New Members will not be entitled to scrutinise in Committee even the old petitions, let alone new petitions.

Some considerable time has passed. The Bill is now in the fourth year of its passage. Since it was published, new information has come to light that hon. Members particularly newly elected ones, would want to have considered in Committee. There is also new information on the basis of which individuals in the community may have wanted to petition against the Bill. According to the motion, they will have no opportunity to do so because we will go straight on to consideration of the Bill by the whole House. We will lose the opportunity to make any more petitions based on new information.

Since the Bill was considered by a Committee, new information has come to light on which hon. Members may well have wanted to base their decision on whether to allow the Bill to proceed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) pointed out, the promoters now propose significantly to alter the substance of the Bill. That proposal, as the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire said, is to base the extension of the franchise to the business vote not on rateable values but on a count of employees.

I will deal with the detail of those arguments later. If we take them at face value and the change is substantial and significant, the Bill is in effect new, although I would argue that it may well not be. We do not want to mislead the House that the change is as significant as some commentators suggest.

The Bill cannot be deemed to have proceeded appropriately through its previous stages in its former guise if the substantial amendments are presented at a later date. We should return to the stage at which new petitions can be submitted based on the new amendments if they are significant and substantial. A new Committee would be able to examine the detail in the light of new information, new amendments and any new petitions.

Let me give a brief example of information that has come to light since the Bill was published and that dramatically affects our considerations. The Bill would extend votes to a vast range of businesses located in the City. There are no proposals at this stage to exclude businesses on the basis of their performance within the City and the global financial system. I believe that consideration of petitions and proposals would have been influenced by recent revelations that some City companies that will gain votes if the Bill makes further progress have allegedly been money laundering.

The debate in the French Parliament was clear. The report before it identified British companies that were considered to be elements of an international money laundering system. If that information had been before the Committee or even the general public when the Bill was published, petitions would have been made to consider amending the Bill to exclude those companies from gaining a role in the governance of the City on the basis of money laundering. We could have examined procedures in Committee or the House at that early stage, based on petitions from individuals or others, to suspend the companies under investigation and prevent people from holding office who are from a company that is proven to be involved in money laundering. Had that information been available, petitioners would have had the opportunity to obtain approval from the Committee that scrutinised the Bill to introduce procedural changes to prevent money launderers from participating in the affairs of the City of London.

It is important to realise, however, that the Bill does not simply affect the governance of the City corporation. If we agree to the motion, the carry-over will enable the City corporation to extend its franchise to businesses, some of which are being investigated for money laundering, which will then have a role in the governance of the city as a whole because the City counts as an individual borough in the consultative arrangements for the Mayor of London and by the Government office of London.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): If those companies are found guilty of criminal activities, will not they be dealt with under other legislation and penalised in the appropriate manner?

John McDonnell: There is nothing to suspend those companies from operating in the City corporation while they are under investigation. Many of the companies that are under investigation have not been suspended from trading. As a result of the report to the French Parliament,

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many of us believe that they should not have a part in the affairs of the governance of London while under investigation.

Mr. Davey: I do not understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Is he suggesting that if an election takes place while a citizen is under police investigation, that citizen should not be able to vote?

John McDonnell: Let us equate a business that will exercise a democratic vote under the business franchise within its area, which is an influential position, with a Member who serves in the House. If an hon. Member is under investigation, he or she usually withdraws or is suspended. We should follow that example, because the Bill does not deal with individual voters but with businesses that in effect exercise a block vote.

Mr. Davey: If Members are under investigation and appear before the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, they continue to vote in the House. It is only when they are found guilty and are asked to withdraw that they no longer exercise that right.

John McDonnell: That applies when Members are found guilty under the procedures of the House, but not necessarily in law itself. We should apply similar standards to the exercise of what is, in effect, a massive business block vote.

The charges that have been made against certain companies are so severe that we should consider carefully whether the Bill should be carried over. It will give several companies that are under investigation for money laundering a role in the democratic government of the City.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Is my hon. Friend saying that, if some companies are found guilty of serious crimes, nothing can be done under the Bill to exclude them from the governance of London?

John McDonnell: My point is different. If those companies are found guilty, they might be brought before the law and fined. However, the proposals in the Bill will not preclude them from exercising a vote in the City of London corporation. My point is that, depending on the severity of the crime, it should be possible to suspend those companies from operating within the City corporation while they are under investigation.

In the House, if a severe charge were made against a Member, the onus would be on that Member to withdraw from exercising a role within the democratic mechanisms of the House while he was under investigation. That has happened on a number of occasions in the past when Members have been investigated for what might be serious criminal activity.

I am happy to go through the list of firms that have been identified in the report—although you would not want me to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I shall not. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire described an early-day motion on that issue as tasteless, but I find tasteless the activities of companies that have received laundered money from Nigeria and that are even, we believe, associated with Osama bin Laden.

The Bill will supposedly be substantially altered by future amendments. However, before we have seen the detail of how it will be altered, we are expected to accept the motion and take a leap in the dark. We are expected to agree to further debate before we have seen the amendments. All that the promoters have provided is yet another statement, and I cannot remember how many such statements they have published. The promoters tell us:

> "In proposing the alterations to the existing business franchise provided for by the Bill the Corporation's aim has been to strengthen the link between the right to vote and the interests of those for which the Corporation provides services . . . The promoters have, however, noted the continuing criticism which has been made of an entitlement related to property values."

It is on that basis that we have been told in the debate that amendments will be tabled for our consideration.

However, we have been asked to accept the motion without the detail of those amendments or any information about them. We are supposed to take a leap in the dark. In fact, we are being asked to make a leap of faith on the basis of the City corporation's track record and the assurances that it has given for previous debates on carry-over. Let us consider them, because the motion must stand in its own right but be viewed against the corporation's track record. In previous statements—it repeats this in the latest—the corporation told us:

> "The Bill forms part of a wider package of reforming measures, and the Promoters have given the Select Committee formal undertakings as to the implementation of the remainder. These can be dealt with by the City's own legislative mechanisms and do not therefore require Parliamentary powers."

When the carry-over was debated in the past, what held sway in many Members' minds—certainly in that of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government—was the view that, although it might be a tawdry rag of a Bill, it would produce some improvements in democracy. The argument was that the Bill should be carried over because it would be getting something from the City corporation, no matter how minor—crumbs from the City corporation table. We were promised in the Select Committee, as set out in paragraph 9 of the statement, a series of improvements that would protect the residents' vote but did not have to be included in the Bill.

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I take issue with my hon. Friend on one matter. I understand the sophistication of his line-by-line, detailed argument, but surely we cannot talk about improvements when an issue is fundamentally rotten and wrong. Rather than arguing over small issues, should we not be arguing that the Bill is an affront to democracy and as such should be thrown out?

John McDonnell: I could not have put it better myself; I agree. However, I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would call me to order if I tried to pursue that general argument, so I let it stand on the record as a good summary of my views.

Jeremy Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will have heard both the sponsor of the Bill, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), and my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) refer to substantial amendments that are not before the House. Have you or your office had sight of those amendments?

If so, do they substantially alter the basis of the Bill, to the extent that it should be reintroduced rather than be the subject of a carry-over motion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have had no sight of the amendments.

John McDonnell: I shall return to my earlier point and consider later whether the amendments affect the substantive nature of the Bill. It is important that we return to that matter in this debate.

We are being asked to agree to carry over the Bill on the basis of an offer from the promoters on behalf of the City of London corporation. They have said that wonderful amendments will be tabled and that, lo and behold, democracy will reign in the City corporation—based not just on residence or businesses but on a workers' soviet on the entitlement of employees to vote. We need to consider what the corporation has done in the past when giving such assurances.

According to paragraph 9 of the promoters' statement on the motion,

"a wider package of reforming measures"

was to be introduced. That was promised to us in 1998, but not a single measure or part of the package of supposed reforming measures has been introduced. I would expect my right hon. Friend the Minister to feel somewhat aggrieved that the deal between No. 10 and the City corporation on that package has been reneged on.

When considering carry-over motions, amendments and the quality of the Bill, we were told that the reforming measures did not need to be included in the Bill, were not part of the parliamentary process and would be implemented anyway. To convince us that the Bill should be carried over, we were told that the amendments represented an act of good will on the part of the City corporation. I do not any more accept that there is such good will, because if there were, the package of reforming measures would have been implemented already. I would be happy to give way to the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire if he could describe the measures that were promised and those that have been implemented. He is silent because none of the measures has been introduced.

Given that track record, and on the basis of a promise of amendments that have not been published, received by the Deputy Speaker or seen by anyone, how can we take as a beneficent offer the proposal that we support the motion to carry the Bill over? We should call for a report and the reconvening of the Committee rather than allowing a Division at the end of this debate and the motion to be accepted.

The motion should summon the City corporation to ask what happened and why promises to the House, which we received in good faith, were not implemented. If the amendments are substantial, there will, in effect, be a new Bill. Tonight's debate is not about carry-over, but a new Bill. Petitioners should therefore be informed that we will start again with a new Bill and allow petitions; or perhaps we should consider a procedure—I am happy to meet the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire halfway on a compromise—whereby the amendments are published and petitioners allowed to petition on them.

Changing the Bill at this late stage denies the rights of petitioners. If the amendments are fundamental, we should at least allow the right of petition to be reintroduced. Again, I urge the right hon. Gentleman to consult the City corporation, even during our debate, to see whether we can reach a compromise. New parties and groups of individuals will be affected if, as he says, the amendments change the basis of the franchise from rateable value to a formula that takes account of the number of employees. Bills are declared hybrid if they affect certain individuals or classes of individual, and go through a process similar to that for a private Member's Bill. Once individuals know that they are affected, they are given the right to petition. In a private Bill, we go through the same process; people who are affected should have the right to a say and a direct line of communication to the House

Mr. Etherington: My hon. Friend has come to the nub of the problem: the nebulousness of what we are trying to discuss. Will he say more about how democracy will be improved by changing the property vote from one based on floor area to one based on the number of people employed in the building?

John McDonnell: I will not encourage your intervention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by going into the principles of the Bill. However, with your discretion, I should like to deal with the proposal as it affects the carry-over; that is a matter of procedure, not principle.

If new parties are affected by an amendment to a Bill of this nature, they should be allowed a direct line of communication to the House to explain how they are affected. That will enable us to consider how the Bill, the amendment or, as it is becoming, the new Bill, will affect them and how we should protect their interests. I give the example of employees themselves. As the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire said, the amendment would base the franchise on the number of employees in a company. I am sure that employees, whether individually or in groups, and the trade unions have questions about that. A year ago, the City corporation floated a range of ideas for amendments, but they were not based on a count of employees, as we suggested. Instead, they identified individual companies, assessed their rateable value and the number of employees employed in relation to that value, and used that to determine its vote. In other words, there was no amendment to ensure a count of employees or that the franchise would be based on the number of workers in the company; it would be based on rateable value.

If such an amendment is now being proposed again—I do not know because no one has seen it apart from those promoting the Bill, who, suspiciously, are keeping it close to their chest—it is pointless because it is a thinly veiled attempted to con the House that it is an improvement to the democratic system. It is not. The corporation would not be reformed. A proposal would be made that votes be sold to businesses just as before. It would be said that the proposal was based on numbers of employees, but that would not be the case. The proposal would be based on rateable value.

The proposal was bandied about 12 months ago, and we considered it farcical. That is why amendments were tabled in the spirit of the Bill. If there had been procedural problems and we had been unable to get them through the House in the previous Session, I would have supported the carry-over motion. The amendments were simple. The intention behind them was to base the franchise on the

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number of a company's employees, with a proper count and registration of the companies, as there is of electors and others.

I would welcome a comment from the Minister about what was or is wrong with such a proposal. Why did the Government not support it? If they had done so, this evening's debate would not have taken the same form. The motion would have been carried unanimously rather than having to have a debate that is revealing that the corporation is not budging an inch.

We need to reject the motion and go back to Committee. If there were a way to amend it, I would seek to do so. Even if I supported the carrying over of the present Bill, we should have a democratic right to return to Committee. I think that some of the Members who considered these matters in Committee are embarrassed that they have allowed a Bill to come before the House that is based upon the promises that were set out in the promoter's statement, none of which have been adhered to. I urge the Minister who is responsible for the Bill, although he refuses to accept that word—my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford)—to take the matter back. We have substantially a new Bill before us.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): As a Member who was involved in the opposed private Bill business, I can say that the Committee considered these issues thoroughly. We took evidence from many people, including representatives of the City of London Labour party, and I think that we came to sensible conclusions. We produced some amendments, which have been incorporated. The City corporation is acknowledging that because four years have passed, it can improve the Bill. If the revival motion is agreed to, we can fully debate the Bill.

John McDonnell: I think that the hon. Gentleman has missed my point. He did the best job that he could in Committee with the material that he had before him, but the problem with that material is that it did not contain the proposal that has been advanced tonight. If it had contained it, he could have examined the corporation in detail about implementation and then consulted other petitioners, and other petitioners would have come forward. Perhaps he could have persuaded the corporation to move away from the detail of the amendment that has been suggested, or the previous amendment, which does not include a count or a register of employees. Thereafter, he could have persuaded the corporation to introduce a worthwhile amendment. I am convinced of his forensic ability, and of his powers to persuade the corporation.

If we reject the motion, we shall be asking the corporation to pause, to think carefully about the amendments that it wants to table and to consult. I envisage consultation with the businesses that comprise the corporation electorate already, those that are seeking to acquire votes and influence within the corporation, residents, the mayor, the London boroughs and others.

I make the corporation an offer. The compromise of withdrawing the motion would give us the opportunity as individual Members to consult it about the nature of the supposedly significant amendment that has been brought forward. It would be an insult to the House if such a Bill, based upon a significant amendment, were forced through the House without that consultation.

Hon. Members may recall that, in previous debates on carry-over motions for this legislation and on the legislation itself, the City corporation made the strong point that there had been considerable consultation with all the bodies that I mentioned, including the Association of London Government and the boroughs themselves, and that there had been some consultation with residents and businesses. The position of London Mayor did not exist at that time. However, at no point in those consultations was a proposal presented to grant the franchise on the basis of employee numbers. Such a proposal was never made to the City's current electorate or presented for consultation with the London boroughs and other bodies. It therefore flies in the face of the City corporation's own statements to introduce a novel amendment on which there has been no consultation.

Jeremy Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to rise for a third time on a point of order. However, as you have not received the amendments to which various hon. Members in the Chamber have referred, and therefore cannot rule on whether they would so substantially change the Bill that it would be within the Speaker's remit to order that a new Bill be introduced, would it not be appropriate to abandon this debate until the promoters have produced their amendments, so that the Speaker, Deputy Speakers and Clerks could advise the House on whether the amendments are in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No.

John McDonnell: I can see that that was a considered response, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like, on a point of order, to ask you the rationale for that response, but I shall not press the point.

The second and fourth paragraphs of the motion relate to the consultation issue. The second paragraph states:

"the Bill shall be presented to the House by deposit in the Private Bill Office no later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day".

The fourth paragraph states:

"on the next sitting day following presentation, the Clerk in the Private Bill Office shall lay the Bill on the Table of the House".

We should reject the motion on basis of those provisions alone. The Bill should be re-published with the proposed amendments. We should be able to see both the current Bill and a redrafted Bill.

Mr. Etherington: Does my hon. Friend think that, rather than considering a revised Bill, it would be better if the Government introduced a new Bill to bring the City of London into line with the rest of the country, where there are democratic elections based not on property but on one person, one vote? Would not that have been far preferable?

John McDonnell: Although I do not want to offend your sensibilities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in managing the affairs of the House, I have to say that I fully agree with my hon. Friend. We would not be having this debate if this Labour Government had adhered to the Labour party policy that had existed for almost 70 years: to ensure that local government is democratic and based on universal

adult suffrage. I leave it to my hon. Friend to take that message—with some trepidation, I should think—to wherever he thinks it important to take it.

I am concerned about the time scale specified in the second and fourth paragraphs of the motion. I take it that the Clerks or the occupant of the Chair will advise us on whether they are standard in all opposed private business carry-over motions. As I said, I genuinely feel that the City corporation could do us all a service by publishing both the current Bill and a Bill that has been amended as they propose. That would give us an opportunity not only to consider the new proposals but almost to have pre-legislative scrutiny, such as we have had for other Bills.

The Bill should not be placed on the Table without an alternative Bill, or at least the amendments, being published. The justification for the amendments should also be published, and in a language that all—but especially hon. Members and the City corporation residential electorate—can understand. People should understand what would be done to them by these apparently hidden private amendments that we have not seen. There should now be a detailed procedure for consultation and discussion, so the time limits are now unrealistic. It is unrealistic to expect the Bill to be presented on the fifth day and placed on the Table on the next sitting day following its presentation.

I argue for a compromise. If the motion is passed, I suggest that the Bill should not be placed on the Table for at least a month after its presentation. That would allow thorough discussion. I welcome an informal discussion involving all interested parties, including all my hon. Friends who have expressed reservations about the Bill. We have met the City corporation on several occasions, but I shall not go into those discussions as I found some of them offensive. Perhaps that is something for the memoirs. We need to discuss informally the detail of the Bill before it comes back to the House. On that basis, I argue against the proposed time constraints.

The third paragraph of the motion states:

"That a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the bill, stating that it is the same in every respect as the bill presented in this House in the last Parliament;"

What a pointless exercise that will be. We have already been told that the promoters plan to present amendments that will significantly alter the Bill, so we are asking the agent to produce a declaration telling us that it is the same Bill while the City corporation has up its sleeve secret amendments that it will not divulge even to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is pointless for us to agree to that paragraph of the motion this evening. In fact, we should agree a motion that says that a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the Bill stating that amendments are being proposed by the City corporation and setting them out. At least that would give us the opportunity to have sight of them.

I shall now sum up quickly because I have to meet some constituents. The first paragraph of the motion is the key to the debate. I accept that it is difficult not to stray into the principles of the Bill and I shall accept any ruling that you might make, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It states:

"That the promoters of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill which originated in this House in the last Parliament . . . had not received . . . Royal Assent".

The Bill originated in the last Parliament, but this is a new Parliament with a new mandate. We were all elected at a general election this year. The Bill did not receive Royal Assent as a result of decisions taken by the last Parliament. This is a new Parliament, newly elected with new mandates. The Bill did not receive Royal Assent because some of us argued that there was not sufficient mandate for it in the last Parliament. The argument of Ministers was then based on a reading of the 1997 Labour manifesto that bizarrely assembled eclectic phrases and sentences from different pages of the manifesto to justify the reform of the City of London corporation on this basis. It was difficult for any of us to keep a straight face when that argument was made, but at least it had the fig leaf of being based on some form of manifesto commitment, so there was a mandate for bringing forward something.

I do not think that any party put forward these proposals in any manifesto at this year's general election. I am happy to give way to any hon. Member who can draw attention to an election manifesto that stated that we were about to sell votes in the City of London to any business that could buy a piece of land. I hear no takers and that is fair enough. In that case, the first paragraph of the motion is critical. The Bill did not receive Royal Assent in the last Parliament and this is a new Parliament. We have no mandate for the Bill and on that basis the motion should not stand as it has no reference to any manifesto. We were not elected on this mandate. The whole point of our constitution and the House considering motions of this sort is based upon the premise that we are elected on the basis of what we say to our electors, as honestly as we can.

They honestly vote for us, or do not, and we are returned on the basis of what we say as individuals and as parties. We did not tell the electorate that we intended to carry over the Bill. I have asked individual Members to search their election literature for any statement to any individual in their constituencies that made reference to the motion or its contents.

I would like to hear from the Liberal Democrats whether they won their seats on the basis of selling votes in the City of London or of supporting rotten boroughs. I would like to consult the electorate of Greenwich to ask whether the Minister included the motion in his personal manifesto. Was a leaflet produced in the general election campaign that said that we would sell votes to businesses, some of which have been accused of money laundering for Osama bin Laden?

We have no right even to consider the motion, let alone carry it tonight. It is an offence against democracy that it is even on our agenda. It was an offence against democracy last time, and we are now in the fourth year of consideration. At least last time some jiggery-pokery with the manifesto gave some justification for the Bill's consideration, but even that fig leaf of a defence is not being used this time.

Last time, the Bill did not reach Royal Assent. Why do we drag the Queen into the matter? Why should she be associated with that bunch of freeloading freemasons who launder money for the City of London corporation? No Royal Assent can be given to the Bill because it is an offence to all decent human beings, and I include the royal family among them.

[John McDonnell]

The motion would make fundamental changes to our constitution and on that basis, I urge hon. Members to reject it. I urge hon. Members to read the words, because if we carry the motion tonight it will mean that

"the petition for the bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Order applicable to it shall be deemed to have been complied with".

That equates to support for the Bill itself. All those who vote for the motion will be supporting the Bill. They will be supporting the extension of the vote to businesses. We must reject that. In the 21st century, if we cannot stand up for the principle of democracy of one person, one vote, and if the Government succumb to the blandishments of the City of London corporation—the freeloaders and of the wining and dining circuit of the City—I shall wonder what has become of the Labour party. That is a serious issue.

The consideration of the motion is taking up the time of the House. If the motion passes, it will take up the time of the House for the next three or four years. The right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire has secret amendments, but I also have amendments that might improve the Bill. I will go back to my earlier 150 amendments and I will amend and amend again. Unless we reach some agreement, not only is the motion not supportable, neither is the Bill.

I would like to debate many issues in the House. Private Members have Bills that they wish to introduce. For example, I want to ban hunting and I want to tackle homelessness. If the motion passes, it will take up time of the House that could be spent considering worthwhile Bills. Why should we consider this degrading legislation when we are in the middle of a war? We could consider homelessness, rising unemployment, the problems in the health service, local government finance issues, pensions or environmental issues. We discussed today the private Member's Bill on marine wildlife protection, and there are many others, but this Bill will crowd them out.

We should reject the motion. The Bill no longer covers the issues that it should cover and that we agreed as a party so long ago. The Labour party wanted to introduce democratic reform of the City of London corporation, and I would have been happy to consider a business district for the corporation. However, business districts all over the world are accountable to some democratic body. Instead of agreeing a carry-over motion, as we did two years ago, our suggestion was that the business district of the City of London corporation should be accountable to the Mayor for London, an institution that was then being introduced.

There was an opportunity then for us to reform the Bill and insert that democratic element, but the Bill's proposers have produced another statement that completely disregards the new democratic structures for the strategic governance of London. It contains no acknowledgement that time has moved on and that London's structures of governance have changed. That is why I believe that we should throw the Bill out.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am puzzled by my hon. Friend's reference to a statement from the promoters. Those of us who were here in the previous Parliament will know that such a statement was produced then, but I am not aware that any new statement has been circulated to hon. Members today.

John McDonnell: A statement was lodged in the Vote Office. A number of hon. Members received a letter from the City corporation in relation to the motion. Those of us who did not receive the letter clearly are not on the corporation's Christmas card list this year. I deeply regret that we did not get the letter, but the statement is available from the Vote Office. I assure my hon. Friend that it is not worth reading, as it does not vary much from what we have heard before. It is an insinuation rather than a statement.

I suggest that we should consider a compromise. Instead of passing the motion, I suggest that we suspend consideration and that the promoters consider withdrawing it. We should then set up a commission to consider the real reform of the City of London corporation. That commission should adopt a consensual approach that involves all those who, in new Labour terms, would be called stakeholders. We should also establish a discussion involving MPs, and invite academics to undertake a further investigation of the available options.

In addition, the time scale should be limited. The motion sets out a period of five days, but I suggest that we set a time scale of six months, within which a consensual proposal for the democratic form of the City of London corporation could be agreed.

It might turn out that we could not reach consensus after six months, but we should try. It behoves the City of London corporation—given its resources and its ability to exert influence in connection with its relationship with No. 10, which was referred to earlier—at least to consider my proposal, instead of pushing the motion through tonight.

I close by saying that I have set out what I believe should be the objectives of the new institution that could arise out of those discussions.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The hon. Gentleman has been on the point of ending his speech about five times, so I shall be brief. He referred a few moments ago to people making progress, and I assure him that his kind words about the royal family will be much appreciated among Conservative Members. That shows that even he is making progress, to a limited degree.

John McDonnell: I am grateful for that intervention, although I must warn Her Majesty that she should not be associated with motions such as this.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The debate on the motion is very narrow, and certainly does not include members of the royal family.

John McDonnell: I fully agree, Madam Deputy Speaker. If it were up to me, no motion on any Bill would refer to Royal Assent, as the country would be a republic. However, we should move on.

I am offering a compromise: a commission, lasting six months, to set out what the objectives of the City corporation should be. The motion promotes a Bill that is undemocratic in its form and nature, with amendments that we have not seen. The City corporation should meet

the objectives of the consultation paper from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which says that the Department wants a quality council to

"be representative of, and actively engage, all parts of its community, providing vision, identity and a sense of belonging . . . be effectively and properly managed . . . articulate the needs and wishes of its community . . . work in partnership with principal authorities and other public service agencies . . . in proportion to size and skills, deliver local services on behalf of principal authorities . . . in proportion to size and skills, undertake more service delivery and other responsibilities themselves . . . work closely with voluntary groups in their communities . . . give leadership to work by the community on town or village plans . . . act as an information point for local services."

That is what the City corporation should be doing.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, as I know that he is anxious to bring his remarks to a conclusion. I am grateful also that he has informed me of the promoters' statement, in which I note that the City makes it clear that it intends to bring forward a substantial amendment to alter the fundamentals of the Bill. He has read this and other documents closely. Does he think that that is in order? Should we be aiming for a completely new Bill, and not have a carry-over motion at all?

John McDonnell: As you were not in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, you may not be aware that we have covered this point extensively, so I shall be brief. Tonight we must consider the motion. How can we consider the motion on the basis of the existing Bill, when we are told that—most probably within hours, if not days—the Bill will be significantly amended? It is a farcical process that undermines democracy. Why become elected if the manifesto on which one is elected contains no mention of putting to the electorate the idea that such legislation will be proposed? When such a Bill is published and we try to debate it, we are told not to worry, because we can carry it over. However, it will be amended the next day in a way that makes it almost unrecognisable.

What is the point of this debate? Why does the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire not do the honourable thing and withdraw the motion? Why does he not suggest tonight that we have the six-month breathing space, and establish a commission to try to abide by the objectives set out by the Government, and by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government in his discussions on parish and town councils and other local authorities?

The key issue is to articulate the needs and wishes of the community. I can accept that the Bill is trying to articulate the needs of the whole community within the City corporation: the residents and the businesses. But this matter is not worth carrying over unless the Bill articulates the wishes of the workers themselves. The amendment—which has not been tabled, but alluded to—could be pulled out of the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire's sleeve, photocopied and circulated. However, the amendment that was suggested privately 12 months ago—the same one to which he has alluded—does not give the right to the workers to have a vote in the City corporation. It simply uses them as the fodder upon which votes by businesses will then be cast.

The criticisms tonight are the same that the Conservative party used about the block vote years ago, and the same used about the constitution of the Soviet Union, which established votes on the basis of large Soviets of individual factories while the workers never had a vote themselves. That is why the motion should be rejected. We want to go back to the process of democratic discussion and debate to enable us to amend the Bill and reach a satisfactory conclusion. My view is that we are not entering into that process but into a hide-and-seek one.

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend talks about a democratic mandate. Does he recall that, on 15 May of this year in the Hayes Labour club, I drew attention to his activities in opposing the Bill in the previous Parliament? As soon as I did, overwhelming cheers broke out around the hall. It would seem that he is the only Member with a democratic mandate to oppose the Bill.

John McDonnell: My hon. Friend makes a good point. If we accept the motion and carry over the measure, there is a real chance that some Members will want to promote such legislation elsewhere. Last year, during discussions on this Bill, I was approached by representatives of a Japanese business newspaper and informed that they had been considering the Bill, that it was interesting and that it could be used—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman once more of the narrowness of this debate?

John McDonnell: Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was merely referring to my democratic mandate from my constituents as against the democratic mandate that is being undermined by the Bill.

I urge the sponsor of the Bill, even at this late stage, to pull back, to advise the House that the motion should not be voted on and to accept our compromise offer of six months co-operative collaborative work on an agreed, consensual approach to the reform of the City corporation—establishing a commission, involving all the stakeholders and allowing us to make a proper proposal. It is unacceptable to introduce a Bill in one Parliament, to try to have it carried over, to tell us that it will be substantially amended, but not to give us the amendments, and then to expect us to vote on it tonight.

I challenge hon. Members who want to vote on this pig in a poke to examine their conscience: how can they vote for something that they have not even seen? That makes a farce of democracy. We have reached Hogarthian structures of government. If the motion is not withdrawn, I urge hon. Members to oppose it.

The motion will be a test of the democratic conscience of individual Members. It will certainly be a test for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government. I know him to be an honourable person who struggled for democracy in London over many years. He was one of the key people who re-established strategic democratic governance in our city through the London mayoralty.

The motion is also a test for the Liberal Democrats—to see how liberal and how democratic they are. If they vote for the motion, their credibility will be undermined. They will have sold the pass. They will be looking for the

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crumbs under the table at the City corporation freemasons' lodge. I urge them and all hon. Members to vote against the motion if it is not withdrawn.

With those brief words, I shall sit down.

5.17 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members enjoyed the speech made by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). We have heard some of it before, but it was none the less welcome.

John McDonnell: Would the hon. Gentleman like to identify those parts of my speech that he had heard before and those that he had not? I do not think that he has heard my speech before.

Mr. Davey: I shall not go down that road, as I am sure that I should soon be brought to order. People who study our proceedings can read the hon. Gentleman's speeches for themselves.

I agree with some of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, as I pointed out during some of the debates on this measure in the last Parliament. I and my colleagues also voted for many of the amendments that he tabled to improve the Bill.

However, I disagree with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument today: that this Parliament should not be allowed to debate the measure. It does not seem to be a logical sequitur that, because the Bill is inadequate, the House should not debate it. We are often asked to debate inadequate Bills, many of which are introduced by his right hon. and hon. Friends. It is the job of this place to improve legislation.

Jeremy Corbyn: Is it not a parliamentary maxim that one Parliament cannot legislate for another? Public Bills cannot be transferred from one Parliament to another. Private Members' Bills cannot be transferred from one Parliament to another—indeed, from one Session to another. Why on earth should private Bills—in this case, promoted on behalf of the City corporation—be allowed not merely to pass from Session to Session, but from Parliament to Parliament? If we are all still Members in four years, I would not be surprised to find us discussing a motion for the Bill to carry over into the next Parliament.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but I think that he misunderstands the parliamentary procedure under which we are debating the motion. The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington agreed that this revival process has been used before to continue debate. Surely, the hon. Gentleman wants to debate the subject of democracy in our capital city.

John McDonnell: My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) was making the point that when other Bills are transferred they start afresh.

Jeremy Corbyn: They are newly introduced.

John McDonnell: Indeed. Our objection to the whole carry-over procedure in this motion is that the Bill will not start afresh. It will not go to a Select Committee where representations or petitions can be considered. The motion is certainly offensive because new amendments will substantially alter the measure. The Bill should start afresh.

Mr. Davey: I am happy to deal with that second point in due course, but it is my understanding that private business is often revived using this procedure. It is not a new thing for the House; it has happened over the years.

Jeremy Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: No; I will not give way on that, because I want to deal with the second point raised by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington, which he laboured at great length. He said that we had been promised amendments by the promoters, which in his view, would completely change the nature of the Bill, which therefore should not be revived.

I disagree with the hon. Gentleman, because the principle underlying the Bill is that the promoters wish to change the franchise for votes for the City corporation. It is the House's job to decide whether the direction in which they want to change the franchise is correct. Therefore, if the underlying principle is about the franchise, it seems quite sensible that the Bill should be carried over so that we may continue that debate.

Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I am pleased that the corporation has suggested that it will table amendments because, like him in the previous Parliament I disagreed with the Bill that the City corporation put before the House because—

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: I shall give way when I have finished the point.

I disagreed with the Bill that the City corporation had produced in the previous Parliament because it was unsatisfactory.

John McDonnell *rose—*

Mr. Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman rest in his seat for just a second?

That is why I and my colleagues supported many of the amendments proposed by the hon. Gentleman. Like him, I wish to see the amendments that are mentioned in the statement before us, but unlike him, I am prepared to vote for the motion tonight so that we may see and debate them.

John Cryer *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I will allow the intervention in a second, but I want to make this point. It is very important that we change the current franchise in the City. I find it as unacceptable as does the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington. That is why I wish to see those amendments.

I should have thought, given the hon. Gentleman's background, that he would want employees to be enfranchised within the new system.

John McDonnell *rose—*

Dr. Vis *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I give way to the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis).

Dr. Vis: I thought that the hon. Gentleman said that he was pleased that the amendments were there, but that must imply that he has seen them; he also gives the impression that he has not seen them. How can he be pleased about not having seen the amendments about which he is pleased?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman needs to listen more carefully. I said that I had been told, as had others, having read the statement before us, that there were proposals to table amendments. I wish to see those amendments, because we are told that they are moving in a direction for which I and Labour Back Benchers argued in the previous Parliament.

John Cryer: Why cannot we see the amendments now? What is preventing those amendments from being tabled now so that we can see them?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I wish that the promoters had put the amendments before us for the debate. However, the question before us is whether we should vote for the motion, and if he is arguing that we should not vote for it just because we have not seen the amendments, I am afraid that that is a non sequitur, and therefore I cannot agree with the logic of his position because that logic is not very good.

John McDonnell: This is bourgeois liberal sophistry, but let us go through it. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I have seen an amendment, and it is the same as the one that was offered last year. It does not give the vote to employees. It simply says that if a company has a specific rateable value it must, according to a formula, employ a certain number of employees and therefore it may have that number of votes per business. He knows as well as I do that if we allow the motion to pass tonight, the Government will steamroller the Bill through, and that the amendment is no more than a tawdry fig leaf. I ask him to get real.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is making a number of assertions, most of which are highly contentious. After an hour-long speech, he has just told us the news that he has seen the amendments and can assure us what they are. That is news to me. I know of no publicly available amendments. If he has them in his possession, it is a shame that he did not bother to circulate them to other hon. Members. He has done the House a disservice.

John McDonnell: I referred to the amendments in my speech. They are the same as those on offer last November and were made widely known by the City of London corporation. Let us ask the Bill's sponsor to produce them now so that the hon. Gentleman can judge them tonight. I believe that, with those amendments, we are talking about a new Bill. The hon. Gentleman should ask the sponsor.

Mr. Davey: I am more than happy to see any amendments that the promoter wishes to put forward.

In the last Parliament, we had some good debates to try to make the City corporation more democratic. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends would want to move in that direction. I am worried about some of his arguments. He called me bourgeois in his pejorative manner, which shows where he is coming from in this argument.

Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not find in my dealings with the City and my knowledge of its undertakings in the capital that it is always nefarious. The City corporation does some good works. It should be made more democratic and that would make those good works far more legitimate in my eyes and those of many other people. We do ourselves a disservice and we do not benefit the arguments for democracy when we resort to the approach and attitude demonstrated by the hon. Gentleman.

Jeremy Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman is raising an unbelievable non sequitur. There is City of London housing in my constituency and Hampstead heath is nearby, which is extremely well run by the City. That is not the issue; it is that during the whole of the last Parliament the Bill received insufficient support to get it through. He says that he will vote for the carry-over motion because he wants more democracy in the City of London. Clearly, the Bill does not enjoy much support in the House. Is he in favour of such a motion for any Government Bill that does not successfully complete its passage within a Session? If he is serious about democracy in the City of London, he will oppose this Bill completely and produce his own to restore real democracy on the basis of one person, one vote.

Mr. Davey: I am glad that Labour Members are now learning that democracy and one member, one vote are important. So often the Labour party has not adopted those principles when running its own organisation and I understand that it does not operate that rule for many aspects of its policy. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends are so hostile to our wanting to improve the governance of the City. I think that rather odd.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North) *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I have given way quite enough.

I want to see the amendments because progress appears to have been made. I should have thought the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington, rather than pooh-poohing and opposing the motion tonight, should be crowing. He may well have secured progress by blocking—

John McDonnell: If the proposal was to allocate votes on the basis of employees registered and entitled to a democratic vote, the City of London corporation would

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have supported the amendments that we proposed for an electoral college for employees. It did not. I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman can be that gullible. This is just an excuse for swinging the Liberal Democrats behind the City corporation. God knows what deal the Liberal Democrats have done elsewhere. I do not know. The amendment does not allow employees—workers—the right to vote. It is a fig leaf.

Mr. Davey: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not have faith in his ability to persuade other hon. Members of that fact during our debate. He is using tactics that go against the whole nature of this place. The point of this House, as I think that you will agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, is to enable us to debate the matter rather than simply to use blocking measures to prevent debate and to prevent Opposition Members from voting for some of the amendments that the hon. Gentleman proposed in the last Parliament.

Mr. Hopkins: A moment ago, the hon. Gentleman said that the City of London corporation was not always nefarious—in other words, it is sometimes benign. That may or may not be the case, and I am happy to accept that it can be benign, but is he suggesting that whether an organisation is benign or nefarious justifies its being less democratic? Should I tell the electorate that I do not have to stand for election because I am benign? I believe in democracy, whatever the nature of the institution.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman needs to pay more attention when listening to speeches. I was making a point not about the nature of democracy, on which there is much shared ground on both sides of the House, but about the fact that there is a presumption in some hon. Members' remarks that the City corporation is uniquely nefarious, and I do not think that that holds water. If the House agrees to the motion, I hope to argue for greater democracy in the City corporation in later debates. I want the Bill, as considered by the previous Parliament, to be substantially amended. I want hon. Members to be able to argue about the nature of a business vote.

John McDonnell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: In a second. I want us to be able to debate whether the City is unique, so that we can tie down such issues. That is important because the City corporation is so important.

John McDonnell: Let me get something clear and on the record. Is the hon. Gentleman saying on behalf of his party that he will commit the Liberal Democrats to voting for an amendment that will support the right of workers to vote in City corporation elections?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman will correct me if I am wrong, but I understand that we voted in favour of such an amendment in the previous Parliament. Did we not reach that amendment?

John McDonnell: We reached it, but the Liberal Democrats were split on it.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman says that my party was split, but that is news to me. I certainly voted in favour of almost all the amendments that he tabled. Before he says that my party is split, he should consider the Labour party because it is split in many ways.

John McDonnell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: No, I wish to bring my remarks to a close.

John McDonnell: I want an assurance that he will persuade his colleagues.

Mr. Davey: I will talk to my colleagues, but the Liberal Democrats do not whip private business—that procedure is shared across the House. My hon. Friends are responsible for the way in which they vote on private business, and I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would know that.

John McDonnell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: No, I shall bring my remarks to a close now. We have had an interesting exchange, and I am delighted to have stated the Liberal Democrat position in public.

John McDonnell: We have flushed it out.

Mr. Davey: There is nothing to flush out; we have been open and transparent throughout. We are in favour of greater democracy and reforming the City corporation, and other hon. Members should agree.

5.33 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I want to express my appreciation to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this debate. I had expected rather more hon. Members to be present, because this is an important issue. Hon. Members may well wonder why a person from the north-east is concerning himself with a matter that apparently relates only to the capital. The fact is that nothing could be further from the truth. The Bill concerns everyone throughout the United Kingdom because it is about the very democracy that we say we hold so dear.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman said that he had heard certain things before. He certainly will not have heard anything that I have said before because he was not present when I said it, and in any case, there will be some variation. These debates are like a bad dream that keeps turning up; we do not seem to make an awful lot of progress. I am trying to speak to the motion as narrowly as I can, but I have to try to explain why I oppose the carry-over motion. All that I want to say subsequently will be based on that, even if I seem to deviate—in any case, I am sure that you will put me right if I stray too far, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I feel a certain bemusement. I have always held Peter Brooke—now Lord Brooke—in high regard. He is a fine democrat and a man of great courtesy. It amazed me that a man of his background should bring forward such a fundamentally undemocratic—indeed, anti-democratic—Bill. I shall extend the same courtesy to the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young). Again, I hold him in high regard as a democrat, although there are many of his opinions with which I do not agree.

My right hon. Friend the Minister did not give a very convincing performance when we debated the matter last time. I hope that he will do better today, but if he supports the Bill, as I am sure that he will, he is in the same position as the promoters, and it is difficult to speak convincingly when putting forward such a rotten proposal.

We have spent more than an hour talking about reform and improvement. To draw an analogy, some years ago we talked about reforming and improving the poll tax. We must recognise that some things are so fundamentally flawed and rotten that the only thing to do is to eliminate, not reform, them. That is what we want to do with the Bill.

This Chamber is held in high esteem throughout the world as the mother of democratic Parliaments. For people to argue about amending something that is so fundamentally wrong is offensive. I also find it offensive that we are wasting three hours of valuable parliamentary time talking about this rubbish when there are so many important things to discuss. My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) mentioned the abolition of hunting with dogs. Most of my constituents would be much more interested in making progress on that.

I have to be critical of the Government, because they set the parliamentary timetable. I should like to see them show the same concern if, by some fluke, someone introduced a private Member's Bill that put the City of London in the same category as the rest of the United Kingdom, where every resident in a constituency has one vote and all votes are worth the same.

The Bill is about the property vote, which I thought had been eliminated when I was a child, which was quite a long time ago. I was amazed when I came down here to find just how the City of London corporation operated. I had seen all the bumf about how wonderful it was. I am not criticising the City or the corporation. Whether there is sleaze involved, I do not know. I am still not decided on that one. That is not the issue—the issue is that it is wrong that business and property should interfere with what we regard as the proper democratic process.

Under a property vote system, I would be worth four votes. I have a house in the City of Durham constituency, an office in the Sunderland, North constituency, an office in Westminster and another house in the Southwark, North and Bermondsey constituency. I do not think that I am worth four votes. I am worth one, the same as everyone else.

When we talk about carrying over, there seems to be an element of chicanery involved. My hon. Friends the Members for Hayes and Harlington and for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) are such skilled interventionists—I almost said obstructionists—that I thought myself fortunate to be able to speak before 7 o'clock, and I do not want to push my luck too far. However, we are spending far too much time talking about intricate details. I raised the matter with my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington earlier in the debate. I have had one piece of correspondence from the corporation of London, and I thought that it was insulting. It tried to persuade me that the property vote would be moved away from the concept of the square yardage of the floor area of the building and the system made more democratic by basing it on the number of people working there instead. I thought, "Who are these people trying to kid?" As my colleagues have pointed out, those amendments do not give us a mandate to carry over the Bill.

I have heard no proposal that will enhance democracy. I hope that the Minister is listening carefully. He is certainly writing away assiduously. I feel ashamed that my party, a good democratic organisation, and my Government are giving such garbage a fair wind. I find that not only offensive and embarrassing but incomprehensible.

5.40 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) has already alluded to the somewhat tortuous circumstances of this debate. I am most grateful for his support in this matter, which is hardly an everyday procedural occurrence even for a seasoned Member, let alone a new one such as me.

I echo the tribute paid by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) to my predecessor, Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville, a Member of the House for 24 years who, as the Member for Cities of London and Westminster in the previous Parliament, so skilfully sponsored the Bill.

The scope of the debate is confined, although I note that this fact alone did not prevent the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington from speaking for over an hour. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire has dealt with a number of the issues, and I should like to take the opportunity to make some short points from a constituency standpoint that reinforce the case made so powerfully by my right hon. Friend.

Much has been said in earlier debates on the Bill about what are alleged to be its potentially damaging effects on the resident voice of the common council, and hon. Members have alluded to those this evening. In fact, the Bill will restore the resident-business balance on the common council to its 1900 position. In addition, the wards that are primarily residential in character will remain so under the new proposals. From the residents' viewpoint, however, perhaps the most crucial factor supporting the revival of the Bill is that it will ensure that the City of London is not reduced to a local government area in which the civic administration of the world's leading international financial centre rests on 5,500 voters who happen to live there.

Jeremy Corbyn: When the hon. Gentleman was seeking election to the House last summer, did he discuss with the resident population of the City of London the fact that their influence on local government will be diminished by the exaggeration of the business vote, and point out that in trying to influence the running of their services they will be completely outvoted by corporate interests? Did he compare the position with that in the neighbouring borough of Islington, which I have the honour to represent, where businesses have no vote? The only people who have a vote in Islington are those who are ordinarily resident in the borough, and I have never heard of anybody asking for a business vote to be introduced there.

Mr. Field: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman brought that up. As he well knows, a chunk of the residential

[Mr. Field]

population of the City of London, the Golden Lane estate, was transferred to the City from the borough of Islington in 1994. When I was canvassing in Golden Lane, it was evident to me that, almost universally, the residents, many of whom have lived there for many years and had therefore been under the auspices of the much-loved borough of Islington, are much happier being governed by the corporation. I did not go into great detail about the massive change to the franchise, although they are well aware that there will be changes to the voting arrangements if the Bill is passed. However, it was clear to me that in general the residential population of the City do not feel that they are to be disfranchised. Indeed, the opposite is true. They are glad of the opportunity to be residents of the City of London, rather than of the borough of Islington.

John McDonnell: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the debate. I am sure that we will all grow to know him well during our deliberations on this matter. The key point is that his constituents were previously able to petition against the Bill as part of the process. Did he inform them that it would be changed by the amendment that the sponsor is suggesting? Was he aware of that amendment? If so, did he put it before the electorate to enable them to petition or at least to communicate with him on it? Has he seen the amendment? If so, can he let us have a copy? Can he let the Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesmen have a copy now that they have formed a partnership? That would allow us to discuss it.

Mr. Field: I have not seen the amendment. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that only a small proportion of the residential population of my constituency is in the City of London—about 5,500 out of 73,000. As such, the reform was not a major part of my election campaign in May and June. That said, when I met residents of the Barbican, Petticoat square and more generally, it was an issue, although I did not go into precise details. By the same token, I am sure the hon. Gentleman will understand that I was not at that juncture in a position to put to paper concerns or promises about events that might happen.

John McDonnell: When the hon. Gentleman is made aware of the amendment's contents, will he consult his constituents who live within the City corporation boundaries? Does he not think it appropriate to give them the right to petition the House on the basis of that amendment?

Mr. Field: In fairness, there has been much consultation in recent years. It is evident to me that the City corporation has done its best to consult residents and ensure that they are aware that change is under way. If the motion to revive is accepted, I undertake to write to all City of London residents to outline the nature of our debate. I will do that in tandem with other issues because the health service and other public services are also important to my constituents.

Jeremy Corbyn: That is excellent news. In the hon. Gentleman's letter to the residents of the City of London, will he enclose a copy of the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) so that, instead of thinking that the Bill is tinkering around with administrative arrangements, they are fully apprised of the arguments for democracy? Will he tell them that the prize for defeating the Bill is to gain control of their local government? *[Interruption.]* I am sure that if my hon. Friend cannot visit all the residents personally, he will be happy to send them a video of his speech, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) suggests.

Mr. Field: I am sure that the sheer weight of the hour-long speech by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington will cause the Fees Office to blanch at the cost of sending it out.

The City is the world's leading financial centre. The idea that its civic administration should rest on the 5,500 voters who live there is not appropriate. Such an eventuality would be logically unsustainable and in due course bring forward calls for the abolition of the City corporation. The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington might welcome that, but it would be contrary to the wishes of my constituents in the City of London.

On the electorate, one need look no further than the past two boundary commission inquiries. As London Members know, we are going through that rigmarole again. It is clear that the overwhelming majority of City of London residents are keen to remain in the City corporation, with its distinct powers and characteristics. Representatives of the City branch of the constituency Labour party made that point when they gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Bill. Hon. Members will want to take account of the view of City residents when they decide on their attitude to the motion.

As hon. Members would expect me to report, the case for reviving the Bill is supported by the financial sector of the City of London. The most recent survey was conducted in October 2000 and it consulted 150 senior City executives. It showed 91 per cent. support for the Government's decision not to abolish the City corporation and 88 per cent. support for the proposed extension of the franchise.

Dr. Vis: The hon. Gentleman said that he has discussed the proposals with residents. What consultation has taken place with the workers in the City? Can he give us any information on that?

Mr. Field: I must inform the hon. Gentleman that I have not been involved in that, not least because many of those workers are not my constituents. It would be wrong for me to make any representations to them, and I am not aware of the precise representations that the City corporation has made. I shall be interested to know whether his constituents made any representations in that regard.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand the temptation to range widely, but it would certainly be a comfort to the Chair if the motion could be mentioned a little more frequently.

Mr. Field: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington argues that we have had insufficient opportunity to scrutinise the Bill over the past four years. I am not convinced, however,

that a new Committee would make a great deal of difference. We have already had plenty of consultation over the years with all imaginable relevant parties.

John McDonnell: The sponsor of the Bill is offering us either something that is completely ineffectual or a substantial vista of industrial democracy opening up in the City. That is a key issue on which we should consult. The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) has accepted that he has not consulted any members of the work force in the City corporation who will be directly affected by the Bill. However, if the wonderful vista of a soviet in the City is to be established, surely they must be consulted.

Mr. Field: My reply to the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) was that it was not my place as the Member of Parliament for Cities of London and Westminster to consult other hon. Members' constituents. I am sure that he accepts that. The organisation of the business franchise has been subject to extensive consultation with City businesses and employees, and details of the proposals have been circulated by the corporation's publication, which comes out on a monthly or bi-monthly basis and has a circulation of 65,000.

Dr. Vis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his replies to me and to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). I would object to the hon. Gentleman visiting Finchley unless he told me in advance. However, he can come if he lets me know.

The people to whom he referred will receive a vote, but I do not want him to talk to people in Finchley or other constituencies. I want him to consult the people in the workplaces in the City and ask them, while they are at work, whether they want a vote. That is my point, and it is the one that he is avoiding.

Mr. Field: I am not avoiding anything.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. When the hon. Gentleman replies, will he relate his remarks to the motion?

Mr. Field: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), who said that we should accept the motion so that we will be able to examine any amendments that might lead to the extension of democracy. Indeed, the promoters are offering amendments that deserve serious consideration, and such consideration can take place only if the Bill is revived. On that basis, I hope that the House will support the revival motion.

5.54 pm

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Hon. Members will recall that Government representatives, myself included, have spoken in previous debates concerning this Bill. I therefore intend not to speak at length but merely to take a few moments to confirm why the Government believe that it is right for the Bill to have the opportunity to progress.

The Bill contains a number of provisions relating to the existing business franchise about which it is difficult, even for the Bill's main opponents, to complain. I refer specifically to measures designed to curb certain practices that are clearly unsatisfactory. For example, an individual may currently be entitled to a business vote if he or she is an owner or tenant of property in the City with a rateable value of just £10.

John McDonnell: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Raynsford: If my hon. Friend will bear with me for a moment, I should like to make a little progress. I have only just started my speech but will give way to him in a moment.

I was making the point that current provision allows individual owners or tenants of property with a rateable value of only £10 to have a vote even if they do not maintain a physical presence in the City. The Bill would tighten the definition of occupation to require physical presence on the premises and increase the rateable value threshold needed to qualify for a business vote to £200. It is also currently possible for an individual to be entitled to more than one vote in local elections in the City. The Bill would specifically prevent that. If the Bill is not revived, those anomalies will continue while we wait for another opportunity to end them.

I am surprised that my hon. Friends—I understand their strength of feeling—should, in effect, be advocating the retention of plural voting.

Mr. Etherington: I hope that my right hon. Friend is not suggesting that I advocated plural voting, because I spoke against that. I would be surprised if he were to quote me as having such a view. I am interested in the concept of—it is hard to think of the right term; perhaps this is the word to use—proportionality. Two categories come to mind when thinking about business premises and those present. What, for example, would be the position of a self-employed window cleaner who works in the vicinity? What would be the voting arrangements for a football ground, rugby pitch or other sporting facility in the area? Would we have to find out how many people attended over the season and average out that number? I am not trying to be clever, but I feel that I must exaggerate in order to show how ridiculous the concept is.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend made a fair point in his speech about his occupying a number of premises and how he would regard it as wrong for him to have more than one vote. Although I accept entirely that it is not his intention to support plural voting, the effect of his succeeding in blocking the Bill's revival would be to allow the continuation of plural voting. Although I understand the sincerity of his argument, he must recognise that we are dealing with the reality, which is in many ways profoundly unsatisfactory. The Bill seeks to remedy some of those defects. Either he wishes to remedy those defects or not. If he is arguing against the revival of the Bill, he is in effect allowing such abuses to continue.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: On my hon. Friend's specific question, which I shall seek to answer before giving way to some of my other hon. Friends, the definitions as proposed for the qualification for a business vote in the City are quite detailed—I do not intend to go into them as that would be contrary to the purpose of this debate—

[Mr. Raynsford]

but would depend entirely on whether the business has premises in the City and the occupiers were working from those premises. Those are reasonably sensible criteria. The question is whether one accepts the premise—I know that my hon. Friend and others do not; I shall come to the matter in a moment—that there should in the unique circumstances of the City of London be a franchise related to residence not just by residential occupiers but by business occupiers.

John McDonnell: Will my right hon. Friend cut to the quick? Has he seen the invisible amendment up the sleeve of the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), who is sponsoring the Bill? Has he been consulted on it? Does he know whether No. 10 has had any communication with the City corporation on the amendment? Has there been any correspondence on the matter? If he has seen the amendment, what is his attitude to it? Are the Government supporting it? If he has not seen it, at what stage does he think that it will be produced?

Mr. Raynsford: I have not seen the amendment and would not expect to see it because we are considering a revival motion for a Bill that is not drafted in the way that the City corporation indicates it would like it to be drafted. The amendment, as I understand it, responds to specific issues raised in the House in the last Parliament and addressed criticisms made by my hon. Friend, among others. It is slightly bizarre of him to criticise amendments that seek to effect reforms and improvements that he himself advocated in the last Parliament.

John McDonnell *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall give way once more. However, I wish to make progress as the House has been at this rather a long time.

John McDonnell: I do not know whether my right hon. Friend heard what he just said. He said that the motion seeks to revive a Bill that is not acceptable to the City corporation; it is about to be amended because it is unacceptable, yet we are being asked to revive it. The only amendment that I have seen is one that was floated 12 months ago, which did not respond in any way to our criticisms. It was a veiled way of bringing back a vote based on rateable value and businesses. I cannot believe that the City corporation has not consulted someone in Government. When our debate has finished, will my right hon. Friend go to No. 10 and ask who has been in dialogue with the City corporation?

Mr. Raynsford: I am sorry that my hon. Friend is being obtuse. A simple point is at stake—whether the Bill should be revived and, if so, whether it should be amended in the light of criticisms made during previous considerations. If my hon. Friend believed that the considerable period that the House has spent on the Bill will improve it, I would agree. However, he does not seem to take that view. As everyone knows, he does not like the Bill or the City corporation. He is doing everything possible to avoid any reform or change at all. I understand his position, but—

John McDonnell: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Raynsford: No; I have given way twice to my hon. Friend and I do not intend to do so again. He is opposed to the measure and does not wish it to proceed. A little frank speaking, rather than the pretence of speaking to the amendments, would be a lot better.

The main contention levelled against the Bill concerns the concept of expanding the business franchise to include the large number of companies in the City. I understand why its opponents, including many of my hon. Friends, find the expansion of a property-based business vote unacceptable. However, the reality is that such a franchise already exists for local elections in the City. It has long been accepted that that is the appropriate franchise for the unique circumstances of the City, which is essentially a business district with a resident population of about only 5,500 people, which would not make it a viable district for local government under any other circumstances. If we accept that in the unique circumstances of the City corporation it is appropriate that local business people should have a say in the election of those who make decisions for their area, it is wholly inappropriate that that right should be available only to unincorporated businesses.

The Bill would correct a huge imbalance. Sole traders and partnerships between them determine elections to the non-residential wards in the City's local elections, while incorporated businesses and the many people who work in them have no say whatsoever. The Bill includes provisions to determine how many votes are allocated to a company and to whom they are distributed within it.

Mr. Etherington: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Raynsford: No, I have taken several interventions, and I intend to make progress.

The recent statement by the promoters of the Bill indicates their intention to break the link between property and voting rights by replacing the rateable value as the basis for calculating entitlement to vote with a formula based on the number of employees. It is important that Members are aware of the wider reforms, to which the Bill is integral, that the City of London corporation is progressing. The special report of the Committee that considered the Bill welcomed the boundary review volunteered by the promoters and the need to reduce the overall number of elected members in the common council. Both the boundary review and the reduction in elected members are proceeding in line with undertakings from the corporation to ensure that the position of residential voters would not suffer as the result of the introduction of the corporate franchise envisaged in the Bill.

However, I fear for the completion of those processes should the Bill fail to be revived today. Those members of the corporation who are opposed to modernisation are more likely to gain ground if there is disillusionment at the House's rejection of the reform of the business vote set out in the Bill. I think they would be asking, "Why should we continue to propose reforms if Parliament has rejected the legislation that the measures anticipate?"

In summary, the Government believe that the revival of the Bill is the right way forward because the measures in the Bill seem reasonable and, in parts, long overdue. Secondly, to kill off the Bill would be a real setback for the process of modernisation of the corporation, and would allow the continuation of entirely unacceptable practices that no hon. Member could possibly wish to see perpetuated. I therefore urge all Members to vote in favour of the Bill's revival.

Question put:—

The House divided:- Ayes 156, Noes 33.

Division No. 64] **[6.5 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baird, Vera
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Blackman, Liz
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burt, Alistair
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cameron, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cotter, Brian
Cruddas, Jon
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McFall, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNulty, Tony
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moran, Margaret
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Randall, John
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Ward, Ms Claire
Watson, Tom
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Paul Goodman and
Mr. George Osborne.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Cable, Dr Vincent
Clwyd, Ann
Coleman, Iain
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dismore, Andrew
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Gerrard, Neil
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Khabra, Piara S
Linton, Martin
McDonnell, John
McWalter, Tony
Mullin, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Cryer and
Mr. Kelvin Hopkins.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That the promoters of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill which originated in this House in the last Parliament but had not received the Royal Assent may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the bill in the present session of Parliament; and the petition for the bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable to it shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the bill shall be presented to the House by deposit in the Private Bill Office no later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day;

That a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the bill, stating that it is the same in every respect as the bill presented in this House in the last Parliament;

That on the next sitting day following presentation, the Clerk in the Private Bill Office shall lay the bill on the Table of the House;

That in the present session of Parliament the bill shall be deemed to have passed through every stage through which it has passed in the last Parliament, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having passed those stages;

That no further fees shall be charged to such stages.

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ordered,

That Mr. Richard Shepherd be added to the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Human Rights.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

TRAVEL CONCESSIONS (ELIGIBILITY) BILL [LORDS]

Ordered,

That, during proceedings on the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill *[Lords]*, the Standing Committee on the Bill shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

PARLIAMENTARY CONTRIBUTORY PENSION FUND

Ordered,

That Baron MacGregor of Pulham Market, Mrs. Sylvia Heal and Mr. A. J. Beith be discharged as Managing Trustees of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund and Mr. Peter Lilley, Ms Gisela Stuart and Mr. John Burnett be appointed as Managing Trustees in pursuance of section 1 of the Parliamentary and other Pensions Act 1987.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Seaside Towns

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

6.19 pm

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): I am grateful for the opportunity to highlight once again some of the many acute social and economic problems that afflict seaside towns, to look at what action the Government have taken to address them and to consider what further measures need to be taken.

Having been raised in the seaside town of Morecambe, I witnessed its decline throughout the 1980s from a thriving, prosperous holiday resort to an area of high unemployment and social deprivation. The regeneration of our seaside resorts has therefore long been high on my list of priorities. Following my election to serve as the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale in 1997, a substantial part of my maiden speech to the House was devoted to that subject. Much of what I said about tourism and seaside resorts in general, and about my constituency in particular, has been echoed on many occasions by other hon. Members with similar constituencies. It may be useful to remind the House briefly of some of the points that I raised and use them as a benchmark to assess what progress has been made.

In 1997, I told the House that following the collapse of the domestic holiday trade in the 1980s, Morecambe was suffering from a wide range of social and economic problems. There was a huge stock of former guesthouses and hotels that had fallen out of holiday use and were being used as substandard houses in multiple occupation. The proliferation of HMOs had attracted a large number of socially disadvantaged and mainly transient people to the town, which had put an enormous strain on public services. High unemployment was endemic in several wards, and deprivation and social exclusion were widespread. Many of the resort's visitor attractions had closed and many others were on the verge of closure. Much of its infrastructure was old, decaying and in need of refurbishment. Access to the resort was poor, hampering efforts to attract new business. Those were the conditions that existed in my constituency, and in seaside resorts throughout the country, in 1997. Unfortunately, many of the problems that resorts faced then are just as acute or worse today.

In my constituency, squalor and splendour sit side by side. The high density of HMOs remains and continues to attract the socially disadvantaged into the resort. Many wards continue to harbour substantial pockets of social and economic deprivation among the worst in Lancashire. The resort's premier attraction, the Frontierland leisure park, has closed. The Bubbles leisure complex has also closed, and the resort still does not have a theatre. Occasionally, productions are put on at the Festival market hall, which necessitates the stallholders forfeiting their business to accommodate them. Shops in the main Arndale centre and surrounding area continue to become vacant with alarming frequency.

Access to the resort remains poor, whether by private car or public transport. Rail services are infrequent and, in the main, run only as far as Lancaster, where visitors to the town are required to change and frequently encounter lengthy delays. The ticket office and waiting room on

Morecambe station are closed from early afternoon and, in inclement weather, passengers have to huddle under an open-ended shelter on the platform. After the ticket office has closed, no information is available to passengers about late-running or cancelled trains.

Bus services to the resort are also infrequent and often become entangled in the traffic chaos and congestion that pervade the Lancaster and Morecambe area. Those who travel to the resort by car experience similar difficulties. There is no doubt in my mind that poor access is the biggest single barrier to investment and the regeneration of Morecambe.

On a brighter note, a proposal to redevelop the Frontierland site as a retail park is being examined. A private developer is also attempting to renovate the Midland hotel, which was once the flagship of Morecambe's tourism industry. If either of those developments comes to fruition, it will give commercial activity in the town a significant boost.

Of course, the natural beauty of the area remains untarnished. But after decades of decline and underinvestment in its infrastructure, Morecambe—in common with many other seaside resorts—is still only at the stage of preventing further decline, never mind being regenerated.

Perhaps at this point I should make it clear that I do not lay the blame for the decline in resorts such as Morecambe at the door of the current Government, and neither do I accuse them of negligence or inactivity in advancing measures to remedy the problem. Nothing could be further from the truth: I firmly believe that, since coming to office in 1997, the Government have made enormous strides in getting to grips with the horrendous legacy that they inherited from the Tories.

Many seaside resorts now have access to funds from which they were previously excluded. My constituency is set to benefit from assisted-area status, as well as from objective 2 and single regeneration funding. The establishment of the resorts taskforce and the publication of the regeneration "Sea Changes" blueprint, which clearly sets out what needs to be done, constitute a major step forward, as does the multi-billion pound commitment to improve the nation's transport infrastructure that was announced in the Government's spending review. That undoubtedly will prove of great benefit to many seaside towns. The cross-departmental approach that the Government have adopted, given many of the problems of social exclusion in our resorts, is also soundly based.

Although I do not blame the Government for what has transpired in our resorts and commend them for what they have achieved so far, I do not want to give the impression that they can now sit back and contemplate a job well done. As far as I am concerned, they have taken a few small but significant steps down a long road.

The "Sea Changes" blueprint is only words on paper at the moment, and unless they are converted into action, they are meaningless. I should be interested in any details that my hon. Friend the Minister can offer of how and when the delivery of the huge amount of extra investment required to transform and modernise our resorts will be achieved.

I firmly believe that regionally based seaside regeneration delivery units need to be established to ensure that a focused, cross-departmental approach is maintained at local level. There is no doubt in my mind that, without such a focus, attempts to regenerate seaside towns will become patchy and over-bureaucratic, and that in general they will fall short of their targets.

To illustrate what I mean, I shall refer to a couple of things that are happening in the local authority that covers my constituency, namely Lancaster.

First, there is a long-standing bid to build a link road from the port of Heysham to the M6 motorway. There is almost universal acceptance at all levels of government that such a link is required, but there is a dispute about the routing of the road. I, the city council and the county council favour the western route, which offers the best prospects for economic development of the area. The northern route, preferred by the Government office of the north-west, appears to have a less adverse environmental impact, and accordingly the office has registered objections to the Lancaster local plan.

My concern is not that the office has objected to the proposed western route but that in doing so it stated that, although the western route would open up more areas for economic development, such developments were not part of the road's strategic objectives.

I believed that the Government had said that they would build roads for economic reasons and not just to relieve congestion, so I find the thinking of the Government office muddled and misguided. That is compounded when it is considered in conjunction with a bid submitted by Lancaster city council to establish an economic development zone.

The core of that bid is the industrial development of the Luneside site in Lancaster. The site is landlocked, with only limited access by minor roads. Government officials discovered how poor access was when they had to walk from the centre of Lancaster to inspect the industrial estate. It was just too difficult to reach by minibus, and the officials had to get out and walk there. Despite that, they have examined the EDZ bid and included it among the 10 high-priority schemes. It seems that the Government office is prepared to support the spending of millions of pounds on the development of the site but opposes the building of a road that would make it a viable proposition.

On Monday, I met Peter Styche who, until recently, was acting director of the Government office of the north-west, and asked him to reconcile those contradictory policies. Not only was he unable to give me a satisfactory answer, he appeared unable to give any answer whatever. Both the building of the motorway link and an EDZ are critical to the regeneration of Morecambe. I would be most grateful for any assistance that the Minister could offer in helping to resolve this matter.

In my opinion, the foregoing clearly demonstrates the need for a more focused approach to the regeneration of our resorts to ensure that the joined-up cross-departmental thinking that the Government adopt nationally is carried forward and implemented locally.

That leads me to my final point. Seaside resorts in recent years have suffered from a contraction in the domestic holiday trade similar to that experienced by mining communities as a result of pit closures. It is obvious that seaside resorts will require a similar amount of support and investment to that which the coalfield communities received if they are to be successfully regenerated.

[Geraldine Smith]

Serious consideration should be given to the establishment of a seaside regeneration trust, modelled on the coalfields regeneration trust, which will focus on and give impetus to the regeneration of our seaside resorts. I am aware that the Government are currently of the opinion that the economic and social deprivation caused by the decline of seaside resorts is not directly comparable to that suffered by mining communities as a result of pit closures. Indeed, the Minister confirmed that to me in a written response to a parliamentary question earlier this week.

I have to inform the Minister that I believe that the Government are wrong in their assumption. The collapse of the holiday trade, on which the economics of seaside resorts depended, had an impact on many resorts every bit as sudden and severe as that which occurred in the coalfield communities. The only real difference in circumstances is that when the collapse of the holiday trade occurred, we were saddled with a Conservative Government who were not prepared to do anything about it. Much of the resulting devastation still afflicts seaside resorts today and it will take much more than a pump-priming role by Government to renovate, modernise and improve the infrastructure of seaside resorts and enable them to diversify and rebuild their economies.

If my hon. Friend the Minister is in any doubt that this is the case, I invite him to visit my constituency at the earliest possible opportunity to see for himself just how much still needs to be done.

6.33 pm

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I take it that the hon. Gentleman has the agreement of the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) and the Minister to participate in the debate.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) for obtaining this important debate. I am grateful also to the London Members who made it possible for more time to be spared for it.

What my hon. Friend said about her constituency in the north-west applies equally to my constituency in the south-east. Seaside resorts have special problems and, like her, I brought them to the attention of the House in my maiden speech; both of us have been battering on about it ever since. Much has been done, and I want to acknowledge that the Government have addressed many of the social issues and the symptoms of the deprivation that exists in many of our areas. But we need to acknowledge that seaside towns are unique in this special regard; they have a 180 deg catchment area. The economic success of an area is thus limited by a factor of 50 per cent. compared with areas with a wider catchment. That creates difficulties. Furthermore, our transport systems are frequently inadequate, which makes matters worse. That is certainly the situation in Hastings and, to some extent, Rye.

The lack of economic activity and low wages over many years has resulted in social problems. Older people have moved to the area. In itself that is a good thing but, sadly, they have a low income—certainly, they did in the past. It was always said that if people had money, they went to Bournemouth; if they did not have quite as much, they went to Hove; if they were a bit hard-up, they went to Eastbourne; but if they ended up in Hastings, they were really poor. I suspect that that is a particular problem in my constituency rather than in Morecambe, but all seaside towns face the problem, or challenge, of an elderly population who are often without economic strength. We see the consequences of that in our seaside towns.

The Government have successfully addressed the symptoms: for example, the minimum income guarantee is especially successful in helping the aged in my constituency to make ends meet. There is help through programmes such as the education action zones or cash benefits for low-paid families such as the working families tax credit. Like the sure start and neighbourhood renewal schemes, all those social benefits have brought significant changes to my constituents during the past four years.

However, in a sense, we are improving the social well-being of residents of seaside towns rather than providing the economic gains that are needed before we can make a leap forward. For example, although there have been improvements in my constituency, we remain the 28th poorest town in Britain. When a south-east town, only 60 miles from London, is the 28th poorest town in Britain, we have to ask why, after all that Government aid, we have failed to improve our relative position.

The answer is simple. To improve the lot of individuals is good and proper and we are grateful for it, but we need to improve economic benefits through the infrastructure to attract private-sector investment. In my constituency, a great opportunity was lost when the Government decided not to build a bypass, which would have brought wider benefits—not only by creating confidence among the business community but by safeguarding our seafront. The town is unique in Britain because its main trunk road trundles along the seafront, past its hotel, going through seven conservation areas. However, I pass on—the decision has been made so there is little purpose in bemoaning its effects.

The balance in the Government's consideration was wrong: the environmental argument was so strong that the economic argument was set aside. That is always a problem in seaside areas, because they are beautiful places. They are usually surrounded by a wonderful hinterland—as they are in my hon. Friend's constituency and mine. That is great and we appreciate it, but we have to balance the environmental cost with the economic gain. I hope that no other constituency will suffer as Hastings and Rye did from a decision that appeared perverse. None the less, we move on.

Transport is essential. Not only do we need roads for our seaside towns, we need public transport so that we can get to them. We need transport so that people can go to work elsewhere if there are no local jobs. I work in this place, but it takes me two hours to get here on the train every day—only 60 miles. That is probably a combination of Railtrack, Connex and a lack of investment over many, many years.

People need to be able to visit our seaside towns. If we do not have proper rail services, they cannot do so. I emphasise the infrastructure argument advanced by my hon. Friend. Hastings is not unique in its transport

infrastructure difficulties; many seaside towns suffer from the same problems of inaccessibility. That is an important factor.

We also, in Hastings and Rye in particular, suffer from many other deficiencies, such as the lack of a higher education institute, which results in a work force with low skills. A package of measures is required. Seaside towns are not unique, but they are special in that many of them suffer from the same basket of disadvantage.

I do not want us to so improve the social infrastructure in seaside towns—especially Hastings and Rye—that we become a university for misfits. I do not mean that unkindly, but there is a risk that that could happen. We have plenty of cheap accommodation. As we improve the lot of our residents through our social programmes, those people improve. That is of course what it is all about, but there is no economic benefit because there are no jobs for our residents, so they move on. The space becomes available and more people move in with social problems similar to those that we have solved for other people.

That cycle is not unique to Hastings and Rye. It happens in many towns, including Brighton, and it may well happen in Morecambe. Although we want to benefit those with disadvantage, we want our community to gain from the investment in the individuals whom we so aid.

In conclusion, I am looking for a Minister-level taskforce for seaside towns. The needs of seaside towns are difficult, because they are numerous but they are perhaps not complex, because we know what they are. I am not criticising the Government, who have done much already, but if we could persuade them to take seaside towns even more seriously and get together a ministerial taskforce to focus on their specific needs, that would be a means by which Government could really demonstrate joined-up thinking and government and aid us all to a better life.

6.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) on instigating the debate. She has done her constituents a great service, as she certainly has since she was elected to this place. In highlighting the special difficulties that we find in coastal resorts and seaside resorts, she reminds us all of how important those towns are. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) is in the Chamber; I am sure that he is present because he is very interested in the debate, and many others could draw illustrations similar to those drawn by my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale in highlighting the special difficulties of seaside resorts.

I was slightly worried that my hon. Friend, in comparing those resorts with coalfield communities, was in danger of talking down the great potential of seaside towns. Many seaside towns, including Morecambe, are experiencing great difficulties at the moment, but they still have something that the coalfields certainly do not have in the aftermath of colliery closures: the sea and beautiful scenery. Their raison d'être was to provide a holiday for people.

Geraldine Smith: Yes, we have the sea, the views and natural beauty, but we need attractions. We need indoor attractions that families can use. We need decent infrastructure. We need decent road and rail links to get people to seaside resorts. Most seaside resorts are pretty isolated; they have the sea on one side and access to them is poor. Such improvements are essential to ensure that we attract tourists. After all, attracting tourists is our core industry, just as mining was the coalfield communities' core industry.

Dr. Howells: My hon. Friend took the words out of my mouth. We should also remember that in 1999, about 100 recognised seaside resorts generated £6 billion of income, which is well over 15 per cent. of the total income generated by tourism in this country—we do not have the exact figures yet as the tourism industry is a little slow in producing them, which is a big problem. The resorts accounted for 2.1 million domestic holidays, for more than 40 per cent. of all holiday trips and nights away and for about 200 million domestic day trips. Those figures exclude visits by overseas visitors.

The resorts are still phenomenally important generators of income and employment. My hon. Friend is right to say that they could do even more. She was also right to point to the need for inter-departmental action on the issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) also pointed that out when he talked of the problem with the bypass decision. It was an important decision and it will have a long-term effect on the town.

I sympathise with my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale. I took my family to north Devon this year. If I climb the mountain above my house in Pontypridd I can see the shoulder of land above Ilfracombe, but when I set off to drive to 10 miles south of that shoulder of land on a Saturday morning in the middle of August it took me four and a half hours—breaking the law, I could probably have driven to Italy in that time. It was unbelievable. She is right to highlight the great problem caused by the lack of good communications and the problem of getting to the resorts. We should be able to get to them more easily and that is one of the great tasks that we face.

A range of sources of funding already exist as my hon. Friend knows and they are being tapped by a number of resorts. It is important that they continue to do so and that they can identify those sources of funding. The prime source has been the single regeneration budget. I am told that there have been 35 successful bids by coastal areas worth £172 million—28 per cent. of the total SRB round 6 awards. It is important for resorts to understand that if they can come up with imaginative and coherent proposals, the money is there to be used.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I thank the Minister for giving way and the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) for initiating this debate. The single regeneration budget is important. Although it applies in Ryde in my constituency and has already applied to Cowes, we are looking forward to its roll-out to other coastal towns, such as Sandown and Ventnor, which suffer particularly.

Dr. Howells: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be glad to know that I was subjected, in a very pleasant way, to a considerable amount of information about the help needed on the island at the Isle of Wight stand at the

[Dr. Howells]

Earl's Court travel show yesterday. However, this is my hon. Friend's debate and I must answer some of her questions.

I assure my hon. Friend that at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport we are concerned that the problems that she has highlighted are tackled, not merely by our Department but by all the other Departments. We are determined that the fall in visitor numbers that she so eloquently described shall be reversed. For far too many families, the word holiday is equated with a flight to Spain or some other country. The Department and I must convince people that we have great things to offer them in this country.

Morecambe will finally be returned to its former glory—and more—when we get the visitors back there, so all the schemes and projects that my hon. Friend highlighted need to come to fruition. That is not easy; there are many competing claims. As she and my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye rightly said, seaside towns and resorts have special problems and their claims are many. Some of the poorest urban centres that I have visited are in seaside towns. I understand that, until recently, the poorest ward in the United Kingdom was in Plymouth, and there are many other poor wards in coastal towns.

The way out of this dilemma is to try to reverse the habit that has grown up in this country of assuming that people have to go abroad to have a real holiday, so the quality of the product must be improved in our country. We are trying to do that; we are absolutely determined to push up standards. There are some great hotels, bed and breakfasts and attractions in this country, but we have a far too lengthy tale of under-performers, and great improvements have to be made.

If we are to revive the fortunes of many of our seaside towns, we must ensure that the people who travel to them—whether for a day trip, a weekend stay, a short break or a fortnight's holiday—want to go back there afterwards. That is why I fully concur with my hon. Friend in saying that the problems that she and my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye have highlighted, which almost involve the ghettoisation of poverty and disadvantage, have to be tackled at the root, and we must work with other Departments to do that.

I hope very much that my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale continues to alert the House to those problems, as she has done this evening. I also hope that she continues to alert not only the Department that most obviously has responsibility for tourism in this country—the DCMS—but all the other Departments that deal with social inclusion and regeneration.

We have to consider planning very carefully, as well as the way in which the social security system works. Through the regional development agencies, the problem of investment in those areas must be tackled in a much more co-ordinated way. As my hon. Friend says, there can be no more urgent need for co-ordination than that for public and private transport links, which are very important.

Nevertheless, I hope that my hon. Friend will not leave the Chamber feeling gloomy about the prospects. The Government have put in place a lot of money, and we are very much aware of the difficulties that we face in trying to help communities such as hers. I can tell her that the coalfields faced an extraordinarily bleak prospect. A very short distance from the area where I live in south Wales, thousands of well-paid jobs, which propped up our communities, were lost in a matter of months, but, 10 years on, many of those communities are thriving. We have reinvented ourselves; we have got new industries. That has taken real co-ordination and a determination to win, and it has involved a lot of lobbying of respective Governments. Of course, those responsible have done us a great service. We benefited from the formation of the Welsh Development Agency, and this Government have introduced the RDAs, which are still in the process of inventing themselves.

The RDAs have no more important task than trying to ensure that the criticisms that my hon. Friend makes are addressed and that there is a proper and coherent response, so that we can lift the blight that hangs over towns such as Morecambe and use their great potential not only to develop new tourism industries, but to make them lovely places to live, because that is such an important variable in that economic equation. If we do that, we all benefit—the British tourism industry benefits and Morecambe benefits—and we start to create centres of excellence, which can be a model for many towns throughout the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 16 November 2001

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Public Bodies

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

9.33 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I am pleased to have the opportunity to set out the Government's policy on the important issue of public bodies, their work and composition, and the challenges that lie ahead. The debate has been initiated by the Government precisely because we are keen to report on the situation to date, enter into dialogue on developments and elaborate on our policies and intentions for the future.

We choose as a society to deliver services to meet the needs of individuals through the collective organisation of government at local, regional and national level. Ministers are ultimately accountable to Parliament and the electorate for the quality and efficiency of service delivery. Yet the processes by which services are delivered have evolved greatly in recent years, and the classic model of direct departmental implementation has been supplemented by a variety of other effective and appropriate organisational systems.

The term "public bodies" covers a wide range of organisations. The quango, or quasi-non-governmental organisation, is now known by the equally illuminating term, NDPB, or non-departmental public body, which perhaps better describes the position of those units in the overall government framework. There are four types of NDPB. Those based on the executive model, of which the Environment Agency is an example, carry out a wide variety of administrative, regulatory and commercial functions, and operate under statutory provisions. They employ their own staff and have responsibility for their own budgets. Advisory public bodies, such as the boundary commissions and the Historic Buildings Council, are generally set up by Ministers to advise on matters within their departmental sphere of interest.

Tribunal NDPBs, such as NHS or employment tribunals, are bodies with jurisdiction in a specialised field of law. Tribunals generally operate under statutory provisions and, independently of the Executive, decide the rights and obligations of private citizens towards a Government Department or other public authority. Finally, boards of visitors, such as prison visitors and visiting committees in Northern Ireland, are also classed as NDPBs.

Not all public bodies fit neatly in one of those four categories—for example, English Nature has both an executive and an advisory function—but the models provide the most comprehensive definition of the wide variety of quangos serving the nation.

The Government are committed to keeping the number of public bodies to a minimum. There are now fewer in the UK than at any time in the past 20 years. As at 31 March 2000, there were 1,035 public bodies in the United Kingdom, with approximately 20 per cent. operating in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland under the responsibility of the devolved Administrations. The total number of public bodies in the UK has fallen by around 10 per cent. since 1997, down from 1,128. I intend shortly to publish the updated figures setting out the position at the end of the last financial year.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I am interested in the Minister's definition because clearly there are many local public bodies, such as governing bodies of schools, which are, as far as I can see, executive bodies. They are non-departmental, public and fulfil all the criteria that he set out, but they do not appear in either of the figures that he quoted.

Mr. Leslie: There are several different classifications of statutory bodies, but the issue is which of them are defined as NDPBs, and I shall elaborate on those classifications. Certainly, there are local statutory bodies with which we all work on a constituency basis and are familiar.

NDPB expenditure was about £24 billion in the last year for which records have been compiled, so these bodies are an extremely important component of the public sector. The vast majority of that sum was programme expenditure: the awarding of grants, legal aid and funding for further and higher education. However, only £18 billion was from the Exchequer, the remainder being raised through a combination of statutory levies and other charges. I shall endeavour to publish greater detail and financial information in the next edition of "Public Bodies", which is published by the Cabinet Office annually.

Ministers are accountable to Parliament for the grant in aid given to NDPBs, and it is right that Parliament should scrutinise, on the Floor of the House and through the Select Committee system, how well that money is spent. Ministers set performance targets to drive forward improvements in the quality of services, and are keen to see policies implemented in the most effective way. The process of review and accountability undertaken by both Houses of Parliament is important and greatly valued.

The Government are keen to ensure that those who sit on the boards of public bodies are appointed on merit. It is also important that public appointments increasingly reflect the composition of the nation as a whole, and that we achieve an equal representation of men and women, and, as closely as possible, a pro rata representation of ethnic minorities and a greater proportion of disabled people. It is also a priority of mine to increase the national diversity of those appointed to public bodies, so that all parts of the country have an equal voice about the public services that they need and expect.

The Government are looking to encourage applications to public bodies from people with the skills and qualities that we seek, but who might not be aware that opportunities exist, or might not at first consider themselves suitable for a place in public life.

Gradual steps are being made in the direction of a more diverse pool of public appointments. Of the 30,000 individuals who serve as board members, 33 per cent. are

[Mr. Leslie]

women and 4.4 per cent. are from an ethnic minority. However, greater effort needs to be made to speed up progress in that respect. In particular, I want greater attention to be paid to appointing disabled people to NDPBs, so I aim for the first time to give more information on those numbers in the next edition of the snappily titled, "Public Bodies 2001". I hope that that will establish a baseline from which the Government's commitment to increased participation can be assessed.

It is crucial that people appointed to public bodies should be of the highest quality and the best available for the tasks required. That is why the Government take considerable care in how the posts are filled. Ultimately, appointments are made by Ministers, and Ministers are held accountable for those decisions and for the performance of the bodies concerned.

To ensure that the process is properly carried out in each case, a Commissioner for Public Appointments is now in place to ensure that appointments are made on the basis of merit and in accordance with the code of practice. I pay tribute to Dame Rennie Fritchie, the current Commissioner for Public Appointments, for all her hard work and energy in fulfilling that important role. The code of practice seeks to promote appointment on merit, equal opportunities, probity, openness, transparency and proportionality. The commissioner's efforts have helped to secure an increasingly high quality of individual on the boards of those important organisations.

Once a public body has been established, it is important that Ministers and Parliament continue to monitor and review its performance and structure, and do not regard them as set in concrete. All NDPBs are subject to regular and thorough review every five years, but where it makes sense, that formal review can be brought forward or rescheduled, especially if its results can be linked with simultaneous changes in government. Public bodies do not exist in isolation from the rest of Government, but contribute to wider departmental and governmental objectives, and consequently form a key element of our programme for reform of public services.

In seeking to increase the accountability of NDPBs, the Government are keen for Select Committees to take a more active role in scrutinising the work of larger bodies, and Departments are required to inform the relevant Select Committee when the quinquennial review begins so that its views might inform the process. Fundamentally challenging questions are asked, such as whether the public body is required at all, whether it could be abolished, or whether it should be altered to achieve its objectives more effectively. If, at the first stage of the review, a decision is taken to remain as a non-departmental public body, the review will go on to examine the scope for future improvements, such as how new technology or closer co-operation with the private sector might be incorporated into its work.

I take this opportunity to thank the thousands of individuals who, through appointment to public bodies, give their time serving the public in pursuit of better services. There are some excellent examples of good practice, and I hope that the House will have an opportunity to consider some of them today. Many of the key quangos set up by the Government, such as the Low Pay Unit, the Disability Rights Commission and the new deal taskforce, are a response to specific manifesto commitments.

In my short time at the Cabinet Office, I have worked closely with the Better Regulation Task Force, which provides the Government with independent advice to help ensure that our regulatory programme is necessary, fair and does not impose unreasonable burdens on business and the public sector. To date, it has published 20 substantive reports containing 337 recommendations. Of those, 19 are still under consideration, and all but nine of the remainder have been accepted in whole or in part. That is a classic example of an effective advisory body that makes a significant contribution to the regulatory debate. The best public bodies are those that listen to the needs of the people they serve, and respond swiftly and efficiently.

During the substantive debate on this subject last year, the House spent some time discussing the taskforces set up by the Government since 1997. Taskforces, ad hoc advisory groups and review teams provide independent, expert advice to the Government on a wide range of important issues, including health, education, transport and crime. They are an effective means of securing high-quality advice on matters of public concern.

However, taskforces are not a new phenomenon. Previous Administrations have created their own taskforces and equivalent bodies, but it was this Government who made available for the first time detailed information on the number of such bodies in existence, their remit and membership.

Today, I announce the publication of the first annual report on taskforces, advisory groups and reviews. By producing in the form of an annual report information on details of the composition, names and background of the chair and membership, and dates when those bodies have been wound up, I hope that greater transparency and accountability can be achieved.

The number of taskforces is steadily decreasing. Of the 359 bodies in existence during the last financial year, 12 taskforces have been wound up, 28 reviews have concluded their work, and 86 advisory groups have ceased to exist. A further 22 bodies are due to be terminated imminently.

The House will be familiar with the development of Government agencies, which although not quangos in the traditional sense, are clearly public service bodies that exist outside the classic departmental model. The agency concept came into being in the mid-1980s in a very different political climate, and the next steps reviews have had a major impact on the organisation of the public sector.

The Government now believe that it is a good time to review the work of the agencies at large, both to define best practice and to share it, while recognising some of the difficulties that have been faced—and in some cases still remain—in the agency model. That review is being led by Pam Alexander, the former chief executive of English Heritage, with the support of a small team in the new Office of Public Services Reform.

The review has been designed to make sure that it takes account of the perspectives not just of Departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies, but of service users. It will investigate relationships between Departments, Ministers and agencies, the extent to which

operational freedoms have been devolved, and the impact on front-line delivery and innovation. The review puts a strong emphasis on consultation—so far, the review team has carried out 70 visits and meetings. I anticipate that the review will be in a position to report around the turn of the year.

While the existing system of public bodies and public appointments works well, I am keen to develop a number of improvements. First, I want to look at new methods of improving and extending the way in which appointment opportunities are publicised, and raise awareness generally about posts that arise. While specific appointment opportunities are, of course, already publicised in accordance with rules set out by the commissioner, the Government believe that more can be done to broaden the range of applications, so that not only insiders or those with privileged access are aware of potential vacancies in advance. The Cabinet Office will restructure the existing website on which information on public bodies is made available, and that should be launched next year. It must include key facts about public bodies and details of who holds what appointment at present.

Secondly, the Government believe that the development of regional governance will change the terms of debate on the accountability of regional and local quangos. Directly elected regional government would precipitate a review of how those public bodies should be held accountable to new structures, or subject to their scrutiny, and what future relationships might exist. Clearly, those matters are at a very early stage, and although it is too soon to consider specific arrangements, I am determined to promote wider awareness of the regional dimension in the formation of future public bodies. Specifically, I am keen to ensure that the membership of NDPBs increasingly reflects the regional breadth of all parts of the United Kingdom, and that boards and trusts are not dominated by any particular corner of the nation.

Thirdly, the Government must keep a close eye on the proliferation of public bodies, and check the number and growth of quangos. That is often more easily said than done, but it is important for Ministers to send to officials the message that we must always bear down on bureaucracy and layers of organisation where they are superfluous or can be replaced by more efficient and simple structures.

The topic of public bodies may seem dry and esoteric, but beneath the complexity and theory lie practical and relevant questions that are at the heart of public service delivery. Both the Government and Parliament have a duty constantly to scrutinise and improve the public sector, and I sincerely hope that today's debate will contribute to that process.

9.50 am

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): It is my happy duty to congratulate the Minister on his promotion to his ministerial role. As a result of a recent minor reshuffle in the Cabinet Office, he is now in receipt of a ministerial salary. Some of us in opposition were, slightly more belatedly than others, converts to the doctrine of the minimum wage, and perhaps it becomes us to congratulate the Minister on the fact that he is now receiving due remuneration for the task that he has been performing. I am sure that he shares my pleasure at the fact that that change occurred as a result of British Petroleum's benevolence towards the Government. It is a mark of the triumph of new Labour that British Petroleum's happiness with the Government has resulted in not one but two pillars of the new Labour establishment enjoying an increase in their take-home pay.

I must begin with a small apology. I am afraid that a commitment outside the House will require me to be absent for about half an hour from approximately 10.30 am, and I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker and to the House, particularly if that means that I miss one or two of the speeches that follow mine. I shall of course return as soon as I can.

In his helpful and constructive introduction to the debate, the Minister set out the role of quangos—or non-departmental public bodies as we are now supposed to call them, as he rightly said, although I am not sure that that greatly illuminates matters. However, what does clarify the issue is a series of excellent reports by the Select Committee on Public Administration. I commend to all hon. Members the reports that it produced during this and the previous Parliament, because they contain much useful information.

It is important to stress, as the Minister did, that quangos or NDPBs, however we choose to call them, can fulfil a constructive and valuable role. They can bring into public service a range of independent-minded people, and they can provide greater expertise, wider experience and more flexibility than the hands-on model of Departments in central or local government.

It is important to stress at the outset that no Government are wholly virtuous in their approach to quangos. All of us in opposition mount great campaigns about the evils of quangos. We argue that they must all be put to the sword, and that public service would be advanced greatly if 99 per cent. of them were wiped away. However, when we come to office, we all suddenly find that they are rather convenient and a good model for delivering public service. Before we know where we are, a new set of Ministers is busily appointing members to quangos and creating new ones.

It is perfectly true to say—I volunteer this insight before Labour Members are tempted to challenge me on it—that all Governments are, from time to time, inclined to appoint more of their friends and supporters than their opponents. It is also important to stress that no Government are wholly sinful. All Governments, including the present one, appoint people from a range of backgrounds and political beliefs, and all Governments face the sometimes difficult consequences of appointees, once in place, turning round and biting the hand of those who feed them. That certainly occurred under the Conservative Government, and I suspect one or two people may be wondering how Tom Winsor managed to get appointed by the present Administration.

There have also been some increases in arm's length administration. I am not sure whether the Government would define the increased independence of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee as the creation of a quango, but it has been universally regarded as a success and is supported by my party. That shows that there has been a shift in the way in which we are governed, and we support that. In my view, it is not an indefensible crime for a Government who have received a mandate from the

[Mr. Tim Collins]

electorate to give power and responsibility to those who share a ministerial commitment to carrying out the policies on which the Government sought election. As ever, it is the detail that can cause problems. Many measures that are sensible in moderation can cause problems if they are carried to excess.

The BBC is an organisation that is listed in the Cabinet Office publication on public bodies. Many of us believe that it is perfectly acceptable for either the chairman or the director general of the BBC to be a known supporter of the governing party, but problems arise when, as now, they are both known to be supporters of the governing party, which is wholly unprecedented, as far as I know.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): The hon. Gentleman has been frank about the Conservative Government's policy of putting Conservative party placemen and placewomen into quangos because they had a mandate from the electorate. During the 1980s, the Conservative party never had a mandate to govern Scotland. Did not its enthusiasm for putting Conservative party spokesmen on health boards and various quangos in Scotland lead to its present position, with only one Conservative MP out of 72?

Mr. Collins: I am grateful for that invitation to comment on the existence of a mandate in Scotland. I was under the impression that the Labour party at senior level, including the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had said that theirs is the party of the Union in Scotland. If there is a Union and a United Kingdom, it follows that the mandate applied to this place and to Ministers answerable to it is a mandate across the entire United Kingdom. That is the mandate that Conservative Governments received between 1979 and 1997, and it is the mandate that Labour Governments have received since 1997. I could point out that in Westmorland and Lonsdale the Labour party received 10 per cent. of the vote, yet I do not question its right to take decisions at Executive level that affect my constituents. I invite the hon. Gentleman to be a little more careful before arguing that the Government do not have a mandate in certain parts of the United Kingdom.

We all understand that Prime Ministers have the right to make appointments to the House of Lords, but some of us would question the present position, as almost a third of its Members have been appointed by the incumbent Prime Minister.

It is important to examine the trend of quangos. The Minister, with characteristic charm, attempted to convince the House that the number of quangos is falling. I think he said that it is the lowest number for 20 years. The impression was created that the quango state—if that is the phrase—is in retreat, that the virtuous armies of new Labour are vanquishing quangos even as we speak, and that if we give the present Administration a few more years, the role of quangos will be far smaller than ever before.

That is not the view taken by the Local Government Information Unit, which in the past 15 or 20 years has not been renowned for being a front for the Conservative party, as I suspect Labour Members recognise. It has recently produced a study called "The Advance of the Quango State", which refers to the fact that since 1997 new quangos have been created to lead, and police, national policy initiatives in almost every policy area. It says that Ministers are adding

"a wide range of indeterminate appointed and self-appointed bodies"

right across the field.

If we are to make the numbers comparison, it is important to note that even the Government's document "Public Bodies 2000" recognises that there was a sharp reduction in the number of people who work for quangos, or NDPBs, during the Conservative years. In 1979, 217,000 people worked for quangos, and that was reduced almost every year after 1979. There was a small blip in the 1980s.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Jobs everywhere were being reduced.

Mr. Collins: The hon. Lady says that there were reductions across the board. Indeed, there were reductions in the numbers of bureaucrats and others working for the state. That was one of our commitments in every election from 1979 onwards, and I am delighted that, as the hon. Lady accurately points out, we kept that commitment.

As I was saying, the total number of public servants working for quangos was reduced from 217,000 in 1979 to 106,000 in 1997, a reduction of more than 50 per cent. Since 1997, the number has gone up to 112,000, which is about a 5 per cent. rise. The trend has therefore not only halted but been reversed.

Fiona Mactaggart: I think the hon. Gentleman misunderstood my point, which was that, while his party was in government, employment of every kind reduced. Since Labour has been in government, employment in all fields has increased. Do not the figures that he has cited reflect that, rather than some ideological difference?

Mr. Collins: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who as ever makes a delightful contribution to our debates. I think that she will find that she is wrong. It would be true to say, had she wished to make the point, that unemployment was higher in 1997 than in 1979, but employment was also higher in 1997 than in 1979. Far from employment in all sectors having increased since the present Government came to power, employment in manufacturing has fallen by 112,000 and is in free fall, so I caution Labour Members not to go down that particular route.

It is important to stress that the Minister made a welcome announcement that there would now be an annual report on taskforces, but we learn from the Select Committee reports that about 303 taskforces exist. I think he said that a couple of dozen are being wound up. It would be helpful to know whether he will be able to give the House an undertaking that fewer taskforces will be set up in the second Parliament of the present Administration than in the first, when a very large number were established.

Mr. Tom Harris: I shall try to restrict my interventions. Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that it is now the policy of the Conservative party not to set up any new taskforces if it wins the next general election?

Mr. Collins: I am always delighted to have a conversation with Labour Members about what we will

do when we return to power, but in common with most Oppositions in the first six months of a Parliament—it was certainly a characteristic of the Labour party when it was in opposition for four Parliaments in a row—we do not enter into firm policy commitments this early. All those things are being considered by our policy review, but I take his submission to that policy review in the constructive spirit in which it is offered, and it will be given due consideration in time.

I wanted to put some specific questions to the Minister. He referred to the document "Public Bodies". As he knows, that was most recently published in December last year. I am sure that he will know that a number of hon. Members would have found it helpful if it had been possible for the 2001 edition to be published before, rather than after, this debate. It would be useful if, in the discussions that he has with the Government business managers, it could be suggested that it would help if such a debate took place after, rather than before, publication of the annual report.

Has the Minister a view yet on the format of that document? He will remember that some two years ago in its sixth report the Select Committee on Public Administration said:

> "We recommend that the Government brings together information about the range of organisations carrying out its policy in a single directory, combining the information given at present in "Public Bodies" with other, summary information about departmental roles . . . Such a digest could replace "Public Bodies", and be published in tandem with the Government's annual report."

We all know what has happened to the Government's annual report. It became such an embarrassment that it appears to have been buried without trace. None the less, it would be helpful if the Minister indicated whether he thinks that, from now on, perhaps for this or next year's edition, "Public Bodies" can be modified in the way the Select Committee recommended, to become something nearer the map of the quango state for which it described the need.

It would also be helpful to learn the Minister's thinking on the Select Committee's recommendation that there should be some form of confirmation hearings, although not necessarily on exactly the model in the United States. It recommended that, for the most senior appointments to the most powerful and independent-minded of non-departmental public bodies, there should be the possibility at least for the relevant departmental Select Committee to have a hearing at which the Minister's nominee appeared before their formal appointment.

It would be helpful to know whether the Government have reached a settled view on that recommendation, just as it would be to know what the Minister makes of the Committee's recommendation, which seems quite sensible, that there may need to be clear, universally applicable guidelines on when a function should be implemented by a quango and when it should be implemented by either central or local government. We all understand that there must be some flexibility at the margin. However, there seems to be some confusion about whether a function should automatically be best implemented through an NDPB or through an elected tier of government.

I had an exchange with the Minister earlier about the number of taskforces and whether there would be fewer of them in this Parliament than in the previous one. Does he specifically accept the recommendation from the Committee on Standards in Public Life that taskforces should last for a maximum of two years? He will recall that the Committee reached that conclusion because it was said that taskforces should not be counted in the total number of NDPBs since they were temporary structures. The Committee thought that a temporary structure should by definition wind itself up within two years. Is that the Government's view? If not, many of us say that at least a number of those 300 or so taskforces should be counted as quangos and as a bit more than temporary.

On a slightly more constructive and less challenging note to the Minister, may I say how strongly I welcome what he said about wishing to see more people with disabilities appointed to public bodies of all sorts? I am a strong supporter of the creation of the Disability Rights Commission. Before Labour Members come to it, I am well aware that that was not the view of the last Conservative Government, but I think that the present Government were right to establish the commission. Their view on that has been entirely vindicated by events.

The commission has conducted itself admirably. I hope that the Minister will feel that he can take advice where appropriate from the commission on how best to take forward his strong commitment that there should be a greater number and diversity of people with disabilities on a range of public bodies.

I endorse what the Minister said about the many people who work very hard, either as board members or as employees for public bodies. We should recognise that public service can take a range of different forms, and we are very lucky in this country in the quality of many our public servants. None of them, any more us, is perfect, but they work extremely hard. Many of them do so not for a huge amount of money but with a strong commitment to their community. That should be welcomed.

As we have established, there is a valuable, long-term role for quangos, but there are a number of principles that it would be helpful to establish in relation to their running and the way they are organised. The first is greater openness about who is appointed to run them, how those people are appointed, and what and when decisions are taken.

The Minister outlined various ways in which the Government hoped to take that forward. He did not say much about the idea of having at least some meetings of the boards in public. We all understand that some discussions of commercial and other sensitivities cannot take place in public, but it would be helpful for the Government to say that, unless there are reasons to the contrary, it is useful to have meetings at least from time to time in public.

We need to know whether there will be a strong view about the auditing of those public bodies. The Select Committee recommended that the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee should have a greater role in auditing them. There seems to be a strong case for that. Again, that cannot apply in all circumstances, but as the Minister said, according to the most recent available figures, about £24 billion is spent by these public bodies, of which about £18 billion comes from central Government; the other sums come from fees and other charges that they levy. A large sum of public money is involved. It would be useful if the principle were established that the National Audit Office should have a wide rather than a narrow remit.

[Mr. Collins]

It is important that we put down a marker as a Parliament that arm's length relationships have a valuable role and that virtues can come out of them, but I am not a fan of the proposition that distancing Ministers, parliamentarians and politicians from accountability for decisions is always and invariably a good thing. Often, people will say that it is important that political considerations should be taken out of a particular decision-making process, when what they are really saying is that under no circumstances should the electorate be listened to. That is a dangerous principle.

All of us—I suspect that this is true of Labour Members too—when out of office, and sometimes when in office, may, in criticising the other side, have contributed to the creation of a climate in which the process of election has resulted in some people thinking that those who are elected are disqualified from making decisions, rather than qualified to do so. That is dangerous.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Is that not especially conspicuous when judges enter into the making of law, superseding the decisions of Members and the Government? That extends to decisions about the Home Secretary's powers in respect of sentencing.

Mr. Collins: I agree, but I will not go far down that route, as I suspect I would be rebuked by the Chair if I did. I merely say that the Home Secretary's remarks about the need for the primacy of Parliament and elected politicians in that respect are admirable, and that I hope they will be translated into action.

Consequently, I am afraid I do not agree with the recent conclusions of The Democratic Audit, a body that has conducted otherwise very useful research:

"Ministers and Parliament provide only a narrow, though valuably focused, route for accountability".

That comes dangerously close to being rather patronising about the role of the House. I feel that Ministers and Parliament should be the primary focus of accountability in the case of non-departmental public bodies. As the supreme elected body in these islands, the House should make it clear, on a collective basis, that nothing less than primacy of accountability will do. There may be other forums in which accountability can be exercised, but public bodies in the United Kingdom must be principally and primarily accountable to Ministers and, through Ministers, to Parliament.

My party has made it clear, both before and since the last election, that we are interested in the development of a range of means to strengthen the role, prestige and powers of this place. I very much hope that greater control of NDPBs, and a greater sense of their accountability to the House and its Committees, will form part of that agenda. I also hope that it will be possible to build some cross-party consensus on that.

I agree with the Minister about the role of public bodies, although I would tweak him slightly for one or two of the appointments that the Government have made. I hope that many of those involved in such bodies will interpret what is said today as both a strong indication of parliamentary support for their hard work and public service, and as a demonstration of the strong feeling on—I hope—both sides of the House that they should regard themselves principally and primarily as being accountable to this place.

10.13 am

Mr. David Heyes (Ashton-under-Lyne): I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins), and noted particularly his acknowledgement of the work of the Public Administration Committee. I shall return to that later.

This is my first opportunity to speak in the House, and I am especially pleased to be able to do so on a subject in which I claim a special interest, dry though some may think it.

Before I came to the House, much of my working life was spent with public bodies. I spent more than 25 years in local government, for example. I want to make some comments about the Minister's speech, which I welcomed, but first—according to the tradition of maiden speakers—I want to pay tribute to my predecessors in Ashton-under-Lyne.

That is not as straightforward as it may appear, because the constituency boundaries have been revised in every review that has taken place in modern times. From time to time, parts of the constituency have lain in the former constituencies of Manchester, Openshaw and Oldham, West. Among my illustrious predecessors are Charles Morris and, indeed, the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), who represented a third of my constituency for many years.

Since a by-election immediately after the war, however, the core of the Ashton-under-Lyne constituency has been served by just two Members—two men who, while being very different characters, had in common a passionate dedication to their constituents and the communities that they represented. Hervey Rhodes, later Lord Rhodes of Saddleworth, is still remembered with great affection and gratitude by many of my elderly constituents. His political work at local, regional and national level continued for many years after his retirement from the House.

I want to pay special tribute to my immediate predecessor, Robert Sheldon, now Lord Sheldon of Ashton-under-Lyne. Bob Sheldon achieved that distinction so rare among politicians: he was acknowledged as a true statesman. Although he achieved ministerial rank in the 1970s, his true potential, which was to rise to the highest ministerial office, was not to be realised as his prime years were spent in opposition. Nevertheless, his contribution has been enormous, most notably his chairmanship for many years of the Public Accounts Committee. Under his wise leadership, the Committee came to be the most powerful and respected in the House. I understand that in his day a summons from the Committee was enough to strike fear in to the heart of the wiliest Sir Humphrey. Indeed, it still is.

In more recent times, Bob's leadership and wisdom found another valued outlet in the work of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, which he led through some difficult encounters. His resilience and determination were proved again only last year, when he brushed aside the effects of a serious heart attack to make an amazing and rapid recovery after his life was saved in a famous incident. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation was provided by none other than Olympic champion Duncan Goodhew. If

you are going to collapse in the street with a heart attack, you need a very powerful pair of lungs to resuscitate you. Bob was certainly extremely lucky that day.

My fondest memories of Bob, however, will always be memories of his role as a hard-working constituency Member. The support and wise counsel that he has offered me in recent times has stood me in good stead as I have tackled the massive task of trying to emulate his achievements for his constituents.

I still receive letters from my constituents addressed to Bob, usually thanking him for the solving of some past problem and seeking his help with a new one—and, embarrassingly for me, confirming their undying support for him as their Member of Parliament, reassuring him that they voted for him in the last election, and promising to vote for him again in the next. Too often, I have had the unenviable task of explaining that Bob is no longer the MP, and that I am the unworthy replacement. The usual response, in the honest but dour Ashton style, is "Well, lad, if you do half as well as Bob Sheldon you'll do for me."

The fact that he commanded the undying and universal respect of his former constituents is the best tribute that could be paid to Lord Sheldon. He will indeed be a hard act to follow.

The Ashton-under-Lyne constituency has existed in its present form only since 1997, and Ashton-under-Lyne itself does not in fact lie at the heart of my constituency. The core of it, four to six miles from inner-city Manchester, is—surprisingly—open countryside, farmland and country parkland built around the Medlock valley. Historic Daisy Nook was made famous by local dialect poet Ben Brierley, and immortalised by L. S. Lowry in one of his finest paintings, depicting the Easter fair—which is still going strong after many generations.

Daisy Nook is part of Failsworth, my home town where I am proud to have lived for more than 30 years and brought up my family. The town is having something of an identity crisis. For nearly 100 years, it was a proudly independent urban district; then local government reorganisation placed it in the new metropolitan borough of Oldham. Despite that, the GPO has steadfastly refused to change Failsworth's postal address from Manchester. The boundary commission's decision to place Failsworth in the Ashton-under-Lyne constituency added to the confusion, and has caused much consternation locally.

Change is on the way, however. Thanks to a millennium lottery grant, the trans-Pennine Rochdale canal is being restored to full navigation, more than 50 years after falling into disuse. It has the potential to turn Failsworth, with its long-awaited new district centre, into a tourist mecca.

There are many fine schools in my constituency, but I am particularly proud to be associated with Failsworth school, nowadays a sports college and a magnificent community asset. A huge and growing range of sporting facilities are available there, not just for the students but for the benefit of the whole community. In fact, my first public duty as a newly elected MP was to open the college's new tennis courts.

The adjacent township of Hollinwood has suffered greatly in the past 20 years from the effects of blight, as the community awaited the go-ahead for the construction of the Manchester outer ring road. Despite that, Hollinwood has seen much innovation, with the huge Limehurst estate being one of the first in the country to be placed in the hands of a tenant-led management team. Investment in refurbishing homes and the rest of the built environment has transformed the quality of people's lives.

Limehurst school, re-built on a new site thanks to an imaginative local authority initiative, has been transformed and has now achieved beacon status. It is giving local youngsters a sound start in life. The area is also benefiting from a thriving sure start scheme, and the single regeneration budget has enabled the building of a new district centre. Hopes are high that a new community centre is on the way, too.

A metrolink—a light rapid transit line—is due to pass through Failsworth and Hollinwood, and construction should get under way in the next couple of years. That will boost the quality of our public transport and holds the promise of our achieving a truly integrated local transport network.

Above all else, we have the M60—the Manchester outer ring road—which was completed just over a year ago. Completion was at least 20 years behind schedule, but the motorway for the first time links disparate parts of my constituency. Failsworth and Hollinwood are now within easy reach of Droylsden and Ashton-under-Lyne. Although there has been a slow start, hopes are high locally that that vital link to the national motorway network will bring with it the industry, jobs and economic prosperity for which local people have waited for far too long. Local authorities, the business community and development agencies are making a tremendous effort to ensure that we seize such opportunities.

Droylsden, too, is to benefit from a metrolink line, which will run from Manchester to Ashton-under-Lyne. Droylsden is another proudly independent community, sitting astride the Ashton canal, with a bustling shopping centre and market. The township is to benefit soon from a new sports and leisure centre, which should give a new focus for youth activity. Droylsden is blessed with many excellent voluntary youth organisations. For example, only last week, I was privileged to attend the annual meeting of the Droylsden branch of the Air Cadets to present awards to some high-achieving young people. Such representatives of that generation give me great hope for the future.

This Cook's tour of my constituency ends with Ashton-under-Lyne itself. The heart of the town surrounds the famous traditional marketplace, with its daily indoor and outdoor markets drawing visitors from across the north-west. The newly extended shopping precinct makes Ashton the key retail destination in Tameside and east Manchester.

Ashton has also felt the benefits of canal restoration. Ashton canal, with its link to the Peak forest, has formed a section of the Cheshire ring for many years. With the restored Huddersfield narrow canal and one of the finest and most successful museums at the Portland basin where the canals converge, we have a fine resource, where young people can learn about a proud but often harsh industrial history and older folk can enjoy a nostalgic day out.

Some tremendous work is being carried out by the Ashton renewal team—a fine example of partnership that is helping to revitalise the urban core of the town. At one extreme, there is some ambitious house clearance and rebuilding, although some of the most impressive work is on a much smaller scale. For example, the alley gating

[Mr. David Heyes]

scheme is transforming the quality of people's lives by creating a secure environment around their homes. Such work has revived a once flagging community spirit.

As a Member whose constituency straddles the adjacent boroughs of Oldham and Tameside, I cannot avoid mention of the violent events that have troubled us in recent times. I do not want to go into detail, but the outcome of the independent review is awaited with interest. It will be vital that its recommendations are given serious consideration by local, regional and national agencies and Government. Above all else, it is vital that all people of good will give a clear lead in rejecting and countering the malignant efforts of extremist groups and individuals wherever they try to stoke the fires of race hatred.

My constituency has a rich ethnic mix. For many generations, people from all over the world have put down roots in Oldham and Tameside. The Muslim people of Ashton are here to stay, and their contribution to a culturally and socially diverse community is to be celebrated and valued. Those in the Indian community of Ashton have worked hard to play an active and constructive role in civic life. It was a great pleasure to play a small part in opening their magnificent new community centre recently.

I hope that it is apparent that I am very proud of my constituency. We stand on the brink of real opportunities to boost the life chances of local people. Much has been done in recent years, but we still need better housing, better education, better health care, better transport and less crime and disorder. The people of my constituency need good-quality, well-paid jobs and a decent income in retirement. Working towards those goals will be my priority in the years ahead.

I should like to turn briefly to the subject under debate. In the spirit of a maiden speech, I shall avoid controversial comment. I should declare an interest as a new and still greenhorn member of the Public Administration Committee. I am a member by choice; public administration is something I know a little of, if only as a result of many years' employment and active trade unionism in the public sector.

I know that the matter of quangos and public bodies has occupied the Committee greatly in recent years, and has resulted in comprehensive recommendations on their composition, scrutiny and accountability. I am pleased that reference has been made to the work of the Committee and its important role and contribution. I particularly look forward to reading the report on the work of the taskforces. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will share my wish and that of the Chairman and members of the Select Committee that its recommendations should continue to inform and help to shape Government policy in this important area.

10.26 am

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Heyes) on his maiden speech. He spoke passionately about his predecessor. I was amused by his comments; I am sure that letters will be addressed to him in the years ahead. He also spoke passionately about his constituency. It seems an enormously diverse area and I am deeply envious of its leisure and transport initiatives. Many things are happening in the hon. Gentleman's area. I only hope that he breaks the tradition and avoids a boundary review.

I welcome the fact that we are debating public bodies, because there is genuine concern about their role. We have heard from the Minister and the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins), the Conservative spokesman, about debates on the increase in their number, although there is no doubt that they represent a large part of the work of government. A considerable amount of money is spent by public bodies—£24 million—but mystery surrounds much of their work.

All Governments want to demonstrate that they are controlling the growth of public bodies, and we heard an interesting exchange between Conservative and Labour spokesmen each trying to demonstrate that they are more determined than the other to control such growth. We should put it on record, however, that the present Government have gone some way in tackling the issue. Although there are still many weaknesses in the system, posts such as the Commissioner for Public Appointments are helping to provide more information about what goes on in public bodies and to oversee some of the appointments and the concerns that many of us share.

I shall set aside some of the detail to raise a general concern about public bodies and the way in which the Government are able to engage the public and explain the work done. More than ever before, there is apathy about the Government and public bodies, a misunderstanding of their activities and a disengagement of the public from Government and the mechanisms by which they deliver services to ordinary people. The election saw the lowest turnout for many years. Although I am pleased to say that the highest turnout was in my constituency, the figure was down there, too.

As a result of such disengagement and misunderstanding, the public do not seem to want to get involved in either the process of electing politicians to take decisions on expenditure or the various local or national organisations in which they could have a direct say about how public money is spent.

In many cases, the honest truth is that all three parties have a battle in finding individuals to stand for local elections. There is a similar battle in many public bodies, particularly local ones. On most of the occasions on which I have seen the work of public bodies at meetings in the regions and communities, just a handful of members of the public have been present in the village hall, and not all that engaged in the process. I am not suggesting that the way in which public bodies operate is completely to blame, but I should like the Minister to step back from the detailed initiatives that he has talked about today and let us know the Government's thinking about our use of public bodies. We should think about them in a radical way and reform them so that they can bridge the disengagement between Westminster and local communities. They have an important role to play.

I spent last night and last Thursday night in discussion with my constituents. Last Thursday, 350 people turned up to discuss noise on a motorway and last night about 200 people turned up to discuss the impact of mobile phone masts. We know that when people get involved in issues, they want to join the debate and have a say in what

affects them. We need to bridge the gap so that people recognise the need to get involved in the public bodies and organisations that set the agenda that affects how much noise there is on motorways and where mobile phone masts are sited. There is a gap between people's interest in issues that affect them and their willingness to get involved in the agencies that may help them address those issues. The Government need to tackle that problem.

Having engaged people in some of those bodies, we need to consider the lack of representation. I was pleased to hear that the Minister is determined that people on public bodies should reflect the make-up of society, but it is hard to find good people to get involved in the process. Of course, some positions are sought after and there have been concerns about certain political appointments.

I welcome the work of the Public Administration Committee, of which the hon. Member for Ashton–under–Lyne is a member. I was a member of that Committee previously and its Chairman is passionately committed to tackling these issues. I also welcome the work of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in trying to make sure that sought-after appointments are made on merit rather than on the basis of favouritism. However, in her most recent report, the commissioner said that there had been an increase of 4.2 per cent. in the number of those appointed who had declared some form of political activity. I would welcome the Minister's view on that. It may be a blip; it may not mean that there has been an increase in political appointments, but I am concerned that the figure has increased from 14.8 per cent. to 19 per cent.

Mr. Tom Harris: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, rather than suspecting some evil conspiracy behind the figures, we should consider whether the Government have not done what all Governments do and simply appointed people who are willing to serve on these bodies? More often than not, those people already have an interest in public service, which usually means that they are engaged in some form of political activity. Perhaps what happens has more to do with playing to people's strengths and interests than with some kind of political conspiracy.

Mr. Oaten: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. We need to expand the process so that it does not always involve the same group of people but includes individuals who are not necessarily involved in politics. The hon. Gentleman's point has held good for a number of years, but I am concerned with the increase in the past year. It is a small increase, but it is worth the Minister commenting on it.

I am also concerned about the role of women in public bodies. The Minister rightly said that 33 per cent. of public bodies include women, but that figure has not changed since the Labour Government were elected. It is a pity that progress has not been as fast as we all would have liked it to be. In fact, some Departments which are involved in nominations have seen a decrease in the number of women appointed. The Treasury and the former Department of Social Security have reported such decreases. The latter has had to reduce its targets, and that is disappointing. I would welcome the Minister's view on how we can turn things around.

The Minister and the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale mentioned the inclusion of disabled people. The Select Committee reported a slight dip in the number of disabled people appointed to public bodies. Similarly there has been a dip in the appointment of people from ethnic minorities.

Two other barriers to achieving the Minister's aim of getting a broad range of individuals on to these bodies have not been mentioned this morning. The first is the lack of involvement of young people. The Minister is a shining example, as he has achieved a great deal at a young age. I think I am correct in saying that he is the youngest Minister in the Government. However, young people are not getting involved in public bodies. It is difficult to make that a target and I accept that it is not one of the Government's indicators, but I hope that the Minister will give some thought to how we can encourage more people under 40 to get involved. Perhaps because of the time commitment involved or the times at which public bodies meet, the tendency is for individuals to become involved when they are in their 50s and 60s, have already brought up their families and do not have pressing commitments. If public bodies are to be representative, particularly given the decisions that some of them take, it would be good to get some younger people involved.

Perhaps it is more controversial to say that most public bodies involve middle-class professional people. If we really want to include a more diverse range of people, we should encourage people from different professional networks. In a sense this picks up on the point that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) made in his intervention. We have to look at how people get involved in these organisations. We are part of a cosy network. That may be because we are politicians or because of our professional lives. That is where the chats take place and people say, "There is a position coming up. Would you be interested?" As long as that is how appointments are made, we will continue to exclude people from other parts of society. I do not know whether we can change that by looking at how positions are advertised. If the proposed solution is to advertise in *The Guardian*, it will not be good enough. We need to go out and seek good people who are getting involved in issues on estates and in communities and persuade them to step up their activities. We need to give them financial support so that they can get involved in public bodies.

My next concern relates to the lack of accountability in public bodies. The Public Administration Committee reported that 95 per cent. of non-departmental public bodies were under no requirement to produce an annual report. I find that as bizarre as the fact that Members of Parliament are not required to produce annual reports. Perhaps it is hypocritical of us to criticise other organisations. I produce an annual report and I believe that there should be a requirement for all hon. Members to do the same. However, the fact that 95 per cent. of public bodies do not produce an annual report cannot be contributing to accountability or explaining the work that they do.

Only 1.8 per cent. of advisory quangos release the minutes of their meetings. Although I quite understand why some of them may not want to do that, what is stopping such organisations as the Sustainable Development Education Panel, the UK Round Table on Sustainable Development, the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee making the minutes of their meetings accessible? Perhaps the Minister could comment, as I believe that there is a need for action and for a requirement on those organisations.

[Mr. Oaten]

My final concern relates to the Government's ability to slow down the increase in the number of public bodies. I have no doubt that nearly all of them are set up with good intentions. When an issue needs tackling, the Government nearly always respond by setting something up. The Government and the nanny state rarely step back and do nothing. That is the nature of politics. It is also the nature of politics that responding to a situation often involves bringing expert advisers in to help. There is nothing wrong with that, but we need to make more progress in trying to analyse whether we need all the bodies that exist. With so many bodies in place, how can they co-ordinate among themselves? There must be crossover, and the more non-government bodies there are, the more likely it is that the Government's ability to achieve joined-up government will be hampered.

Worse still, there has been a growth in the number of bodies being set up which fall outside the remit of this debate—organisations that are not described as public bodies or quangos. Appointments are being made, particularly by the Cabinet Office, to taskforces, ad hoc advisory groups and internal reviews. My concern is that these bodies fall outside our remit. They are described as temporary bodies, which means that they do not have to fall within the commissioner's remit. Of the 300 or so that exist, 52 have been in operation for more than the two-year limit that is recommended for a body to be regarded as temporary.

The Neill Committee said that after two years the Government should decide whether a temporary body is to be abolished or turned into a permanent organisation that would fall under the commissioner's remit and be included in the figures that the Minister gave. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can specifically address that concern and give a commitment to review the status of those 52 organisations so that they can either be abolished or can fall within the remit of the Neill Committee.

I welcome the debate. The Minister has been open about his ideas for making progress on this issue. I have raised specific concerns about the ability to include quangos in the figures and the importance of accountability. We can tweak the figures, but unless we tackle the problem of apathy in public engagement and find a way in which public bodies can engage with the public, the subject will remain mysterious, which does nothing to make the Government more accountable to the people whom we represent.

10.41 am

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I begin with an apology. I may have to leave before the final speeches because of constituency commitments, some of which I have cancelled because I am keen to participate in the debate.

Much can be said about the work of public bodies, but I intend to address a narrow point. Sport is a classic example of British administration in which independent public bodies are charged with implementing policy. What exercises me is how Ministers can deliver what is expected of them. We have not yet squared that circle.

I am concerned about appointments to public bodies. I want to consider whether the system of appointments is satisfactory and whether all sections of the community are properly included. The answer, as the Minister admitted, is not yet. Things are not improving, which is of great public concern. Although it is clear from his welcome remarks that efforts are being made to improve the system, my report on the work that is being done is that things are not good enough yet. I hope that we do better.

The Minister said that 33 per cent. of appointments to public bodies have been women, but Dame Rennie Fritchie's report makes it clear that this year there has been a decrease—admittedly marginal—in the number of female appointments, from 39 to 38 per cent. Although there has been a marginal increase in the number of women who chair bodies, there has also been a slight decrease in the number of appointments of people from ethnic minorities and a small decrease in the number of appointments of young people and disabled people. The record reflects a marginal backwards movement in our attempts to ensure that people are properly represented on public bodies. I expect better under a Labour Government. There is a will to do better, and we need to focus on how we can deliver on it in practice.

There are lessons to be learned. It will not surprise anyone who is interested in equal opportunities that although there has been a marginal increase in women chairs, the bodies with the most impact are dominated by men. For example, those executive non-departmental public bodies that pay more than £50,000 have a ratio of men to women of 6:1; for those that pay between £20,000 and £50,000, it is 4.5:1; and for those that pay between £10,000 and £19,000, it is 4:1. It is only in the lowest paid bodies that women are in a majority.

There is a problem with the level of authority and appointments, but what can we do about it? We need to address how people navigate their way into such appointments at any level, from local governing bodies—many people start on school governing bodies—to a dynamic executive NDPB. Finding a road in—the initial navigation—confuses most people. There are welcome initiatives, such as mentoring and shadowing schemes and the public service week, but I have the strong impression that the main route in for most people is via a network of which they are a part.

We know that such networks reproduce themselves. That is their nature. There is an urgent need to construct different types of networks. Public appointments reproduce a middle-aged-plus, middle-class, white male network. The Government's first job is to put substantial energy into creating different networks. We do not want one network to provide the motorway into public appointments. In addition to alleyways, byways and country lanes, we need to create different networks in every Department, to link and plug into voluntary action in communities and in those networks that are led by people who do not represent the classic appointees.

The network may provide a route to a system, but we need to confront the criteria that are used to determine many appointments. Every Department should be required to conduct an equality audit of the criteria that they use for public appointment. In my experience, such an audit can radically transform the types of people who are appointed. For example, a proper criterion for making an appointment to a body that deals with health or education should be experience of using those services. A person

may not have extensive boardroom experience, but extensive experience at the school gate should allow him or her to match the criteria and be appointed.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I sympathise with the hon. Lady's argument, especially in relation to people who are not used to sitting on committees and have not absorbed the committee culture. What concerns me is that having got on to the committee, they find the culture so hostile that it is impossible for them to make their point.

Fiona Mactaggart: That is an admission of failure on the part of our public bodies. We also need to audit properly the practices of those bodies that silence voices. I remember vividly being a very young member—it was a long time ago—of the governing body of a further education college. In those days, I did not have the confidence to call any of the other members by their first names. I called them Mr. So-and-so and Mrs. So-and-so, but they all called each other by their first names. Because I was so much younger, I did not feel that I had the authority to do that. It took courage—hon. Members will know that I am not short of that—to bust through that feeling and challenge a culture that, accidentally, had excluded me by its way of working.

As well as experience of public services, another appropriate addition to the appointment criteria might be commitment to a public service ethos. Many women and members of the ethnic minorities are or have been employed in the public service, but that is not counted as relevant experience for appointment. We also undervalue voluntary activity, especially if it is informal, when appointments to public bodies are considered. Many people have, for example, voluntarily organised school runs and child care circles, but those activities do not significantly contribute to their CVs, unless they have had clever training in how to present them. As a result, a set of major management skills are simply not recognised in appointment criteria.

The first task is to perform an equality audit of the criteria. The second is to make it easier for people who would like to know how to put themselves forward for public appointments. One problem that inhibits the under-represented groups in even applying is a form of self-censorship. I vividly remember a speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) about how the discrimination that she had faced in life because she is a woman was often self-created, but that the discrimination that she had faced because she is in a wheelchair was often physically in front of her. We need to make it easier for people to see their way in. I recommend the creation of a single website—it would improve access only for people with access to the web, but more people will have such access in future—that explains what bodies exist and gives information about appointments.

Mr. Tom Harris: My hon. Friend's points about accessibility to quangos have a parallel in the debate about encouraging women to enter Parliament, and I know that she has been involved in efforts to encourage women to stand as candidates. Those efforts have failed to the extent that we have had to change the law to make all-women shortlists legal. Is not what she suggests simply the same old method that has failed in our party?

Fiona Mactaggart: My hon. Friend anticipates the final point of my remarks. It has always been my view that when trying to make a horse drink, we should offer encouragement before dunking its head in. We need single gateways and simpler sources of information. When I have encouraged constituents who are appropriate candidates for appointment to public bodies, I have found it difficult to give them sensible information about what opportunities exist in suitable areas. For example, I know someone who works in public service, has much experience in building up ethnic minority businesses and is fanatical about cricket. He could contribute substantially in several areas—such as sport and business—but I could not direct him to a single website or publication that would give him information about what opportunities might exist. We need to simplify such information.

The third task is to form a clear policy for advertisements for jobs. I remember when the Greater London council took a policy decision to advertise posts in ethnic minority newspapers. Just that decision changed the nature of the people who were appointed to posts at all levels in that public authority. We are not as rigorous in public appointments now, and it is wrong that the main ethnic minority newspapers and publications aimed at women who are seeking employment are not used as a matter of course for advertising public appointments. Those who look in *The Guardian*, *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* are a peculiar minority bunch, and we need to ensure that those who are not in that class of people can find out about public appointments that might give them an opportunity to serve.

More work needs to be done to build on the shadowing and training initiatives. Dame Rennie Fritchie's report describes some impressive work in that area, but individual public bodies need to mount their own efforts to build on that. I also recommend that those who make appointments to public bodies take some risks, especially with young people. In many ways, it was a risk appointing me as a teenager to the board of an FE college, but I was a good governor and stayed on the governing body for a long time. Those who appoint people to public bodies should be given an opportunity to take a risk with one appointment—a wild card—and perhaps appoint a young person. Some of those appointments will fail, inevitably, and I do not suggest that risks are taken with appointments to chairs or with people who lack a broad enough range of experience. However, unless we take some risks, we will continue to reproduce the old pattern. There are places that we can look for appropriate young people, such as those who are attempting the Duke of Edinburgh award or who are involved in their student unions. They are not considered by those looking to recruit to our public bodies, but such young people have much to offer.

We must also consider using force to deal with the problem. We should consider imposing a quota on appointments to public bodies that have an especially poor record of appointing women, members of the ethnic minorities and disabled people. Let us be honest and admit that there are some constant recidivists. Unless we target them, they will not change. I asked for an information sheet from the Cabinet Office on appointment statistics, and I received some figures for 1999.

Hon. Members will not be surprised to learn that 92 per cent. of those appointed—more than 1,000—by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food were men.

[Fiona Mactaggart]

However, we all know how involved women are in food and food preparation in the family, and in managing and coping with the farm when the husband is out on his tractor. The second-worst was the Ministry of Defence, where the figure was 84 per cent., followed by financial institutions such as the Inland Revenue, the Royal Mint, the Export Credits Guarantee Department and the Treasury. They were in relative contrast to the Department of Health and the Home Office, but not one Department had a majority of women appointees.

The best was the Department of Health, where 44 per cent. of the appointments were women. However, we all know that the largest group of employees in the health service are women and that, very often, it is women who negotiate entry into the service. Within the family, women often manage the connection between the family and the health service. However, not even in the Department of Health were the majority of appointees women.

We have had enough of the voluntary approach. The Minister should force those Departments with the worst inclusivity records to become more interested. Until we use some stick, the carrot will continue to fail. This is not just a mad feminist ranting from the Back Benches. I have looked carefully at our public service and it is not serving people like me properly. Until the voice of women is heard in the Treasury, the Bank of England and other financial institutions, we will miss out on a different perspective and, as a result, we will do the job worse.

Women need representation. Without it, institutions fail because they ignore not half of the population, but more than half. My remarks about women apply also to disabled people, who are physically excluded from many of the services provided or supervised by public bodies, and who are not counted in policy making. They apply also to those in ethnic minorities who, in many ways, have been the worst victims of the kind of networks that I have described.

Our record on this is just not good enough. I want to praise the Minister for calling the debate and for having the courage to admit that not enough progress has been made. But those of us who support him might start not only to encourage him, but to shove him forward, because it is not enough to make good statements or to have good intentions. We must have a strategic plan that delivers.

Labour has been in power for five years and has not made a sufficiently substantial impact on appointments to public bodies. There has been good will, but there have not been enough powerful instruments to ensure that that good will is implemented. I suspect that, in many cases, the usual channels and the usual networks have produced lists of chaps for Ministers to approve. Ministers have been busy and have had neither the energy nor the time to say, "Let's have some chapesses. We are bored with this." So the chaps have carried on getting through, and many of them are very good chaps. However, they cannot do all the work on their own. Until we get proper representation of currently excluded groups, we will fail our communities.

Non-departmental public bodies have huge responsibilities in terms of public service. They cannot properly serve the public unless they include all sections of the public in decision making. At present, they are failing to do that.

11.5 am

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Ashton–under–Lyne (Mr. Heyes) on his election and on his maiden speech. I was particularly interested to hear about the frequent boundary changes that seem to have afflicted his constituency. I am pleased to say that the boundaries of my constituency have not changed since 1832, except where the sea has eaten bits away: something that is not a danger to the hon. Gentleman.

The Minister adopted a narrow definition of public bodies and never got beyond it. Obviously, we recognise the importance of the non-departmental public bodies to which he referred, and I recognise among them some local examples, such as the boards of visitors which do such sterling work in the three prisons on the island.

By definition, if there are non-departmental public bodies, there are also departmental public bodies. The Government need to adopt a rational definition that looks at all public bodies and all appointments to those public bodies, not simply those that happen to be non-departmental. These include the governing bodies of schools, harbour authorities, primary care trusts, learning and skills councils—both national and local—and the many local bodies that build up and sustain the fabric of our communities. Many of these are voluntary and wholly extra-statutory, although some are public bodies in the sense that they are publicly appointed and statutory in origin.

The biggest public body of all in this country is the one of which this House is a part; the body that makes the legislation by which all our citizens live. The other place is an important component of this Parliament, and I would like to refer to the reforms to the other place introduced by the Government. I should start by saying that if I were going to reform the House of Lords, I would not be starting from here. Indeed, were I back in 1997, I am not sure that I would have reformed the House of Lords in the first place. It did a good job under past Governments of all political complexions, and it has continued to do a very good job under the current Government in both the manifestations that the Government have introduced.

Mr. Tom Harris: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously saying that, at the beginning of the 21st century, his preference would be for a wholly or largely hereditary second Chamber? I find that an amazing statement.

Mr. Turner: I was saying merely that, until 1997, the House of Lords—on a hereditary basis—had done an excellent job. As Gilbert and Sullivan put it, the House of Lords

"Did nothing in particular,

And did it very well."

I am not talking about where we go from here, because we no longer have that fortunate composition of the House of Lords which the Government inherited and then decided to destroy.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) pointed out, the Government have substituted a House of Lords with a significant composition made up of Tony's cronies.

Fiona Mactaggart: The hon. Gentleman's words are carefully chosen and very significant, although I reject the label "Tony's cronies". Does he accept that, even with life peers, a minority are Labour?

Mr. Turner: I accept that the Prime Minister does not always nominate for ennoblement people who will accept the Labour Whip in the other place. More to the point, the right hon. Gentleman has nominated for ennoblement more people in the four and a half years he has held office than Baroness Thatcher did in the 11 years we were fortunate enough to have her as Prime Minister.

Labour Members need to understand how much patronage the Prime Minister has exercised. It has been exercised not to improve the representation of Labour Members or Labour ideas, let alone socialist ideas, in the House of Lords, but to improve the representation of a certain small metropolitan class, of which the Prime Minister is the greatest exponent and advocate. If Labour Members want evidence for that statement, I will provide it.

The Prime Minister said earlier this year that 267 people had been elevated to the peerage on his recommendation. Of those, 20 per cent. live in London, within the M25. Not even the constituency of the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) is included. Of course, fewer than 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom's population live in London. Significantly more than 1.5 per cent. live in the east midlands, but the Prime Minister has felt it necessary to nominate for ennoblement only three people who live there. The Prime Minister's nominations are "Tony's cronies" in terms of composition, friendship and networks as well as being a highly unrepresentative, metropolitan, chattering-class élite.

Mr. Tom Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how a more fair distribution of seats in the other place could be achieved through the hereditary principle?

Mr. Harris: It is a fact that more hereditary peers live outside London, in proportionate terms, than those whom the Prime Minister has recommended for ennoblement in the past four years. The President of the Council, in bringing forward the Government's proposals for reform of the House of Lords, has looked for regional representation, by election as well as nomination, and I congratulate him on that. He is aiming for proper representation of the regions. For far too long, as I think the hon. Member for Slough might have said, our public bodies have been dominated by people nominated from and living in London. That is no way to represent a country as diverse as the United Kingdom.

The President of the Council confirmed that it was his intention that future nominations to the other place should be regionally balanced. He also recommended a certain balance in terms of gender, and hoped for balance in representation of the ethnic minorities. I do not recall him mentioning disabled people, but I am prepared to be corrected. He felt that 30 per cent. was the minimum appropriate representation of women in the other place, and that 30 per cent. was the minimum appropriate representation of men. However, the right hon. Gentleman was unable to say whether the Government were expecting a rebalancing exercise to take place in the early stages of the life of his proposed new House. In my view, and I am sure that many people outside London would agree, it is appropriate to have a rebalancing exercise among the nominated Members of the reformed upper House at a very early stage, if that reform should ever come to fruition.

I wish to consider some of the other proposals that the President of the Council made for the reform of one of the most important public bodies in the country. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson), who is on the Front Bench, to close his ears for a moment. The Conservative party has not yet come to a final view on the future of the House of Lords, but I would like to put forward some suggestions in a friendly way.

The most obvious and representative way to appoint people to the other place is by lot. That method has been used in other legislatures in the past but I do not propose using it at the moment, not least because I fear that many people would not wish to accept nomination by lot. Being willing to accept nomination by lot would in itself make people unrepresentative.

I welcome the Government's proposal that the number of elected Members of the House of Lords should be severely restricted. Again, it is a curious kind of person who is willing to put himself up for election at any level in society. One has only to look around the House to be clear about that. We achieve more effective representation if we allow the nominated element to be larger than the elected element. The quality of those putting themselves forward for election to the new National Assemblies for Wales and for Northern Ireland and for the Scottish Parliament appears, from the point of view of someone representing a southern English constituency, not to be as high as that of those putting themselves forward for election to this place. However, the Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish can have their say on that—I should be tactful and remain silent.

I welcome the Government's proposal to make the office fairly long term. A period of seven to 15 years—although, ideally, it would be for life—is much more appropriate than a short one. Then those people retain independence from the nominating body. One of the great virtues of the life peers, not to mention the hereditary peers, whose nominating body is rather higher than ours, is that they are independent once appointed. Their strings cannot be pulled by No. 10 or by Ministers. So a long period of office makes for greater independence.

I also welcome the suggestion that the nominations should be proportionate to the votes cast at the preceding election. That seems a sensible way of reaching a compromise between a proportional representation election, which I think none of us would seriously welcome, and a system in which the Government nominate as many people of their complexion as they wish.

I have an additional change to suggest. The proportion of those not voting in the most recent general election should also be represented. The best way to do that is by giving those nominations to the appointing body. If 45 per cent. of the electorate choose not to vote for any of the political parties that have put themselves forward for

[Mr. Harris]

election, clearly they are looking for a more independent form of representation. I believe that if 45 per cent. abstained in the 2001 general election, 45 per cent. of nominees to the upper House should be appointed by the independent appointing body and should be expected to take an independent, Cross-Bench position when they sit in the House of Lords. The number of nominations would vary with the electors' confidence in the programmes that the various political parties put forward at the election.

Fiona Mactaggart: Earlier in his speech, the hon. Gentleman welcomed the proposal for longer appointments. Although I disagree with him on the issue of proportional appointments, I agree with him that longer-term appointments would encourage independence. However, may I invite him to read carefully paragraph 57 of the White Paper—which suggests that the options for appointment length are five, 10 and 15 years, and that the Government are tempted to opt for five or 10 years? Perhaps he would like to encourage them to accept the longer-term option, to obtain the type of independence that he seeks.

Mr. Turner: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. In the light of it, perhaps I should say that the word "welcome" was overgenerous. I should have said that I note the Government's proposals and urge them to move in the direction of appointments for seven to 15 years or possibly for life.

I also believe the letters ML—Member of the Lords—are wholly inappropriate because there will be many Lords outside Parliament, and we are not even clear that the other place will be called the House of Lords. I was thinking of PPs, for Peers of Parliament, but then I thought that that might result in people being called "Peeps". I think that LPs, for Lords of Parliament, would be appropriate post-nominal initials for those appointed or elected to the other place.

The general point on public bodies is that their job is to implement policies made by those who are elected by the people. It is for elected government, at whatever level, to determine policy. One practice that I rather deprecate is the tendency to hand over to public bodies policy-making responsibilities rather than merely policy-implementation responsibilities.

There is also a danger of our passing policy-making responsibility to supranational bodies such as the European Community, in treaties, and into the realm of judge-made law. It is fine of course for judges to determine specifically what the law was intended to mean, but I deprecate the current tendency for judges to enter into pre-legislative debate on what the law ought to be. If judges set down what the law ought to be, there is danger that, once the House has made law that does not conform with what the judges think it should be, they will go on to make it what they had said it should be in the first place. Consequently, we would lose confidence in the judiciary's independence.

I also deprecate the type of job creation scheme for human rights lawyers that we have seen with the incorporation of the European convention on human rights in British law.

The question is whether we as Members of Parliament—I speak for both hon. Members and Members of the other place—have the power to put right the wrongs that are felt by our constituents. I have absolutely no doubt that the House and the other place are the greatest public bodies in our land. We should as far as possible seize back the policy-making power, and certainly the legislative power, from the onward march of judge-made and foreign law, not for ourselves but for those whom we represent.

Local government is another important category of public body, although we have failed so far to recognise it in this debate. I am speaking of local councils at county, district and town level. I should also like briefly to illustrate the possibility, indeed the actuality in my own constituency, of achieving greater representation of young people and ethnic minorities than ever before. In the past four years the Conservative party has achieved that goal in my constituency. Although I do not claim that my party is alone in achieving it, I nevertheless congratulate Drew Mellor, 21, on being recently elected to the Isle of Wight county council. He not only sits on the education committee, most unusually for a student, but has won a ward that was held by another party for more years than most of us can remember.

I also congratulate Cliff Huggins on being elected to the county council in 1998. He is the first non-white member of the Isle of Wight county council. I congratulate, too, Abdul Mateen on his election, in 1999, to Cowes town council. He is the first non-white member of that council. It is possible for local government to encourage the membership of ethnic minorities, women and young people. However, we have to encourage that to happen, and I do not think that we will do it through the appointments process.

I also do not think that we will encourage the representation of a wider cross-section of people by establishing more regional bodies, which by their very nature are distant. Unless one is unfortunate enough to live in Guildford, one will not think that the south-eastern regional assembly is very close. My electors find it difficult enough to have their police authority run from Winchester; they certainly do not want to be run from Guildford. Nor do we wish to see a greater range of regional bodies. Indeed, some of us would ask about the boundaries on which the Government are relying to create the regional bodies. There is no rhyme or reason to connect Hampshire with Milton Keynes and Kent rather than with Dorset, and there is certainly little rhyme or reason to connect the Isle of Wight with any authority on the mainland besides, perhaps, Hampshire.

Southern Arts and SouthEastern Arts are public bodies that do a very good job in their respective areas, but the Government are proposing to amalgamate them for no better reason than to achieve coterminosity with the wholly artificial south-east region. As I said, it is the truly local bodies, both public and private, that constitute the warp and weft of the fabric of our local society.

Earlier, I mentioned the danger of the Isle of Wight being run from Winchester. Brading is a town with a population of about 1,200, and St. Helens is a village with a slightly smaller population. They have not seen eye to eye since the Napoleonic wars, when a French raiding party came to St. Helens and the townspeople of Brading quite generously left them to get on with it. Although they feel it very unfortunate that they have the same county councillor, I am pleased to say that he is a Conservative councillor and manages to represent both disparate

communities very well. Nevertheless, if two adjoining places on the Isle of Wight do not see eye to eye, it is hard to see how we can have regional government.

We want bodies, both public and private, that have an agenda that attracts the interest and involvement of local people, rather than asking how on earth we can get people involved in those bodies. The bodies have to do what the people want—give them the power and let them get on with it. Governing bodies of grant-maintained schools are a perfect example of that. I had a small part in creating many of those bodies, and they did such an excellent job that the Government, in "abolishing" them, have done their best to adapt the experiences of grant-maintained schools to Government education policy by giving as many schools as possible the same type of powers and responsibilities. The Government have of course not achieved that as well as the Conservative Government did, but they have sought to give as many schools as possible the same types of powers and responsibilities.

Mr. Oaten: There is a contradiction in the hon. Gentleman's argument. At the start of his speech he said that he disapproved of power and money being devolved to organisations and felt that Westminster should have more power; now he is arguing that those bodies will be effective only if they can take policy decisions, for which they will require money.

Mr. Turner: The hon. Gentleman misheard me. I did not say that I disapprove of devolving power and money. I said that it was fine to devolve power over policy implementation, but that the power to make policy should be held in this place. It is the duty of the elected representatives of the people to determine policy.

I welcome and I recognise, as I hope that the Government recognise—I am sure they do—the very important role of the many men and women who serve on governing bodies, town and parish councils, health authorities, primary care trusts and NHS trusts, harbour authorities and the whole host of local public bodies to which I fear the Minister hardly referred in his introductory remarks.

We must realise that not everything can or should be done by the Government or by the council. In his introductory remarks, the Minister said that we choose to meet through collective organisation, locally, regionally and nationally, many of the needs of our society. However, those local, regional and national organisations do not all need to be Government-inspired. For example, the Cowes Combined Clubs is a private association of three or four yacht clubs which organise Cowes week. In one week of the year alone, those who come to the island by yacht bring £60 million to the island's economy. That is a huge contribution, made with minimal Government interference, I am pleased to say, and certainly with little Government involvement either locally or nationally. That has been achieved by a private arrangement between private organisations.

I do not question the motives of the hon. Member for Slough in complaining about the unfair male, middle-age—although sometimes that applies to people of all ages and both sexes—dominated appointment process. I acknowledge that the people she described—the mums who can organise school runs and child care circles—need to be represented. I do not believe that we should have to adapt to a committee culture when we are appointed to public bodies; many of us have been able to do that, but many others find it difficult. However, I question whether any system—however detailed or robust—will ever represent people effectively through the nomination process to public bodies.

Perhaps the hon. Lady is an optimist and I am a pessimist; perhaps we approach the matter by different routes. I believe that the fewer public bodies that act between people and the services they require, the better; because then those bodies, however good, will not—sometimes inadvertently, sometimes intentionally—form an obstacle to access to those services.

Do we really need all these public bodies? We should give as much power as possible back to the individual voter and the individual consumer of public services. We should always be on the lookout for ways to reduce—although we shall never eliminate—the number of public bodies.

11.33 am

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Heyes) on his maiden speech. He referred, in a self-effacing way, to not being a worthy successor to Bob Sheldon. I assure him that any of his constituents who heard his speech will consider him a very worthy successor. Without wishing to sound complacent, may I express the belief that, unlike his predecessor, my hon. Friend will spend most of his prime years in the House on the Government rather than the Opposition Benches?

I thank the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) for broadening the debate beyond the definition of a quango to discuss public bodies as a whole. Later in my speech, I shall refer to my experiences working with public bodies that might not be strictly defined as quangos but would fall within the bounds of this debate.

When we talk about quangos, we usually focus on whether they are a good or a bad thing. In the past, the debate became quite sterile and polarised. People were either for quangos or against them. That is not helpful. Some of us may remember that in the 1980s such a debate was held in the Labour party. People came down on one side or the other—for or against health boards being directly elected or accountable to local councils. That is no longer helpful, as I shall explain later.

There is an element of public ignorance regarding what a quango is: it is not a soft drink. In Scotland, when people are appointed to public bodies, especially if the person has a record of political service, the call goes up, "You've been quangoed". That says something about the low esteem in which many of those organisations are held.

Before the 1997 general election, the then shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, now Lord Robertson, promised a bonfire of the quangos if Labour won the election. Much to the consternation of the chattering classes, that bonfire has not happened—certainly not in Scotland. I am not convinced that that is a bad thing. In retrospect, the "bonfire of the quangos" phrase was a hostage to fortune.

It is significant that the Labour Opposition were not the first Opposition to promise a dismantling of quangos. I note the comments of the hon. Member for Westmorland

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and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) about the reduction in the number of people employed by quangos after the 1997 general election. However, despite a reduction in the number of people employed by quangos, there was a very modest reduction in the number of quangos. I accept that fewer people worked for them. In opposition, parties tend to count numbers and say that there will be a reduction when they are in government, but often it does not work out like that.

Criticism of the Government for creating extra quangos is misguided. As my hon. Friend the Minister pointed out, the number of NDPBs—a term that I shall not use again during this debate: quango is a much more friendly term—fell by 10 per cent. between 1997 and 2000. That spikes the gun of those Opposition Members who say that we are setting up taskforces instead of implementing policy. That is not the case.

However, it may be missing the point to focus on that statistic. Instead of counting quangos and worrying about how many there are and about how many people are appointed by them, we should be considering whether those organisations are doing the job for which they were established. Are they providing the services that we need to offer ordinary people? Are the services of a high quality? Are the members of the quangos accountable to Ministers?

To return to Labour party history, this debate is rather like the one we held on nationalisation. It was only when John Smith became the leader that we realised that ownership itself was not the point: regulation and control were what mattered. There is a similar point to be made about quangos. It is not the numbers that matter—they mean nothing to anyone—but the services they offer and their effect on the lives of ordinary people.

I do not conform to the view that quangos are by their nature unaccountable to the public. In my experience, I can think of a few quangos that have been more responsive to the public than certain Departments, although if I were pressed to give an example, those cases would all be before 1997.

In a debate in Westminster Hall, my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) pointed out that the term "quango" is a bad word. He compared quangos to theme parks, call centres and breakfast television. That is rather unfair—especially to call centres, which provide many jobs in my constituency. Indeed, it is about time that the term "call centre" went through a rehabilitation. The point is that people may not be able to tell the difference between a quango and an elected local body. Perhaps we should not expect them to do so.

There was some discussion earlier of the difficulty of persuading people to stand for appointment to quangos. I take what may be a cynical view. When people elect Governments, they want us to get on with the job and leave them alone. Voters in Scotland went to the polls five times between May 1997 and June 2001. They completed seven ballot papers and we ended up with a total of 18 politicians representing every individual Scot. That is no doubt something to be celebrated. I rejoice at the expansion of democracy, but we have the prospect of even more elections. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight talked about putting a limit on the number of elected peers in any future reform. If only 55 per cent. of people turn out to vote in elections to the House of Commons, there is not a strong argument for expecting people to turn out and vote in an election to the House of Lords, which the hon. Gentleman said might be described as the greatest quango ever. I am not sure that that is an accurate description.

Mr. Oaten: Does the hon. Gentleman think that members of the public would be more likely to turn out and vote if they felt that they were voting for the whole House of Lords rather than just 20 per cent of it?

Mr. Harris: The simple answer is no. I accept, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we do not want to stray too far from the core issue, but the simple fact is that the statistics show that turnout at general elections, which are the most important elections, has steadily declined over the past 20 years. I am sceptical about how easy it will be to reverse that trend. The turnout at elections to the House of Lords on the same day as or, even worse, half way between general elections, could be so derisory that it would negate any beneficial effect. Time will tell. I do not believe that the public are straining at the leash for another election.

I have mentioned my time working for public bodies that are not quangos. We can take the House of Lords as one example, and local authorities as another. I worked for East Ayrshire council. The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) said how difficult it was to motivate local voters to become involved in a general way. If the water commissioner for Scotland holds a public meeting on a broad issue such as the standard of water services, the same half dozen people will come out every time. It is only when there is a specific problem that people come out in numbers.

I was public relations manager for East Ayrshire council between 1996 and 1998, during which period the council held quarterly community forums. I understand that that practice continues. A huge amount of effort and resources goes into organising those meetings so that members of the public can come and listen to their councillors spout forth about cleaning the streets, emptying bins or local education services. At every single meeting, the same six people turned up. Perhaps the public simply want politicians to get on with the job. Bizarrely enough, if turnout is very low at consultation meetings, there is an argument for saying that it shows that people are not unhappy with the service. They may not be enthusiastic about it, but if they were unhappy, they would turn out.

Mr. Oaten: I do not wish to extend the debate, but it may be that local communities should take ownership of some of the services. That would be a much better model, in which people would be engaged rather than going to meetings to hear individuals who run services on their behalf.

Mr. Harris: I agree with the hon. Gentleman to a certain extent. The point goes back to the debate that we had about encouraging people to stand for election to public bodies. The average person on the street is not like us in the House. They could not care less about politics except once every four years at general elections. I have a similar view of football; I am not interested until it comes to the World cup. The average voter wants to stay in at night and watch television, to go out for a meal or

go to the cinema. They do not want to sit in a dusty, cold hall listening to a lecture about democratic accountability in the local council.

I agree with the comments that have been made about the system of appointments to quangos. It is one of the strengths of the system. It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for Isle of Wight express concern that the geographical representation of the future House of Lords might not be equal. I accept that it is not equal now, but the hon. Gentleman did not mention the importance of balancing the sexes in the new House of Lords. He was more concerned about equal representation of Yorkshire, Wales, Scotland and Tyneside than about representation of ethnic minorities, disabled people and women. That is unfortunate. The system for appointing people to quangos has the potential—it may not always be used in this way—to redress the imbalance that exists in the House of Commons and almost every other elected body. That is a good thing. For that alone, quangos have performed a vital service to our country and its political culture.

When I express general support for quangos, I do not say that the principle of accountability is not important. It is extremely important. Apart from anything else, quangos have a huge amount of money to spend. Executive quangos—those concerned with administrative, regulatory and commercial functions—spent £24 billion in 1999-2000, although only 77 per cent. of that came from the Government. I am not sure where the rest of it came from, but perhaps charges and fees accounted for the balance.

The Government deserve some credit for opening up the culture of quangos, but an incredibly small proportion of quangos produce annual reports, allow the public into their meetings and produce reports of their meetings. They will not do so until the Government tell them to. That is a huge failing in public accountability. That attitude has led to the low esteem in which the public hold most quangos. The danger is that, if the public have a low opinion of quangos, publicly elected servants will suffer from that negative attitude, so it is in our interests to ensure that quangos are accountable and get their act together in terms of public accountability.

There is a crucial weakness which is becoming more obvious in Scotland but is not confined to Scotland. There is ignorance or perhaps apathy among the public as regards how they are governed. I have mentioned the number of elected representatives for each Scot, and that has not stopped the spread of confusion. Let me give the House an illustration of where we are going in Glasgow. We have nine parliamentary constituencies. I will not get on the wrong side of my hon. Friend the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household by including his constituency in Glasgow. Much to my disappointment, that number will go down shortly. If it does, it is likely that the number of constituencies returning Members of the Scottish Parliament will stay the same. So we already have a difference in the coterminosity—a dreadful word—of constituencies. That alone will cause confusion.

The Greater Glasgow health boards cover not only the city but the surrounding area, including Milngavie and Bearsden in the north, Eastwood in the south and Clydebank. In addition, we have the local NHS trusts. Glasgow and Clyde Valley tourist board covers a completely different geographical area. Then there are all the residual bodies left over from Strathclyde regional council—another body that I used to work for. When I left the employment of the Labour party in Scotland in 1992 to join Strathclyde regional council, one wag quipped, "You are going from one sinking ship to another." In the long term, however, that judgment was proved to be incorrect as regards the former.

The residual bodies from Strathclyde regional council are technically not quangos but executive bodies, and they add to the complicated pattern of public bodies. Although the Strathclyde passenger transport executive, by which I was employed until June this year, is a non-elected body, it is accountable to the Strathclyde passenger transport authority, and its remit is huge. It is responsible for funding the public transport system for 2 million people in west central Scotland, and its geographical boundary is completely different from those of any of the other bodies that I mentioned, as well as those of the West of Scotland water authority, the Strathclyde police board and the Strathclyde fire board.

I am sorry to see that the Conservative Benches are now almost vacant because I want to make a party political point. The previous Conservative Government contributed substantially to people's cynicism about public bodies because they played such an obviously partisan game with public bodies in Scotland. They got rid of Strathclyde regional council because they saw that as the only way to change the fact that people in west central Scotland had the cheek to keep electing Labour councillors. Even as they got rid of it, they confounded their own arguments for doing so by accepting that there had to be strategic authorities to provide water, fire, police and transport services.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale took exception to my suggestion that the Conservatives had misused their power in the 1980s by appointing many Conservative placemen to quangos in Scotland. I totally accept that, politically and legally, there was nothing to stop them doing that, and I have no objection to it. However, the Conservatives made a political misjudgment because of arrogance resulting from their strong electoral position in the UK. In the long term, that led to their complete elimination at the 1997 general election. We could have warned them that that would happen.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said that we are a unionist party, and, unlike his party, we think that MPs from all parts of the country should have equal rights in this House. That is why we, rather than the Conservatives, are the unionist party. Arrogance in the use of appointments to quangos works against the party in government, and I am delighted to note that this Government are not guilty of making the same mistakes.

There are 82 national quangos in Scotland—a fact that I found out only last night—including the children's panel and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Scottish Minister for Education, Jack McConnell, on using his powers to sort out the dreadful mess that the SQA was in last year, which resulted in a great deal of confusion and personal distress for many parents and students in Scotland. The SQA is a good example of a quango accountable to a devolved Parliament which got out of control during the year of change-over from the Scottish Office to the Scottish Parliament and has now been brought back within the scope of ministerial accountability. It shows how a quango can work to the benefit of the people of Scotland now that it is being called to account by democratically elected Ministers.

[Mr. Harris]

I list all those examples merely to point out a great weakness in the structures of quangos. There is a dreadful misunderstanding by the public about how services are provided. It is difficult for members of the public to know who to contact when something goes wrong. As we all know, if they do not know who to approach, they come to us. I have no objection because that is our job, but the Government's impressive efforts to make quangos more open and accountable may come to nothing if they cannot sort out the structure of quangos on a UK-wide basis and, where appropriate, on a Scottish, Welsh or Northern Ireland basis.

Three of the quangos listed in "Public Bodies 2000" are nationalised industries: CalMac, the Scottish Transport Group and Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. I did not know that we still had nationalised industries in Scotland. The third of those quangos reminds me of the story of an American woman in Glasgow who went to visit the Western isles. She reported that as she was getting the bus from the Glasgow terminus out to the aeroplane, she was surprised and not a little panic-stricken to realise that the bus was taking off. I am always concerned when the crew start clapping after those planes have taken off. Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. is obviously an important body in Scotland.

I came across a question and answer note prepared by the Cabinet Office. One question is:

"What is the Government's policy on quangos?"

The answer is:

"The Government is committed to keeping the number of quangos to an absolute minimum and to ensuring that those which remain are open, accountable and effective."

I agree with the last part, and I do not think that we should get too hung up on the number of quangos. We should concentrate far more on the quality of service and the quality of the people who serve on quangos.

11.57 am

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): It is a pleasure to take part in the debate. As someone whose day job is in the Opposition Whips Office, I do not know whether I should say this, but the House is at its best when there is, if not full cross-party agreement, agreement on so many issues. We certainly agree on what we want from public bodies, how they should be run, how accountable they should be and how people should be appointed to them.

I do not intend to summarise the debate; that is a task for my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins), when he returns to the Chamber. We have heard excellent contributions not only from Front-Bench Members, but from everyone who has spoken, including the hon. Members for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Heyes), for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) and for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) and my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner).

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne on his election and his maiden speech. I well remember when I made my maiden speech, and although I spoke on a Wednesday afternoon, when one might have expected more Members to be present than are here today, that was not the case. I look forward to hearing from him an awful lot more.

I do not think that I have to declare an interest for receiving hospitality from a public body, the Horserace Totalisator Board, but I mention it because I shall return to that organisation later.

The Minister made an excellent presentation, explaining what public bodies are and the categories into which they fall, but I was surprised to hear exactly how much money is spent on them—£24 billion, or perhaps £18 billion is a more relevant figure as that is what comes from the public purse. When such huge sums are spent, we must ask whether it is worth while and whether the public get from those public bodies the service that they have a right to expect.

What else could that money buy? Would it be better spent on more direct public services, such as the health service? Should it be left in taxpayers' pockets? Governments should always ask that question when taking money from the taxpayer. Do public bodies provide the quality of service that people need? Do they provide the constitutional administration on which the country depends?

The answer to those questions depends on which public body is concerned. The House was again at its best when it was discussing stem cell research, and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is an extremely important public body. Indeed, it is probably one of the most important in existence, given the issues that it regulates. Before I entered the House, I dealt with homeless people and the Housing Corporation is an important public body that provides money to tackle homelessness. Thus some public bodies are very important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight spoke about grant-maintained schools. He played down his role in creating the system of grant-maintained schools, which has been a huge success. I pay tribute to his work. If grant-maintained schools can be described as public bodies, they are another example of bodies that can affect the communities in which they operate and the lives of so many people.

I wonder, however, whether the Apple and Pear Research Council is important. It may well be, and I stand corrected if it is. Some public bodies sound serious but I wonder whether they do the work that we want them to do. I know from my time on the Select Committee on Social Security that the benefits tribunal caused us great concern. Indeed, it was the subject of an inquiry at that time.

What about the National Lottery Charities Board? I have always defended the national lottery, but there have been problems in its operation. Organisations in Tewkesbury have made about 15 per cent. of the applications made from Gloucestershire, a proportion appropriate to its population, yet until recently Tewkesbury had received only 3 per cent. of the money that has come to the county.

I looked at a number of those applications and they were of good quality and very sensible, but they did not attract money. What can I, as a Member of Parliament, do about that? I went to see the then Minister, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), who was extremely helpful, but she could do nothing either. It was obvious that my constituents were being treated unfairly. That is an example of a public body operating unfairly. I admit

that it had its criteria, but I suggest that it was not operating fairly in the interests of everybody across the country.

Although there are some good and important public bodies, such as the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which has perhaps a frightening amount of power given the scale of its task, other public bodies are less important. Indeed, some public bodies should not exist at all.

I have already mentioned the Tote, which has been a public body since 1927. Three years ago, the then Home Secretary announced that the Tote was to be released from Government control, yet nothing has happened. I began by declaring an interest in the Tote, but I do not speak in its favour; I simply say that the Government have a clear opportunity to lose that quango. Linked to it is the Horserace Betting Levy Board, which distributes money through the horseracing industry. It is another body that could be returned to the private sector.

The Government have no need to be involved in either of those public bodies. They have recognised that, yet those of us who take an interest in the industry cannot get the Government to do something about it, despite the fact that little parliamentary time would be required.

I mentioned that I could not make any progress with lottery applications for Tewkesbury, and did not seem to make an impression on the National Lottery Charities Board or Sport England. In spite of having had long, boring meetings with them, there was no way forward. That leads me to accountability.

Many public bodies have a lot of power and responsibility but are not accountable to anyone. I suppose that they are ultimately accountable to Parliament and to Ministers, but what happens if things go wrong and they do not carry out their administrative role as we would expect? There can be recourse to the ombudsman, but he will investigate only if there is a clear case of maladministration and there can be direct redress for the person who has lost out. There may be serious maladministration, but it may not be possible to provide redress to an individual or a group of individuals, so there is a gap in the system.

It is important that public bodies are accountable. There is a growing lack of faith in politics, Parliament, public servants, public bodies and the democratic process itself. The hon. Member for Winchester made a thoughtful, interesting speech, and gave some figures. It worries me that the turnout at the general election was less than 60 per cent.

I used to tell people to look at what happens in America—a country that I greatly admire—where only 50 per cent. of the electorate vote, and only 50 per cent. of that 50 per cent. vote for the elected president. That is terrible, and I ask them to consider what happens in this country, where 78 per cent. turn out to vote, which is marvellous—or which was marvellous, because all of a sudden something went wrong at the last election. People may argue that there was not enough obvious difference between the two parties—*[Interruption.]*—between the three parties, I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. That perception is real, and in politics perception is all important, because people vote not according to reality, but according to their perceptions. When it comes to the ballot box, if people feel that something is the case, then it is the case.

I am not sure what the average turnout is for local and European elections, but it is very low. Why is that?

Mr. Andrew Turner: Could there not be an alternative and perhaps much more attractive explanation? Electors have rightly lost faith in politicians. They do not trust them to do what politicians in the past have given the impression they are able to do. Frankly, what was untrue then, is still untrue now. Society is becoming depoliticised, and that is a good thing.

Mr. Robertson: As usual, my hon. Friend makes a good intellectual point. There are many reasons for the low turnout, and I shall explore some of them. One reason why people do not vote in local and European elections is that they do not think voting matters. I have never been a fan of the European Union, and even less of the European Parliament, so I can well understand people who think that voting in those elections will not make a difference. Having sat on the Select Committee on European Scrutiny for two years, I sympathise with that view. Endless directives come through the House literally every day, and people are powerless to stop them. I can well understand people not wanting to vote in European elections. There is a strong constitutional argument for that.

However, it is worth voting in local elections. My wife was a county councillor for four years, and I often said to her that she had far more power and influence than I have. That is true. Proud though I am to be a Member of the House, that role is somewhat different. What happens in local government is important, but people are not persuaded of that and will not vote in local government elections. They cannot understand why planning applications that no one wants are accepted, either locally or at inspector level. They see a huge democratic deficit. We must deal with that. The creation of public bodies just for the sake of it does not deal with that problem but adds to it.

I have a constituency example that illustrates fully what I mean. It was the subject of my Adjournment debate last week, so I crave your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for repeating it. Just over a year ago, a chemical reprocessing plant in my constituency was, for reasons best known to the county council at the time, built on a flood plain. Planning permission was given in 1978. It was a very dangerous plant that gave off lots of bad odours. Heavy lorries went into it at all times of night and day. It was a bad neighbour with scant regard for the environment or amenities. No one wanted to live near it.

For years, people not only complained about that site, but gave warnings about it to a number of agencies and public bodies: the Environment Agency, the Health and Safety Executive and the county council. There was a lack of response from those bodies.

Just over 12 months ago, there was a very serious explosion at the site. Fortunately, it happened at night so no one was there. Two days later, the River Severn flooded the entire site. The fire and rescue service said that, if the explosion and the flood had coincided, it could not have accessed the site to tackle the fire. One can imagine the dangers inherent in that statement. People had to be evacuated. People from nearby villages were ill. People had to go into hospital. They are still complaining about feeling ill 12 months on.

[Mr. Robertson]

The agencies and public bodies were warned that that was going to happen, yet took no action. They could have closed the site. The Environment Agency, the county council and indeed the Minister have powers under various legislation to close it. They have chosen not to do so, not because they do not recognise that it is dangerous—it is; we all recognise that—but because they are frightened of being taken to court by the company. That is an exercise not in democracy but in bullying and fear. People in Sandhurst, Gloucestershire have to live under the threat of that site reopening—it is on the brink of being reopened—and further dangers arising.

Furthermore, the Environment Agency, which was supposed to have been monitoring the site, is being allowed to produce reports on what happened on the site and on its monitoring of it. The agency has a distinct disincentive to investigate the site fully because the more it finds out about what happened, the worse it looks as the waste licensing authority.

I have pressed for the public inquiry that must be held into not only the explosion and the company but the performance of the agencies in monitoring the site. The Health and Safety Executive was well aware that an employee was sacked by the company for failing to carry out what he considered to be dangerous duties. He took his case to the industrial tribunal and won, yet the Health and Safety Executive, fully aware of that, took no further action.

The county council gave planning permission for the site in 1978 to treat oily wastes and waste oils, yet very dangerous chemicals were treated on the site, including carcinogenic chemicals and BSE drums, which were ordered by the Government from an agricultural area—the Government said, "Send them to Cleansing Services Group in Sandhurst." The company did not have planning permission for any of that.

The county council had discovered that huge breach of planning laws two years before the explosion. However—I have this in writing from the council—it did nothing to correct the position. The Environment Agency nevertheless issued operating licences to the company, which was so stupid as to be unbelievable. Earlier, someone—possibly the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart—mentioned agencies not speaking to each other, and not tying in their activities. That certainly applied in this instance.

I hope that the House will forgive me for taking so long to make a constituency point, but it shows why people are losing faith in public servants, whether elected or appointed.

I do not want to be party political, but I suppose that I am going to be when I talk about local councils. I regret the creation of cabinet or executive-style councils. Thanks to the good sense of the Gloucestershire electorate, the Conservatives form the largest group on the county council but are excluded from the executive, because in a post-election pact—not a pre-election pact, of course—Labour and the Liberal Democrats got together to exclude them. That is not illegal, but it is not terribly democratic, and it certainly does not serve the best interests of the electorate. It could happen only because the Government had changed local government rules, and I think it regrettable.

Many back-bench councillors across the country have received increases in their allowances but, along with those, large decreases in responsibility. They now consider council membership worthless. I mentioned that my wife was a county councillor. One of the reasons for her failure to stand in the most recent elections was the fact that she had to make a decision. Either she would join the executive and work almost as a full-time councillor, which is what is now required—in fact, she could not have, for the reasons I gave, but the facts were not known then—or she would become a back bencher, and not be involved at all.

My wife did not want to be a full-time councillor, for two reasons. First, she did not have time to commit herself to that; secondly, that is not what council work is supposed to be about. Council work is supposed to be about living in the community, whether as a housewife or an executive, and bringing that experience to the council a couple of nights a week. That is how things used to be when local government operated far better than it does now.

We seem to have created a two-tier system in local councils rather like that in the House of Commons, in which the executive—or, perhaps, one, two or three members of the executive—are all-powerful, while the rest are almost impotent unless they are determined to do something different. Moreover, the executive-and-back-bench style will not encourage people to stand for council membership. It is all very well for MPs to say they want to encourage better candidates, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight said, we must show that these organisations are doing a good job and that it is worthwhile joining them. That would be far more likely to attract candidates of the kind that we want—women, members of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, for instance—than a search for candidates from different backgrounds. In that respect, I depart slightly from the otherwise excellent speech of the hon. Member for Slough.

What kind of people can we hope to attract to serve on councils when we create a set-up where it is all or nothing and one is either a back bencher with no influence or a member of the executive and required almost full-time? We can attract either people who rather like the idea of the word "councillor" before their name even though it does not entail much, or those who have an interest in dragging out meetings all day because they have nothing else to do, when we do not want to attract either. The Government have made it almost impossible to attract the sort of people we want, which is regrettable.

I have never served in local government; I do not have a vested interest in it. However, from experience in Gloucestershire and Tewkesbury, I can see what has happened. It bothers me that we shall miss out on many good people serving not only on councils but on other public bodies. I shall not go into the matter of appointments to public bodies; suffice it to say that we are not reaching out to the sort of people to whom we need to reach out.

I mentioned that I had a slight difference of opinion with the hon. Member for Slough on such appointments, although she pointed out that all the Government's efforts and determination to be politically correct have failed to change things for the better. She said that more women,

people with disabilities and people from ethnic communities had not been attracted to undertake such roles. If that is so, we must ask why.

Mr. Tom Harris: In the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), I would point out that she simply stated that in the past year the number of women and of people from ethnic minorities appointed to quangos had reduced very slightly. Under this Government generally, far more women and members of ethnic minorities have been appointed to quangos.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for intervening. If that is so, I fully accept it. I recognise that the hon. Lady made a good speech, and I agreed with virtually all of it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight said, we should make public bodies appear relevant to ordinary people. That would attract them to serve. People always follow success and do not normally jump on a sinking ship. They see success and are led by it. They will be led by the relevance of public bodies and whether they are worth while. We should seek out not somebody from one group or another—it is demeaning to those groups to do so—but the right people, who will of course include women, people from ethnic backgrounds and those with disabilities.

I say that as somebody who argued strongly in favour of women priests during the debate in the General Synod some years ago—1992, I think. Although I might be considered to be from a more traditional background, I did so because I thought it right that people should be allowed to do whatever job they want regardless of their sex, marital status, background or whatever. However, I do not believe that it is advantageous to go down the route of positive discrimination. I was therefore concerned this week—I am stretching beyond my pay grade by suggesting this—about the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill. It is inconsistent with other legislation because it legalises discrimination. It suggests that it is all right for politicians to discriminate but that nobody else in society can do so. The Bill is very curious, but as my party did not oppose it, and given my day job as a Whip, I better move on swiftly.

I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight said about the House of Lords. There has been a transfer of power from the House of Commons to the Executive and to other anonymous bodies that most people have not heard of. Although this may contradict what I have said already, I would not welcome changes in the make-up of the House of Lords. I shall make some brief comments now because my party has not yet determined its policy and I would like to make this point before it is too late.

I can live with the undemocratic nature of the House of Lords as long as it has no power. That relates to what I said about quangos, although some hon. Members may find it contradictory. The fact that the House of Lords is not democratic adds to its quality as its members can say what they feel is right and, unless they are Ministers, nobody can sack them or reduce their pay. That is a useful addition to Parliament.

I would always defend parliamentary democracy and the power of the House of Commons because it is democratically elected and that is why I am concerned by the Government's proposals for the House of Lords. Other people have gone much further and proposed an elected element. I would not want the House of Commons to be replicated as it would be a waste of resources and because it would pose a challenge to the House of Commons that would weaken rather than strengthen parliamentary democracy. It could also result in gridlock, as has happened in the United States. The system of government there produces a presidential election turnout of about 50 per cent. so it has not done them much good.

Some people would say that a Government as powerful as ours with a majority of more than 170 should be challenged by a stronger Chamber that could produce gridlock. I understand that point, but the most damaging and irreversible measures put through by the present Government have been constitutional ones, such as the changes to the House of Lords, devolution and the introduction of alien voting systems in European and regional elections. Those measures were passed by the House of Lords because its members felt unable to resist them. I understand those who say that gridlock might be better, but I do not agree.

If we take the wrong decisions in respect of the House of Lords, we shall lose the tremendous wisdom that exists among its members, who include people who have served in the House, on other public bodies and succeeded in other walks of life, including business. Inviting such people to sit in a Chamber that does not necessarily reward them for that service, but allows the country to draw on their experience is an excellent system and I do not want to lose it.

Anyone who reads the House of Lords *Hansard*, as I occasionally do when I am researching an issue, will be startled by the quality of debate there. The upper House also provides quality legal services. Some hon. Members would describe it as the worst public body, but I think that it is the best.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight said that if he were to come up with a new system for the House of Lords, he would not start from the same place. If one were to design a brand new constitution for a country, one perhaps would not have started by drawing up a system in which some peers inherit their titles and others gain theirs through appointment, but we do not live in an ideal world. The fact that the House of Lords worked is good enough reason to keep it, and the fact that many of the public bodies to which I referred do not, is good enough reason to get rid of them.

12.30 pm

Mr. Collins: With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall respond to the debate.

I begin with an apology: unforeseen circumstances meant that I was away from the Chamber for longer than I had hoped or anticipated. I was able to be present for a wholly admirable maiden speech by the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Heyes). It was filled with knowledge of and love for his constituency. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House remember his predecessor, Bob Sheldon, with affection. Should the hon. Gentleman meet Duncan Goodhew, I trust that he will do so in less dramatic circumstances than those he described. I congratulate him on making a good maiden speech and look forward to debating with him for years to come, certainly throughout this Parliament.

[Mr. Collins]

I am sorry to have missed what I gather was a good speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris), with whom I had an interesting exchange earlier. I believe that he made an important point, which I hope the Minister will address, on the importance of public bodies co-operating with each other, having the same agenda and moving in the same direction.

The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) spoke wisely about the mystery surrounding much of the work of NDPBs. He talked about the need for ever-greater openness and said that progress had been made on that in recent years. I am sure he would agree, however, that there is scope for further progress. He also mentioned the battle that any Government would have in present circumstances of finding appropriate people to serve on public bodies who have enough spare time and are committed to that role. That concerns everyone; we see the problem in our constituencies and at a national level.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about the need to re-engage the public, which sparked a good debate on the problems related to low turnout. I am sure he is right to say that if we are able collectively to crack the problems of getting more members of the public actively involved in public life, that would be part of the solution to increase turnout in all elections to this place, the European Parliament, and local government. That is clearly important. I know that the Minister does not have sole responsibility for delivering higher turnout at elections—he will be delighted to hear that I am not attributing to him the responsibility for that yet, although who knows what will happen later in his career?—but it would be helpful if he addressed how we manage to engage more people of the highest quality in public life.

I am sure that part of the solution is to make it clear that we are interested in ensuring that women, members of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and a range of other groups that have felt less than fully included, play a full role. However, that is not the complete answer, and I am interested to hear what the Government have to say on that either now or later.

I have known my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) for many years and he has extensive experience in education. In a telling intervention, he referred to the lack of clarity. I shall be candid: it was unclear under the last Conservative Government and it is unclear under this Government whether schools that have a great amount of financial autonomy—grant-maintained schools, foundation schools or whatever—should be counted as part of the total of NDPBs. There are arguments both for and against that, but it reinforces the need, as the Select Committee reported, for there to be clarity in the rules that define what is and is not a public body. For example, it is not clear why the cereal marketing board is a non-departmental public body whereas the wool marketing board is not. There are still elements of uncertainty. There is a clear need for clarification. The rules have not changed since 1997, I admit, but we should try to ensure that people can understand why a body is categorised in one way rather than another.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson), in a thoughtful contribution, made some powerful constituency points about the difficulties of accessing lottery funding. I suspect that that concern is shared by many hon. Members, because obtaining access to lottery money for genuinely good causes can be a little frustrating. He also made a powerful constituency case about an explosion at a local chemical plant, and I hope that his characteristic diligence and persistence in pursuing that issue will result in greater certainty and clarification on the part of the various agencies that he mentioned.

My hon. Friend also addressed concerns about reductions in turnout and he had an interesting exchange with my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight about whether low turnout was good or bad and whether a depoliticised society was a healthier society. It is true to say that by comparison with the situation in Afghanistan, politics in this country is less important to our fellow citizens, and that is probably desirable. A society in which politics means life and death, such as Afghanistan, is probably not entirely healthy. On the other hand, a higher turnout is desirable and we would like to hear the Government's proposals—in due course, not necessarily in this debate—for achieving that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury also rightly mentioned his concern about public bodies that need not exist at all, and cited the Tote as an example. I am not sure that I agree with that example, but it is true that public bodies may be set up in certain circumstances at a certain time to perform a particular function and, some years or even decades later, it is not clear why they still exist. I am sure that the Minister will wish to reassure us that the Government keep existing public bodies under review at all times. The various reporting mechanisms that already exist and the welcome commitment to a new series of annual reports on taskforces will, I hope, keep the feet of Cabinet Office officials to the flame. There is a consensus in the Chamber in favour of keeping some non-departmental public bodies, but we do not want an unlimited number. That should be the loud and clear message from our debate to all those concerned.

I remind the Minister of one or two questions that I posed at the beginning of the debate, relating to the timing and content of the public bodies document. Will it be possible in future to have this debate after, rather than before, the publication of that annual report? Will the Government consider amending it along the lines recommended by the Select Committee? Will we have a commitment that taskforces should last only two years, as the Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended? Does the Minister have anything to say about the accountability issues that were raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House, specifically including the extension of the remit and role of the National Audit Office?

We have had a constructive debate and I look forward to the Minister's response.

12.38 pm

Mr. Leslie: Today's debate has been constructive and friendly. It has also been enormously useful in the process of scrutinising the whole question of public bodies, and the Cabinet Office and other Departments will be able to incorporate many of the thoughts and ideas that have been voiced today in the policies that we pursue. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) about the timing of the debate and

the publication of the public bodies report. If we could align those events in future years, it would be preferable. I am also grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome to my post. This is the first time we have crossed swords, but today's debate was not violent and I look forward to working with him in the future.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale acknowledged that reforms had been necessary. Any Government carrying out policy must make a careful check to ensure that they always pursue probity and merit as the key criteria at all times in making appointments to public bodies. The hon. Gentleman referred to the numbers of non-departmental public bodies and taskforces. The Government want to keep numbers to a minimum, and the five-year review process examines all the fundamental questions, including the existence of those public bodies. But we have to make sure that the functions that those bodies undertake are met somehow, and it is a difficult balance to strike.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the next edition of "Public Bodies" in 2001 and whether it will widen information in line with the Select Committee's recommendations. We are trying our best to endeavour to broaden the scope of the report. Compiling these documents is not always easy, given the vast number of quangos and NDPBs involved, but we are trying to make improvements as quickly as possible. On the question of confirmation hearings—raised by the Select Committee—for the chairs of some of the larger bodies, I am afraid that I cannot offer an enormous amount of hope. The principle of ministerial appointment must remain. We should engage with Select Committees in the scrutiny of public bodies, but the Commissioner for Public Appointments is the better and more appropriate safeguard for a lot of the concerns that the Committee voiced. In terms of the allocation of functions as between public bodies and Departments, this is a judgment for Ministers and for Parliament to make in how best to scrutinise the work of the public sector.

The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), as well as the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, asked how we defined taskforces and whether we were looking to bring that definition into line with that of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. I agree with the general definition and we are trying to stick to the two-year rule. However, we are reviewing those bodies that are more than two years old.

Mr. Oaten: Will the Minister give a commitment that the 52 bodies that are over the two-year rule will be reviewed?

Mr. Leslie: All taskforces, ad hoc advisory groups and review groups are examined and monitored at all times and we are in regular discussions with Departments about those issues. Obviously, there will be certain circumstances in which it is not appropriate to conclude a taskforce just because a two-year period has elapsed. We must retain a degree of flexibility.

I appreciate the shift in the position of the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale on the Disability Rights Commission. That is welcome. I believe that that body is proving to be very important and we will watch its work develop over future months and years.

The hon. Members for Winchester and for Westmorland and Lonsdale asked whether the boards of NDPBs will meet in public. We are trying to promote the code of practice in which this question is raised. Similarly, in terms of the role of the National Audit Office, best practice suggests that we should be widening access for the NAO to all public bodies where possible.

The question of the role of elected representatives on public bodies is an interesting one. We already require disclosure of political affiliations in appointments to public bodies and we focus on merit, rather than on the basis of some partisan desire. I do not believe that activity in a political party should be a bar to appointment and, as has been expressed in the debate, political activity can enhance the role of public bodies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Heyes) gave an insightful and intelligent maiden speech. He has a hard act to follow when we think of his predecessor, Bob Sheldon, but the quality of his speech showed that he is well up to the task. His background and involvement in trade unionism, local government and citizens advice bureaux will stand him in good stead in his time here. His speech showed an understanding of and pride in the local communities that he serves. His vision is clear and good; it will do much to encourage his constituents. I know that he will play a strong role in the Select Committee on Public Administration, and I look forward to seeing him take part in future Cabinet Office debates.

The hon. Member for Winchester talked about the need to reinvigorate the public voice and participation in public life in general. It is certainly important that efforts be made to encourage volunteering and appointments to school governing bodies and other local organisations. I share the view that more effort needs to be made to improve diversity. We strive always to reach the targets that we have set, particularly in terms of bringing young people into public life. My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), who has had to leave the Chamber, as she explained earlier, talked about taking risks in appointing young people and referred to the wild card. I am not sure whether that applies to me—time will tell.

I also share the hon. Gentleman's view that organisations should reflect all elements of service delivery and that it is important to have not only professionals but service users such as patients, victims of crime and council house tenants on public bodies. On the implementation of the code of practice for public bodies, the hon. Gentleman asked about the requirement to publish annual reports. We wish to see that requirement implemented more frequently, and acknowledge that more must be done to ensure that best practice is spread.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough expressed strong views that more efforts must be made to drive forward diversity in public appointments, with the greater representation of a variety of groups in society, particularly women. She made insightful comments about the ideas of networks breaking out of the classic appointment system. The concept of equality audits is already essentially undertaken by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, who operates in a monitoring capacity in the very way my hon. Friend seeks. I shall certainly be looking at broadening the types of publication in which vacancies for public appointments are advertised, as she described, rather than simply concentrating on the broadsheet newspapers. My hon.

[Mr. Leslie]

Friend told us that she believed much greater and more proactive work is necessary in this area, and I have taken those comments to heart.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) had a broader interpretation of public bodies. I appreciate his points entirely. He talked about local government participation and mentioned his experiences with grant-maintained schools and voluntary organisations. He said that other public bodies as well as the Government provide public services. We must accept that interchange and dialogue are necessary between the public sector and non-governmental organisations in general.

The hon. Gentleman spoke a lot about the House of Lords reform, as did the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson). The Government have developed a considered and well argued approach and have looked at the issue properly in the context of the United Kingdom's political system. We have said that no political party should command a majority in the second Chamber. A House in which the Government of the day have no majority cannot be regarded as a poodle or a House of cronies. The Prime Minister's power of patronage has been massively reduced.

Our decisions are underpinned by very clear principles. The second Chamber must not undermine the position of the House of Commons. It must bring distinctive expertise to the scrutiny of legislation and must also be more representative of the country as a whole. The Government believe that a wholly or largely elected second Chamber would not be the right approach for the UK at this time. Although I question some of the hon. Gentleman's assumptions on House of Lords reform, at least he is attempting to engage in the reform process, which is welcome and refreshing.

In a very enlightening speech—the first I have heard from him and the first I am sure of many—my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) talked of the need for more co-operation between public bodies. He also commented on the Scottish experience of promoting a "bonfire of the quangos". Devolved authorities are quite rightly pursuing their own approach to the issue, and the Scottish Executive have set in train their own process from which we can all learn and which we should watch very closely.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart said that we should recognise the balance that we have to strike between the number of elections to public authorities and the efficacy of service delivery, which is often well served by a public body that is accountable to Ministers. He also mentioned local government consultation meetings such as neighbourhood forums, and the difficulty of encouraging a healthy turnout for those events. As we know, occasionally such meetings are attended only by the usual suspects, with longer speeches and few signs of discontent. Others can judge whether that applies to today's debate; I would not say that it does.

In his speech, the hon. Member for Tewkesbury pursued a refreshingly consensual approach and discussed some very specific examples. He described the sad incident in his constituency and how he has attempted to gain more information from the Environment Agency. I know that my ministerial colleagues will certainly be examining his comments. He also raised the issue of what motivates his constituents to vote. I share his belief in the importance of local government, even if I do not quite share his opinions on the European Union. His speech was refreshingly progressive and egalitarian, but I am not sure that that bodes well for his career on the Opposition Front Bench.

The principles of public service reform cannot be forgotten. The big-picture issue for this debate is the need to have a framework for national standards, inspection and accountability for all public services, to devolve more freedom to the front-line professionals, to recognise the value and work of front-line staff, and to strive whenever possible to give more choice to service users. Public service reform is important and is not a matter for only the Government to initiate; public bodies have a role in it, too.

The work of the Select Committee on Public Administration should not go unrecognised. I am aware that the Committee has announced that it will be conducting an inquiry into public appointments. The Government will of course co-operate with that inquiry and carefully consider recommendations. I should certainly welcome new ideas on how we can broaden the composition and membership of public bodies, as that is an aspiration that I share entirely. In the past, far too many public appointments were available only to those who knew where to look for them or the right people to talk to. The Government are putting an end to that practice. Wider publicising of posts is clearly crucial to reform, and new technology can help ensure that up-to-date information is available to as many people as possible.

The points that my hon. Friend the Member for Slough made on women are crucial. Rather than sitting passively and waiting for applications to be made, much can be done actively to promote and encourage interest. The Government's commitment to equal representation for women and men will require extra effort to achieve, but next year, for example, the Cabinet Office will be holding a series of regional seminars across the country led by the new Minister for Women—the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche). The seminars will start in the new year and seek to provide practical information, advice and opportunities to women who already hold a public appointment.

I should also take a moment to pay tribute to the work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which has been instrumental in developments in recent years. Its first report recommended the role of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Looking back, it seems astonishing that that role did not exist before.

Ever since the Government came to office we have consistently demonstrated our commitment to more open and transparent government. Our commitments in the new Freedom of Information Act 2000 are underpinned by a code of practice that sets clear standards on how information should be made available. Dialogue should take place with service users at all times. The new statutory right of access to a wide range of information held by public bodies enshrines the existing practice of many quangos which were already proactive in releasing a huge volume of data into the public arena.

The Government intend to strike the right balance in their policy towards public bodies, checking the number and growth of new quangos while simultaneously

improving the systems of those that are in place. We have to work hard to increase diversity in public appointments while always focusing on appointment by merit and anticipating the major changes from the growing regional dimension of public policy. I look forward very much indeed to working closely with hon. Members and the Public Administration Committee in reforming public bodies and modernising the structures through which so many vital public bodies are delivered.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Rail Franchises

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

12.55 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I have great pleasure in initiating this debate. I want to focus on one aspect of railway policy: the role of franchising, especially as it applies in the South West Trains area. I represent part of that area and, if my geography is correct, so does the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead). The hon. Gentleman is looking at me quizzically, so perhaps he does not.

The debate is appropriate at this time and there are three reasons for it. I am aware that a big national debate is under way about the role of the Secretary of State in the liquidation of Railtrack, but I do not want to be part of that—it is taking place at a different level.

My first concern is the effect of the structural changes on day-to-day services in areas such as mine. The brutal fact is that my part of outer London, the adjacent areas and their feeder lines are daily suffering a rapid and visible deterioration in service provision. That can be seen in the growing number of cancellations, of late departures and even later arrivals, and in increasing overcrowding. Those points are not anecdotal. I have checked with the railway management—an authority—who confirm that their internal statistics show that rapid deterioration is taking place. The system of fines and incentives cannot cope with the problem because the infrastructure itself is declining.

My second reason for holding the debate is to isolate certain issues that do not form part of the big question as to whether Railtrack should have been liquidated. I support the Government's action on Railtrack—as did my party. The Government took the correct approach, so I am not trying to score political points. However, many issues subsidiary to the Railtrack ownership question are unclear.

Many of us have an interest in the matter as constituency MPs and we are unclear about the way forward. For example, what is to happen to the management vacuum at the heart of Railtrack? Under the 10-year plan, what will happen to the transmission of funding for service enhancement? How will that finance chain be affected by the change in ownership? What will happen to the three tiers of responsibility: the infrastructure providers, the franchise operators and the subcontractors? Currently, they all have their own profit margins and there are confused lines of responsibility.

The Minister knows well that such confusion has lain at the heart of all the failures of privatisation. We do not yet know how the problem will be tackled. In this case, we do not yet know the Government's thinking on vertical integration, which is an essential and topical issue—certainly in my area. I want to sound out the Government on at least their provisional thinking on that subject.

I want to ask about the role of South West Trains. I am not an apologist for South West Trains, nor have I come here to give the company a caning. It simply happens to be the franchise operator.

South West Trains got off to a bad start. The company sacked a substantial number of key staff soon after it was awarded the franchise. The service deteriorated badly.

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

Staff had to be re-hired, and arguments about terms and conditions caused further disruption. The company endeared itself neither to my constituents nor to many other people. When the new franchising round began, I was more impressed by some of the alternative bidders, such as Dutch Railways.

However, that is history. South West Trains was provisionally awarded the new franchise; it was the preferred bidder. I am impressed by the quality of the new senior management. I have talked to the chairman of the company who seems genuinely committed to railways and to making them work. As a constituency MP, my job is to work with the company to help it to get the franchise operating so as to deliver the service improvements that it promised. That is why I have introduced the debate.

South West Trains has undertaken to provide three specific aspects of service improvement. One is a doubling of the service on some of the suburban loop lines, but that in turn requires investment in new rolling stock. The company has undertaken to provide longer trains, which also requires improvements in stations and the length of platforms. It has undertaken to provide better coaches, CCTV, and more comfort and safety. All those things require money, and as long as there is uncertainty about the franchise arrangement, it will not be clear how South West Trains can make its way forward.

To crystallise the debate and perhaps to help the Minister, I shall encapsulate what I want to say in five questions. He may not be able to answer them all in full today, but perhaps he can do his best and let me have the other answers in writing. First, what exactly is the status of the South West Trains franchise? I asked the Minister a parliamentary question about that a few weeks ago, and received the predictable reply that a decision would be made in due course. I am sure that that is factually true, but it is not terribly helpful.

The franchise has been in limbo for more than six months, and it expires in February 2003. We are rapidly reaching the point at which key decisions on investment cannot be made owing to uncertainty. When will a decision be made, and what form will it take? I fully understand that the Government cannot divulge details of the Strategic Rail Authority's commercial negotiations with companies, but if the Minister can give us as much clarity as possible about the timing and nature of the franchise, the company and those of us living in the franchise area will at least be able to see what the future holds. Before I entered Parliament, I worked in a big corporation in which we operated on 10, 20 or 50-year planning horizons. It is necessary to do that in many industries. The railways have been required to operate on a short leash, and that is simply not the way forward.

The second question is more concrete, which may make it easier for the Minister to answer. When will the 10-car trains that have been promised under the franchise in my area arrive? Under the franchise proposals, there was a firm planning horizon and it was proposed that the 10-car trains would arrive in 2004. Will they be delivered on time? Longer trains are crucial if we are to solve overcrowding. Is it intended that the franchise undertakings in relation to longer trains will be met on time? Can the Minister give me an assurance that that promise will be met?

Thirdly, how does the Department propose to ensure that the finance is available for the service enhancements that have been promised under the new franchise? Where will the money come from? I am aware that the Government have an ambitious, promising, large long-term investment plan, but anyone who is following the matter closely will know that the system is close to collapse in terms of the financing mechanism.

If the Minister is following the matter closely, he will have read a revealing article in *Modern Railways*, a specialist journal, in July this year. It is rather technical, but revealing about the way in which funding is disappearing into the sand. It makes the point that current big rail projects are costing about three times as much as under the British Rail system for the equivalent amount of track. There is an enormous amount of waste under the existing structures. It looks as if the promising finance is not being used productively to produce the promised enhancements.

It appears, and the figures support this, that the cost of maintenance has increased by 35 per cent. in the past three years owing to the inefficiency and inflated profits of the subcontractors. Many people anticipated that that would happen when they criticised rail privatisation, and it has. The practical implication is that the pot of money available for funding service enhancements seems to be disappearing. How will those service improvements be achieved? In the case of the South West Trains franchise, we are talking not about massive capital projects but about modest ones involving station lengthening and the acquisition of new stock. Is the money available for them? Will it come from the Treasury, the SRA or private finance initiatives?

Fourthly, I turn to service and track deterioration. How is that being monitored? Are the Government aware of the extent to which quality has deteriorated? When will that curve start to turn upwards? I know that the Secretary of State is repeatedly pressed on that point, and I believe that he told the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, rather hopefully, that he expected to see improvements by the time of its next meeting, which I think is in January. Perhaps he had not realised that the timetable was so strict. I am not trying to score a political point, but will the Minister give us some indication of when improvements will occur, so that I can pass that on to my constituents? When the Government have studied the inventory of their assets and the underlying technical problems, they should be able to estimate when service provision will begin to improve. We need that predictability.

Fifthly, what is the Government's provisional thinking about vertical integration? We know that it is an option because in his original statement to the House the Secretary of State indicated that he was open-minded about a variety of structural alternatives. However, I press the Minister to give specific, although not necessarily definitive, views about vertical integration.

The chairman of Stagecoach, which owns South West Trains, has gone on the record to advocate that option—I am not breaching any confidentiality—and to make what seems to me, as a layman, a very strong case for it. He argues that vertical integration would eliminate all the profit margins of the three sets of operators and ensure that there was real accountability because the franchise operating company would be responsible for the maintenance of the track as well as customer provision. It

would be responsible also for safety, subject to an independent certification procedure. There would be a concentration of responsibility that has not been seen since the railways were privatised. Vertical integration could be introduced, on an experimental basis, in one region. Are the Government sympathetic to that approach? Are they encouraging it, or have they rejected it?

My final point is not substantive but concerns process. MPs are kept well briefed by Departments about many matters concerning their area. The Department for Work and Pensions keeps us informed about the Government's employment schemes, and we are well briefed on education initiatives as they affect our constituency. Some quangos are getting much better at communicating, and it is increasingly common for hospital trusts, for example, to keep local MPs informed about events.

The railways, however, are an absolute nightmare. It is virtually impossible for us to find out anything about what is happening in our area. We can try to develop a working relationship with the franchise company, but the whole process is extremely opaque. Will the Government consider how they can ensure that MPs are kept abreast of operational and practical developments in the railway system as they affect our constituents? I can assure the Minister that in a commuter constituency such as mine, the deterioration of rail services is perhaps an MP's biggest political headache. I am keen to find practical solutions rather than to score political points, but I would be grateful if the Government helped by clarifying the position.

1.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing this debate and providing us with an opportunity to discuss passenger rail franchise agreements and the other issues that he mentioned. He will understand that it will not be possible for me to give him a definitive answer to absolutely every point that he made, but he may find it useful if I write to him about one or two issues. The essence of the hon. Gentleman's remarks related to the South West Trains franchise. We can air the subject at length today, and I hope that he will find my comments useful in discussions with his constituents.

I confirm the hon. Gentleman's geographical prowess in suggesting that South West Trains services pass through my constituency. I travelled on one of its trains to the House this morning and it arrived at my station and at Waterloo exactly on time. I can offer nothing further than that observation.

The franchise agreement, about which the hon. Gentleman is concerned, is a legally binding contract. It sets out the rights and obligations of a franchisee for the provision of railway services and, in return, provides for payments to be made to the franchise operator, determined by a competitive bidding process.

There are 25 train operating companies under the control of 11 different franchisees. Most of them provide services under franchise agreements of between seven and 15 years, negotiated in 1995 or 1996 by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising through the provisions of the Railways Act 1993. Franchise agreements are not static; they evolve over time, and changes have been made to most of those original agreements, sometimes brought about by a change of control of the franchisee. None the less, most franchise agreements are not radically different from when they were first agreed.

When franchising occurred for the first time, the rail industry was in a very different position. It was a pre-Hatfield industry, with a newly created Railtrack. The growth in passenger numbers in the past few years—some 7 per cent. a year prior to Hatfield—was not envisaged at the time, and franchises were let on the basis of a non-expanding railway. The franchising director, who was responsible for letting franchises at the time, was steered by objectives, instructions and guidance from the then Secretary of State. Those required him to let franchises in a way that left maximum scope for the initiative of franchisees, and to impose requirements that were no more burdensome than necessary to achieve the objective of letting franchises quickly and obtaining good value for money.

Thus the specifications for service provision and quality were based on the service offered by British Rail. The philosophy was to provide a privatised industry that was no worse than the public one that it replaced. The terms negotiated in franchise agreements reflect that.

Minimum service levels were based on the service being operated by British Rail at the time of franchising, and key fares were regulated against British Rail prices. Benchmarks for performance were based on the historic performance of British Rail over that part of the network for which the franchise was being let, and benchmarks for service quality issues were based on the results of surveys of British Rail passengers. Investment by train operating companies for expansion was not a major factor. The franchises typically included a falling subsidy profile, with the franchise agreements for the most profitable routes including a clause for the payment of a premium by the franchisee back to the Government.

It would be wrong to imply that no thought was given to improving services. Incentive regimes and enforcement thresholds—the hon. Gentleman mentioned some of those devices—were incorporated to encourage an improvement in performance and service quality. Franchisees of train operating companies in the south-east, and those providing regional and local services elsewhere, where market forces alone were not deemed to be sufficient to uphold performance standards, receive extra subsidy for improving the punctuality and reliability of services, but pay penalties for deteriorating performance. All franchise agreements include enforcement thresholds for performance, which, if broken, can lead to varying degrees of sanction, including, ultimately, franchise termination.

Since those franchise agreements were signed, the franchising authority has had the opportunity to negotiate additional benefits. For instance, where material breaches of franchise agreements have occurred it has been the policy of the Strategic Rail Authority, or its predecessors, to secure a passenger dividend by way of compensation to passengers. Depending on the nature of the breach, that could be something relatively minor, such as an improvement to facilities at a particular station, or something major, such as the procurement of new rolling stock.

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

When the chance has arisen, the authority has also taken the opportunity to negotiate improved terms in franchise agreements, notably when a change of control of a franchise has occurred. For instance, when FirstGroup took over the Great Western franchise in 1998, a bespoke performance incentive regime was negotiated under which the company can be penalised for poor performance. That was the first of the long-distance, high-speed operators to have such a regime written into their agreement.

In the light of increasing demands to improve services to meet growing demand, in the autumn of 1999 the Secretary of State instructed the Strategic Rail Authority to replace existing franchise agreements, starting with those that were due to expire by 2004, so as to drive up punctuality, reliability and service quality, and to inject investment into the industry. Replacement agreements could complement our 10-year transport plan, which provides £180 billion for the nation's transport infrastructure.

As has been well documented, the Strategic Rail Authority experienced some difficulty in negotiating replacement deals. Two of the first six franchises to be re-tendered, Central Trains and Great North Eastern Railway, resulted in proposals with which neither the authority nor Ministers were satisfied either in respect of value for money or because they were difficult to compare, and subsequently no preferred party could be selected. Negotiations on other franchises were also taking longer than originally expected.

In July this year, the Secretary of State instructed the authority to examine what could be done within existing franchise agreements, or by negotiating short extensions to those agreements, so as to get improvements to services implemented as soon as possible. The two-year extension awarded to Midland Main Line last year is a clear example of the benefits that we want to be spread to other parts of the network. The £240 million package includes £135 million investment in new rolling stock, £17 million investment in a new East Midlands Parkway station and the provision of additional services. That does not mean that there will be no longer-term replacement franchises. Indeed, the authority has been instructed to continue negotiations on those franchises for which it has already selected preferred counterparties for new long-term agreements.

The authority is continuing to negotiate replacement agreements for South Central, South West Trains and Chiltern Railway with GoVia, Stagecoach and M40 Trains respectively. When longer-term replacement franchises are negotiated, we make it clear that early benefits should be secured for passengers. In response to the Secretary of State's statement, the Strategic Rail Authority has submitted a revised programme to Ministers, which we are currently reviewing. An announcement on that programme will be made by the authority in due course.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the Government's intentions with regard to the future of Railtrack. I can do no better than refer him to the Secretary of State's statement on 15 October 2001, in which he said:

"In the light of the administration of Railtrack, we believe that we should now consider reshaping the structure of the industry in a way that recognises that the needs of the travelling public must come first. We shall propose to the administrator that a private company limited by guarantee be established to take over Railtrack's responsibilities. Any operating surplus it makes would be re-invested in the railway network. Such a company would have the needs of the travelling public and other users as a priority. As it would have no shareholders, we would remove the conflict between the need to increase shareholder value and the interests of rail passengers."

He went on:

"Performance targets would be set and linked to levels of service, safety and value for money. The board would work on commercial lines but would focus solely on delivering a safe, well-maintained rail network that is fit for the 21st century."

He also emphasised that the company envisaged that it

"would be able to promote collaboration and co-operation around the wheel and track interface, the absence of which has been one of Railtrack's weaknesses."

He went on:

"A private company limited by guarantee would need far less intense regulation . . . We shall discuss these proposals with the industry's key players."

Indeed, we are doing that. He continued:

"We are clear that it is important for the new structure to provide strong strategic leadership; a cut in the burden of day-to-day interference; an end to the self-defeating system of penalties and compensation;"—

a matter that was raised by the hon. Gentleman—

"clear accountability; and an end to perverse incentives."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 955-56.]

As the Secretary of State has already said, he has an open mind on vertical integration, but it would not be appropriate for me today to go any further than that because of the nature of the position that he reported to the House on 15 October.

No doubt the hon. Gentleman will be most interested in the services operated by South West Trains, as it is the operator of services through his Twickenham constituency. I have considerable familiarity with train services in that constituency. The names of the stations Whitton, St. Margarets, Fulwell, Hampton and Strawberry Hill flash before my eyes, although in those days some of the stations were serviced by trains with smoke coming out somewhere near the front.

South West Trains was included in the first batch of franchises for replacement in 1999. Following a competitive process, the Strategic Rail Authority signed heads of terms with Stagecoach as the preferred counterparty for the replacement franchise in March this year. The SRA is working with Stagecoach towards signing a deal that preserves the benefits agreed in the heads of terms.

As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, the Strategic Rail Authority cannot give a date when the deal might be signed. It does not want to undermine its negotiating position by setting itself a deadline. It wants to have complete confidence that the terms negotiated are fully enforceable and offer best value for money before the deal is signed. Suffice it to say, it wants that to be at the earliest opportunity.

I understand that the authority will consider with Stagecoach the possibility of bringing certain elements of the deal forward in advance of franchise agreement signature. Elements that could be brought forward, to ensure that passengers get some early benefits, include an increase in evening and Sunday services and measures to improve station security.

The hon. Gentleman asked about finance for the services envisaged under the new franchise under discussion. The focus of the investment proposal under that franchise is to allow growth in passenger demand, to increase the reliability and punctuality of services and to reduce overcrowding. Under the heads of terms, £1.7 billion is committed over the first 15 years to that end.

Within the heads of terms, Stagecoach has a detailed set of schemes that will provide passengers with a number of early benefits. Those include—it is particularly pertinent to the questions that the hon. Gentleman asked—investment in almost 800 new vehicles to replace the ageing mark 1 stock, increase the fleet and help relieve overcrowding. In April 2001, Stagecoach agreed contracts with the lessors, Angel Trains, and with Siemens, the manufacturer, for the supply of those vehicles. That order, the biggest ever UK rolling stock contract, is underwritten by the SRA. The first of the new trains are scheduled to enter service in 2002.

The second benefit—again, the hon. Gentleman asked a specific question about the matter—is a programme of platform lengthening at Waterloo and throughout the suburban network to allow the use of 10-car trains in place of the current eight-car trains. That will increase peak capacity on most suburban routes by 25 per cent.

Initial work site visits and technical studies have begun for those platform extension works. Even so, the hon. Gentleman will understand that, until a new agreement is signed, no date can be given for the introduction of the 10-car trains. However, I think that he will take an assurance that work is well in hand to examine how the 10-car trains can come into service.

Further benefits include a recast timetable on the Windsor and Reading lines to provide an additional two trains per hour for most of the day through Twickenham and Richmond. Improvements in service frequencies in suburban areas include the provision of four trains per hour at all stations on the Hounslow loop, and between Shepperton and Kingston.

In the longer term, the heads of terms provide for the redevelopment of Clapham Junction station by 2007. The upgrade is designed to make the station more comfortable and convenient for local passengers, and for those who have to change trains. Improvements will also be made at Waterloo to provide for the safe and convenient circulation of a growing number of passengers, and upgrades will be carried out at Wimbledon and Vauxhall to improve interchange with the underground.

Stagecoach has also put a set of aspirations in the heads of terms on which progress may be made later in the franchise, including the introduction of 16-car trains on longer distance routes, which is particularly interesting to me. They also include the extension of platforms at Waterloo for 12-car suburban trains, and the introduction of double-decker trains on some routes—low bridges permitting, I imagine. Of course changes cannot happen overnight, but I believe that over the next few years passengers on the South West Trains network will see a marked improvement in their service.

The rail industry has recently gone through an unprecedented upheaval, starting with the Hatfield accident in October last year, continuing with the widespread disruption to the network that followed it, and culminating in the placing of Railtrack in administration in October this year. It will be some time before the new structure for the industry is clear. However, the future of services nationwide will become clearer with the publication of the Strategic Rail Authority's first strategic plan later this year, and with the announcement of its revised replacement programme.

The strategic plan will set out the authority's long-term vision for the railways, and its priorities for the short and medium terms. Those priorities will need to address the targets set in our 10-year plan, which are to increase passenger numbers by 50 per cent. by 2010 through investment in infrastructure and capacity, to reduce overcrowding, and to secure improvements in punctuality and reliability.

We are fully committed to delivering the vision for railways set out in our 10-year plan, and we will continue to ensure that the industry bodies work together in partnership to deliver the rail service that passengers expect and deserve in the 21st century.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past One o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 6 November 2001

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Small Business (Regulatory Burden)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I am most grateful for the opportunity to speak about the needs of small businesses and the burden of regulation that they bear. I initiated the debate for three reasons. First, I spent the whole of the past 10 years running my own business, before coming to this place in June, so I hope that I can bring a practical rather than a theoretical or academic approach to the subject of the needs of small firms. If I have learned one thing, it is that small businesses are not so much about the bottom line, the economy and finance; they are essentially about people. That difference is crucial.

My second reason for securing the debate is that, in my constituency, small businesses generate a much larger proportion of the local wealth and jobs than is usual in most constituencies. In most of the market towns and villages in my constituency, the small firms, entrepreneurs and local tradesmen provide the goods and services on which most of my constituents rely. That is one reason why I established the East Hertfordshire Business Forum at the beginning of last year, with the express intention of providing practical help for local businesses. I am pleased to say that one of our initiatives, the prompt payment commitment, is directly tackling the scourge of late payment of bills.

My third reason for raising the issue of small businesses is that we need to speak up for small businesses now, more than ever. We must reduce bureaucratic burdens and lower financial hurdles, because it is at a time such as this, as the economy falters, that those enterprises will help us avoid a long and lasting recession.

Those who refer to small business may be unclear in their mind as to what it is. All politicians and all members of the media happily use the phrase to cover a wide variety of enterprises and work. The first example that I shall give of a small business is that of someone who is self-employed, a sole trader or a freelance. There are now 4 million self-employed people in Britain. Sadly, the Government's determination to push through the IR35 proposal has badly undermined their expectations about working in this country. In the few days since the announcement of the debate, I have received dozens of e-mails, letters and representations about the concerns of that group. One of my constituents, Mr. Paul Granger of Hovecraft Services, based in Bishop's Stortford, cites the iniquity of the tax burden placed on him by IR35. He concludes:

"we do not want employment rights or any special treatment—we want to be left alone to get on and run our companies, many of which are at the cutting edge of technology."

My second example of small business is the microbusiness. Such businesses are usually partnerships or companies that employ up to 10 staff. They make up the vast majority of the shops and local tradesmen upon which we all rely. For them, the marginal cost of employing people is critical in determining whether they can survive as a business. Another example from my constituency is that of Mrs. Moy, a newsagent in Hertford—we have many excellent newsagents—whom I met. The new regulations regarding rights for part-time staff have effectively doubled her staffing costs; however, she has no prospect of being able to recoup those costs.

Once we have talked about the self-employed and microbusinesses, it is only then that we come to what most people think of as a small business: a limited company, usually employing between 11 and 50 people, which is often a family business in manufacturing or the service sector. All those forms of enterprise—whether self-employed, microbusiness or small, and whether they operate as a limited company, partnership or sole trader—are distinct. The failure of Governments, at all levels over the years, to distinguish accurately between the different types of enterprise is one reason why so many Government policies, well intentioned or otherwise, prove disastrous in practice.

Small businesses in all their forms are vital to the economy and community. They provide almost half of all private sector jobs and many local services, particularly in deprived or rural areas where large companies will not venture. They often create the innovative approach to a market, a good example being Mr. James Dyson and his attempts to revolutionise the vacuum cleaner market when other companies saw it as mature and stale. Small businesses offer also a message of hope. It does not matter who people are, their background or education, their colour, creed or race; if they have the ability, ambition and will to work, they can be their own boss and make their own way in the world. Looking at what the organisations that represent those firms have said, that message is one to which an increasing number of people aspire.

Sadly, today small businesses are struggling. The result is that our national competitiveness is falling away rapidly. In 1997, we were the ninth most competitive nation in the world; today we are the 19th, and I believe that that position is under question. Why is our nation's economy failing to compete? Whenever I talk to my constituents and small businesses, or examine the regular surveys by the Federation of Small Businesses, the Forum of Private Business or the Small Business Bureau, I conclude that the answer is always the burden of regulation. We are facing a rising tide of regulation domestically and from the European Union. Last year alone, a record 3,865 regulations were passed. The sheer volume of those rules, the systems that underpin them and the time and money costs of implementation mean that small businesses are struggling to keep ahead.

It might be said that one year of record regulations is not the end, but the problem is not just one year. It followed on from a £15 billion cost of additional red tape, which the British Chambers of Commerce cited as the cost of Labour's first four years in government. If the volume of regulations were not bad enough, the Government compound the problem by the way in which they are introduced. There is often little warning

[Mr. Mark Prisk]

or preparation time. Several businesses in my constituency cited just three weeks as the time that they had in which to deal with all the national minimum wage information. The rules are sometimes contradictory, and now we find that small businesses are no longer expected simply to abide by regulations and rules, but are expected to administer them.

As I was a small business man, I know that we have been unpaid tax collectors for many years—for value added tax, for example. Now we are expected to be the unpaid benefits office, given the raft of new payroll regulations. The stakeholder pension scheme has a recurring administrative cost of £15 million, and the working families tax credit scheme has an annual cost of £105 million. The student loan repayment scheme has recurring costs of £210 million, and the national minimum wage has costs to business of £330 million, not including extra money that goes into people's pay packets. Those are not my figures; they are not even the figures of the British Chambers of Commerce. They are the Government's figures. I shall take one example from that list to explain how small businesses are directly affected. When the Government originally costed the working families tax credit, they allowed £40 million for one-off set-up costs, followed by £105 million per annum for recurring costs to business. Some people said that those were quite small, and reasonable costs compared with those of the European social chapter, although I was not convinced.

However, the Government and some experts failed to recognise that payroll compliance costs always hit the smallest firms hardest. Indeed, the Government's own better regulation taskforce said not only that the scheme directly hit small firms' cash flow—the lifeblood of any business—but £25 million of compliance costs fell on the smallest firms, which employ just one to four people.

Perhaps worst of all is the fact that, according to Lord Haskins's report,

"only £10m of the estimated ... £25m cost to the smallest businesses ... is related to those employers who will actually employ a WFTC applicant. The remaining £15m represents the time spent by the 90 per cent. who will possibly not have to deal with a WFTC applicant but will still have to spend time reading—"

and complying with—

"the guidance."

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Last week, I sold my car. While waiting to receive payment for it, I chatted to the person running the small car company to whom I had sold it. He said that he spent less than 10 per cent. of his time buying and selling cars; the rest was spent managing his business. The largest part of that management involves the administration of all the new regulations of which he has to be aware, even though the company has, I believe, fewer than four employees.

Mr. Prisk: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that classic example of the way in which small businesses that are trying to make a contribution to their local communities find the burden of administration too much. It is a good example, which reinforces the fact that Government policies, intentionally or otherwise, disproportionately affect small businesses, diverting them from creating wealth and providing efficient services. Given that such businesses generate 37 per cent. of our gross national product and employ 44 per cent. of private sector workers, the burden of regulations directly impinges on the efficiency of our national economy.

However, there is also a social dimension. I have long been a strong supporter of citizens advice bureaux, and my constituency is fortunate enough to have several excellent bureaux. I was particularly concerned to read the national association's report back in February, which explains, worryingly, how the working families tax credit has backfired for many of the more vulnerable applicants:

"In the worst cases employers have sacked workers entitled to the pay boost or cut their hours because they want to avoid the red tape of paying it through the wage packet. In other cases life at work has been made more difficult and people are less secure in their jobs."

Mr. David Harker, the chief executive, concludes that

"it makes no sense that the scheme that sets out to make work pay is making it more difficult for some people to stay in their jobs, and leaving some families worse instead of better off."

I am aware that the Government have appointed Mr. Patrick Carter to review payroll regulations and make them more effective and less costly. I understand that Ministers have had Mr. Carter's report for a little while, so I urge them to publish the findings, or at least bring them to the House's attention, to allow us to debate them quickly, not least because it is important to make changes as quickly as we can as the economy declines.

There are several solutions to the problem. In the United States, for example, small companies are able to retain a percentage of the sales tax that they collect on the Government's behalf. In some ways, that compensates companies for the administrative costs.

Does the Minister agree with the taskforce that the working families tax credit disproportionately hurts small businesses? Will he accept that it reduces their productivity and therefore national competitiveness? Does the Minister recognise the potential impact on jobs if red tape deters microbusinesses from taking on people such as Mrs. Moy in Hertford and thousands of others like her? Most important, will the small business Minister and his colleagues heed my call to recognise, financially or otherwise, the burden that the scheme places on small businesses?

Sadly, the working families tax credit will not be the last subject for employment-related regulation. Others expected in the next few months include entitlements to enhanced maternity, paternity and adoption leave, the EU White Paper on environmental liability and the EU directive on the exposure of workers to vibrations. Business is rightly sceptical of a Government who promise support and help, for they seek action, not words.

We wish the new Minister well and we hope that he will succeed, because the future of small businesses is in my mind in this debate. I hope that the Minister will answer my questions today.

The Minister is up against the culture of governance; there is little contact with or understanding of small businesses and family firms, let alone the self-employed. For example, the IR35 measure passed by the

Government represents twice the annual budget of the Small Business Service for which the Minister is responsible. In truth, our regulatory culture is, as Lord Haskins, said, inherently autocratic, inflexible and remote. Mr. Digby Jones of the Confederation of British Industry said yesterday that even big companies are now feeling the pressure.

On Friday Mr. Rupert Murdoch, with whom I believe the Government are familiar, complained about red tape and said that Britain

"is not a country that encourages success...our executives have to spend at least half their time dealing with lawyers and regulators and they would do a whole lot better if they didn't have to cope with this constant harassment."

If a multi-million pound business is struggling, what hope is there for family businesses and small firms in my constituency and those of other hon. Members?

In the long term, we seek a complete change of culture in government. They should recognise that what enterprise needs is not a better regulation taskforce but less regulation. What we need is not more means testing but a simple, efficient tax system; we want not to collect taxes or run the welfare state on the Government's behalf, but to be free to create jobs and wealth, without which there would be no Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is customary for hon. Members seeking to catch the eye of the Chair to rise in their places.

9.48 am

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I declare an interest: I am part-owner of a family microbusiness, which has self-employed people and which negotiated in respect of IR35 with the Inland Revenue on behalf of our sector of industry. The business employs a lot of part-time staff and casual staff.

I have listened to the debate with the utmost incredulity. I considered intervening to ask that the support for, and success of, small business under the last Tory Government be compared with that under Labour Governments since 1997. I set up my business under a Labour Government and the issue of regulation and red tape is a puzzle to me. I am a member of two chambers of commerce and I speak regularly with business in my constituency and beyond. Businesses tell me of subjects on which they would like to press the Minister—and, indeed, the Chancellor—and I shall discuss those in a moment. Regulation, however, is not an issue that comes up regularly.

I want to deal with the specifics, so let me deal with vibration, which is a wonderful example because regulation has not yet been introduced. Historically, the largest industry in my constituency has been coalmining. The next largest is manufacturing. One of the areas that I have been forced to specialise in is vibration white finger. Many compensation claims arose as people went to court retrospectively to sue their employers for failing to recognise a health and safety hazard.

The regulations that have impacted on my business include precisely those health and safety regulations kindly introduced between 1992 and 1997. I have no criticism of the major ones—such as the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992, which are fundamental in protecting small businesses against potential compensation claims from employees, casual or permanent. The raft of legislation on electrical installation—part of our business—is another protection for the employer against bad practice by both employer and employee. It was introduced between 1992 and 1997 and continued subsequently by successive Governments. Once again, I applaud that. The bulk of the regulations introduced in this country over the past decade are entirely right and proper.

The working families tax credit is another example. Some employers tell me, somewhat tongue in cheek, that it supports the employer. Why? Because if someone is paid such a low wage that they are entitled to the working families tax credit, the employee, having received additional finance from the state, is more likely to stay with the company. The one criticism that could be made is that it is subsidising the poor-paying employer, precisely the small business person who, at great expense of time, effort and finance, is trying to build a successful business. Representatives of businesses tell me that the working families tax credit is a major bonus to such employers, and they are right.

A third example—

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): The hon. Gentleman is missing the point. It is not whether the working families tax credit is good or bad, but whether the method that the Government selected for paying it—using businesses as unpaid welfare delivery mechanisms—is the right or wrong way to deliver that benefit.

John Mann: I must disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Whether the working families tax credit is a good thing is the main issue. By definition, the tax credit supports working, not non-working families. The linkage with the employer is coherent and sensible.

The national minimum wage is a third example. My business and the vast majority of businesses welcome the national minimum wage. It was welcome in my industry because we were sick to death of cowboy employers paying next to nothing—cash in hand if they could get away with it—undercutting us on the minimums. The national minimum wage has allowed our industry to push rates up. The largest sector of small business that I deal with regularly is hairdressing and associated professional bodies. In that sector, the introduction of the minimum wage is raising standards—we have the best hair designers in the world—but in the past it has been a low-skill, low-pay, low-cost industry comprising more than 70,000 different small businesses. The national minimum wage is raising standards so that our role as world leaders in design capability translates into the product delivered to the customer. For the first time, those paying the national minimum wage and above are on a level playing field.

The real issue is the significant improvements that the Government could continue to make. I shall list four of them. First, the Government have, rightly, increased VAT thresholds at least twice since 1997. If that trend continued, it would be a major asset to the growing small business. I hope that the Minister conveys that message to the Chancellor, as it is a critical issue for consideration.

[John Mann]

The second improvement that the Government could make concerns capital allowances, which, in the current tax regime for small businesses, are not as fundamental as they were because, with the 10p starting rate and the cut in small business tax, a significantly greater amount is already available—as the profits of my company demonstrate over that period. Nevertheless, the link between paying tax, available resources and capital investment exists in the mind of the small business person. The Government should make far greater use of capital allowances of the type used for computer and IT equipment, with 100 per cent. write-off, to encourage small business capital investment. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will also convey that message to the Chancellor.

The third improvement that the Government could make concerns rate rebates for small businesses. They have slowly begun to have a major impact, particularly in the rural sector, where I live. What does the Minister propose to do to ensure that the existing arrangements are properly communicated to those who run businesses? My experience is that we have a raft of good policies for the rural small business—which is all too often not aware of them. To save time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not cite examples of those policies, although there is a raft of them.

Mr. Wiggin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you confirm the correct way in which we should address you?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The correct form of address to the Chair at the moment is "Mr. Deputy Speaker". Chairmen who are not Deputy Speakers of the House are addressed by name or as Mr. Chairman, as will be made clear at any changeover.

John Mann: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My final point is the most fundamental for small business. I thank the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) for initiating the debate and raising the issue of the Government's small business culture. One fundamental change is required for small business: a change to the culture of the banking system. The greatest barrier to the establishment and success of small businesses is the culture whereby banks refuse to take rational decisions. Yesterday I filled in a questionnaire that asked me to comment on 10 banks. They are all the same. In my experience, they are all as bad as one another. There is no good example among them. How does the Minister propose to tackle the culture whereby banks rip off businesses for short-term profit, at the expense of the longer-term growth of the British economy and of the banking system?

9.58 am

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important subject.

We all know that actions speak louder than words. One reason why politics lacks credibility today is the perception that politicians say one thing and do another. A good example of that is the fact that there is no shortage of pro-business speeches and noises from the Government, yet they continue to make life difficult for business, especially small business. I should declare an interest because I am a small business man.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) that, according to British Chambers of Commerce figures, red tape costs have increased by £15 billion during Labour's first term. There is no getting away from that fact. Industry itself is complaining about the burden of red tape, regardless of what the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) just said. As the Federation of Small Businesses has made clear, the burden of red tape always falls disproportionately on small firms. Figures from the Institute of Chartered Accountants show that the cost to small businesses of implementing new legislation doubled in the period 1999 to 2000. That is a meaningful cost to small businesses.

Regulation and red tape have hit small businesses hard. Entrepreneurs in my constituency are concerned about that. We should be too, because small businesses are the lifeblood of the economy, accounting for something like 99 per cent. of all businesses and nearly half of all employment, as my hon. Friend intimated. If we strangle enterprise in the small business community, we inhibit the prosperity of the country as a whole. Indeed, one of the main reasons why I am a Conservative is that I believe that the relief of poverty should be one of the key objectives of politics. That can be better brought about if we foster personal freedoms within the rule of the law, encourage enterprise and allow businesses—especially small businesses—to breathe and thrive.

Such an approach will create a more prosperous economy and create more wealth from which the Government can take their rightful share to help the truly disadvantaged in society. That will not happen if the Government pile regulations and costs on to businesses as that will hinder enterprise and eventually our ability to help those most in need. Yet the Government continue to make life difficult for entrepreneurs. The rising tide of regulation and red tape originates essentially from two sources. A good chunk is home grown and results from a natural tendency of politicians and bureaucrats to try to solve all problems with more and more regulation. The second source is the European Union. That situation will get gradually worse with the spread of majority voting. I should like to focus on that second danger for a moment or two.

To illustrate the growing danger posed by the EU's obsession with uniformity, I would highlight the prospectus directive because of the immense damage it could cause our small growing companies. That directive will harmonise listing rules across Europe, ensuring that issues of shares, bonds and derivatives should be accompanied by a prospectus. The fear is that the additional red tape could add something like £70,000 to £100,000 to the listing cost of each company, no matter how small. That would particularly hit small businesses, as their cost of raising capital would be increased significantly.

Prior to being elected to this place in June, I was a fund manager in the City, often investing in small businesses that raised capital in the financial markets, and I can vouch for how important it is for small businesses to have access to cheap capital from flexible

financial markets. Meanwhile, as reported in the *Financial Times*, there is also a fear that in seeking to raise the disclosure standards of all companies, the directive could hit second-tier markets such as the London stock exchange's AIM and OFEX markets. Those markets have lower disclosure requirements to encourage young companies without extensive trading histories to raise capital.

They have been phenomenally successful in achieving that goal. AIM is the London stock exchange's market for growing companies and is obviously aimed at the smaller end of the market. Since its launch in 1995 it has helped something like 750 companies raise nearly £7 billion of equity capital. It has become a vital part of the UK economy in channelling public equity capital to younger companies. That market would not survive this directive. That is the view of private industry itself.

The problem is that the directive is the product of an EU Commission which has not consulted widely on the proposal and which did not take full account of the reality of how Europe's capital markets work. It is little wonder that private industry is unhappy, yet the response from the authorities to complaints about the directive has been disappointing, to say the least. In August, representatives of the London stock exchange, Barclays bank, OFEX, AIM, Brown Shipley merchant bank and the Quoted Companies Alliance attended a meeting at the Treasury to voice their concerns. They were hoping to meet senior officials but, instead, were met only by a junior official. As reported in *The Daily Telegraph*, one representative said:

"We were very disappointed. This is a serious issue. Aim has been very successful and, if it is abolished, it will increase the cost of raising capital for small companies considerably."

Apparently, a Treasury spokesman responded and said that it must be accepted that the policy will go ahead.

The EU's response has been extremely disappointing. After it was criticised for producing its "one size fits all" prospectus directive without consultation, a spokesman for Frits Bolkestein, the EU Internal Market Commissioner, said, again courtesy of *The Daily Telegraph*:

"We just did not have time to go for full consultation as we have a deadline to implement this by 2003."

That last statement beggars belief. We seem to have faceless, unaccountable bureaucrats setting deadlines on policies, irrespective of what harm they will do to small businesses and secondary markets, while the Government look on. It confirms to many that London's interests come a poor second to the EU Commission's quest for Euro-uniformity.

I now return to the difference between words and actions. Both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor recently expressed admiration for the success of American enterprise as characterised by low taxes, low regulation and individual initiative. In reality, however, we are moving towards a high-tax, high-regulation EU model which is run by bureaucrats. The language is that of American enterprise; the reality is EU regulation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford said, the adoption of the EU model is beginning to have a detrimental effect on our economic performance. Productivity growth has slowed. The United Kingdom has fallen in the world competitiveness league table and, meanwhile, economic growth is slowing down and the balance of payments is showing a record deficit. That does not bode well for the future.

I urge the Government to do all that they can to block the prospectus directive and to re-examine their approach to regulation in respect of small businesses. We should be moving closer to the American model, not the EU model. Actions speak louder than words and we must act now to ensure that we do not stifle Britain's entrepreneurial spirit and, with it, our prosperity over the longer term.

10.7 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I agree almost four square with the philosophical outlook of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron). He summed up the position nicely by saying that we should be moving towards the United States model rather than a European-type model in respect of small businesses. As a former small business man, I do not need to make a declaration because, within a few months of the general election in June, I was bought out of the business that I set up eight years ago. The Minister may think that it is curious that a phalanx of small business people who want to extol the virtues of such a wonderful life have now decided to go to the public sector, courtesy in part of the electorate. None the less, that means that we have a strong contribution to make to such a debate. Furthermore, ours will be an on-going contribution in the months and years ahead.

I want to concentrate on the more practical aspects of this important issue. No one wants to talk us into a recession, but clearly matters will be a little more difficult in the next few years than they have been in the past half a decade or so. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) who said that, as the economy begins to struggle and turn down, we need to speak up for—without overly interfering with—small business. He had statistics, such as the fact that there are 4 million or so sole traders and microbusinesses, at his fingertips as well as details of small businesses such as the one that I ended up running. I set it up with a partner, and by the time that I left it, about eight years into running it, we had a dozen staff and a turnover of a little more than £2 million. I identify with some genuine anxieties, especially in the final two or three years, relating to payroll issues and that of the unpaid tax collector, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford referred. Many small business people feel that they are long-term Government employees in that respect.

I calculated that for every pound that I brought into the economy, 64p went in tax—if all taxes were counted, including value added tax, corporation tax, my slug of income tax and the employer's national insurance stamp. A significant amount is involved. For every pound that a small business man earns, he can keep only 36p, with more or less two thirds going elsewhere. That tax regime was in place before 1997, as I am sure that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) would be the first to remind me, and I welcome some of the measures introduced in the past four or five years. We now have a more sensible capital gains tax regime, although it has recently become rather more complex. I hope that many Opposition Members would agree with some of the actions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and, by extension, of the Minister's Department.

[Mr. Mark Field]

One of the main concerns at a practical level that many people in small business now share is that we should strike a balance between, on one hand, achieving a work-life balance and considering small business issues in terms of employee rights—to which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw alluded—and on the other, introducing what they would regard as red tape. We must achieve a balance as far as possible, and in my view there has to be a demand for less regulation.

There is a perception that, in my constituency, Cities of London and Westminster—the constituency in which we are today—all the industries are large multinationals. My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay discussed some of the largest institutions in the City of London and some of their anxieties. Equally, however, there are many small, often family-owned businesses based in the constituency, and they have many common small business concerns. Obviously, they have some London-based anxieties relating to congestion and the sheer cost of housing, which means that attracting employees can be an issue, and some fundamental infrastructure issues are involved, especially in relation to transport. Nevertheless, some genuine worries are close to the hearts of people who run businesses here. Payroll issues, in particular, have become ever more prevalent in recent years, as a result of the Employment Relations Act 1999 and the fact that, increasingly, smaller businesses do not have the infrastructure for a large marketing department or, perhaps, even a human resources or payroll department, yet have to deal with complex specialist paperwork.

My business was a classic in that mode. We were not sufficiently well off to employ people full-time, and we had to take consulting advice on payroll aspects. Ultimately, however, much of the burden fell on me and my fellow director. I shall be honest about this: there were concerns. We had a small and relatively young business and, given that at one time two of our four female employees were on maternity leave, it had to make us think twice about whether we could employ more youngish women who might well be considering having a family. Obviously, the increasing amount of paternity leave is an on-going concern, especially for smaller businesses, as employees can be out of the picture for some six months. Long-term plans cannot be made about employing a replacement, lest the employee decides to return. We wanted to employ graduates, but it was very much a factor in our mind that, as the payroll aspects of graduate tax provision were being put back in the hands of small business people, doing so really would have totted up costs.

I do not suggest that there should be a moratorium or free rein in this respect for small businesses. I understand that, as the Minister would rightly say, it would give companies at the cut-off point of, say, 20 or 25 employees a strong disincentive to grow if suddenly they faced new regulation from which they had previously been exempt. The point was well made by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw. He placed the blame for many of the woes of small businesses on the banking system, and more concerns would arise with regard to that if the economy were to enter a recession. Many banks would react to that situation by looking after their own interests and by watching what other banks were doing. If they responded in that manner, they would be reacting in a rational economic way, rather than misbehaving, but important concerns might arise with regard to cash flow. Assistance, such as tax exemptions, or allowing for certain taxes and rates to be paid on a longer-term basis, would be well received, especially in respect of smaller, relatively new, start-up businesses.

The debate has been useful, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford on raising the issue under discussion higher up the political agenda. However, time is running out, and those in the Chamber will now wish to hear from the Minister.

10.15am

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I thank the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) for providing us with another opportunity to discuss small businesses, which are an integral part of every community. I still run a small business—that interest has been fully declared. My practical experience gives me a special understanding of many of the issues under discussion—I am sure that other hon. Members who have business connections will agree with me about that—and I hope to be able to share some of my knowledge with the Minister.

Several issues that were raised by the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford have been addressed in the debate. I was glad that he mentioned the important matter of the prompt payment of bills. The Government's introduction, a few years ago, of regulations on that matter was welcomed by many hon. Members, but how well they have been implemented has always been a concern. However, I am glad to learn that, locally, the matter has been taken on board.

Mr. Prisk: The hon. Gentleman is right to state that that is an important issue. One of my concerns about the Government's proposals is that it is not enough simply to pass legislation. The problem for small suppliers is that, if they have a large customer, they will not want to upset that relationship. Consequently, they will not use the Government's legislation, as has been shown by the evidence to date. In that regard, the legislation misses the point. I would welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments on that issue.

Brian Cotter: That is a fair point. However, if legislation were never introduced, one would never make a start down the right road. The legislation has led to a gradual change in culture. I do not know precisely about the current situation, but I believe that large companies should be required to declare their record on the payment of bills, as should the Government. I spoke when the legislation was introduced, and even then I was disappointed that the Government were trailing behind. Essentially, the Government were telling companies what to do while failing swiftly to implement their own legislation. As hon. Members have said, local government is particularly guilty of that practice.

The issues that have been raised with regard to rural areas are important, and there is still a lot of work to be done on them, particularly following the foot and mouth crisis. Other issues, such as of sub-post offices, also need further attention. Hon. Members are

increasingly looking to the Government to deliver through the regional development agency system. Ministers are talking about investing more money in the system next year, or the year after, and increased investment in regional development agencies would be welcome because they did not receive enough funding when they were established. In future, like many other hon. Members, I shall be looking to the regional development agencies to introduce more initiatives to help rural areas.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) made some good points. He mentioned, for example, the working families tax credit, which we all welcome. However, we also look to the Government to do something about the burden that they have placed on the small companies that must implement the credit. The initiative is good and worthwhile, but we want help for business to be implemented by the Government rather than by business.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw also mentioned business rates, an issue that is important and high on the small business agenda. I wait with increasingly bated breath for the Government to bring forward a scheme to help small businesses with business rates. I do not know whether my breath will continue to be bated today or whether I will get satisfaction. I ask the Minister to respond here and now to the programme that the Liberal Democrats have proposed: a business rate allowance that is easy to implement with no red tape and that leads to an immediate reduction in small businesses' business rates. If the Minister does not know the full details of the proposal, I shall send them to him. I cannot understand why such a worthwhile initiative cannot be adopted.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) made some good points on the prospectus directive. I am in touch with the rapporteur in the European Parliament on the matter, and he has taken on board the points that I made and those of the type mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. We hope that the directive will bed down as a reasonable regulation.

We all know the important role that small firms play in our society, economically and socially. It does not take much to figure out that it is in the Government's interest and in all our interests to ensure that small businesses are allowed to fulfil their potential without being weighed down by excessive regulations. I disagreed with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw when he said that that matter was not a high priority for many people. Respected surveys by bodies such as the Federation of Small Businesses, the Forum of Private Business and the Institute of Chartered Accountants state time and again that the matter is problematic.

The Government pledged to think small first. We plead that that pledge should lead to real action, rather than simply being a pious hope. There is still some way to go before small firms cease to be strangled by regulatory red tape, which prevents them from getting on with the business of running their business. A recent survey by the Institute of Chartered Accountants said that, since last year, the average compliance cost for microbusinesses had increased from £3,600 to £4,100. That is a discernible increase. In the small business sector as a whole, the average cost has increased from £8,000 to more than £10,000. We must respect those figures and the Government must take them into account.

Given the Government's record, it is unsurprising that small businesses remain unimpressed by their rhetoric. Seventy-five per cent. of respondents to the Institute of Chartered Accountants survey said that the Government had not done enough to encourage enterprise culture.

Mr. Wiggin: The hon. Gentleman is probably as familiar as I am with the fact that huge numbers of small businesses in his constituency run tourist-driven activities, such as bed and breakfasts and small hotels. Given that the money available for tourism has been disproportionately spread to Scotland and Wales, does he lament, as I do, the Government's lack of funding and support for struggling small businesses that are trying to attract tourists to England—especially to the seaside—in the aftermath of the foot and mouth crisis? I hope that he will support me in asking the Government to divert more funds to increase funding for tourism support.

Brian Cotter: I happily support the hon. Gentleman in that request, although Conservative Members have not produced a significantly better programme on the issue than have the Government. However, I shall raise those issues with the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting when he comes to Weston-super-Mare on Thursday.

There is a fine line between achieving good standards for employees and not putting too great a burden on the employer. The annual report of the better regulation taskforce states:

> "Any regulation decided on should be designed to deliver its objectives efficiently and cost-effectively without impairing the liability and competitiveness of good and especially small businesses."

That is a definitively important statement, which the Government should observe when dealing with business. That is what all regulation should be about, as Lord Haskins said in his report. However, if we use that test to judge some of the regulations that the Government have introduced, we find that they have failed to meet it time and again.

Do the provisions for stakeholder pensions, for example, fulfil the objectives to which I referred? No, they certainly do not. In a recent written answer, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions admitted that, by the end of August, only 146,950 employers had designated a scheme for their employees out of a total of up to 400,000 employers that were in line to do so by 8 October. The take-up rate has been decidedly low because of concerns about the scheme and its past performance. The Government seem resigned to the fact that there is concern about stakeholder pensions. The Department for Work and Pensions announced another pensions review just two weeks before employers could have been fined for not having a stakeholder pension scheme in place. That is an important point for the Minister to bear in mind.

The new regulations on the issue also fall short of the good regulation test because they place an impossible burden on smaller employers—the microbusinesses—

[Brian Cotter]

who must identify a scheme and administer it through the payroll. Once again, small firms are carrying out the work of Government and being forced to undertake roles that should never have been placed within their remit. I ask the Minister to consider that important point. The point applies also to the working families tax credit, which I mentioned earlier.

No small business owner would dream of asking the Minister to mind the counter of his shop—although it might be a good idea if the Minister were to do so. Instead of grandiose schemes whereby people work for Shell for a couple of years and enjoy all the benefits of such big companies, the Minister, Members of Parliament and especially civil servants should get down to the nitty-gritty and work for two, three or four days in a small business—a garage, for instance—slog away and go home late at night to calculate VAT.

The climate change levy is another important issue. Many firms of all sizes are concerned about it because it is complicated and cumbersome. I also draw special attention to the lack of consultation on the working time regulations. Although those regulations are supposed to be extended and better operated, that has not yet happened.

I seek several reassurances from the Minister on behalf of small businesses. A key to achieving regulation that complies with the model set out by the better regulation taskforce is to understand the needs of small firms. The Minister would do well to read, on the British Chambers of Commerce website, the comments made in reply to its campaign to cut red tape. A gentleman called Henry, for example, runs a business that is based on the internet and e-commerce, and his comments on the website neatly summarise the way in which many people have been affected by the IR35 legislation.

Many small firms have no idea of the regulatory requirements facing them. I ask the Minister to ensure that the communication process between small firms is improved, perhaps by using the Small Business Service. What action are the Government considering to ensure the effectiveness of legislation passed by the House? I ask the Minister to press for an immediate review of legislation that places unnecessary burdens on small firms. I would also like him to guarantee that further legislation will not be introduced to the detriment of small firms, particularly as we look ahead to the tax credits coming on line in 2003. Finally, when will the Minister respond to the detail of the Competition Commission report on banking, which has been on the table for nine months? We have yet to hear a response.

10.31 am

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on securing the debate. He is eminently qualified to raise the subject of small business and so too, it appears, are other hon. Members who have contributed this morning. I declare my interest as a director of two companies, both of which, I think, would qualify as small businesses under the official definition.

I want to set the subject in a wider context. Over the past couple of months, political focus has been on wider issues: foreign affairs and our country's ability to defend itself. Before that, the political flavour of the month was public services and an agenda for making them better and more effective. Those legitimate activities of Government and the social state critically depend on the ability of our productive enterprises to generate the wealth that underpins them. Business is critical to the success of our society and small businesses play a significant role in our economy.

Already, we have heard about the 3.7 million enterprises that exist in this country. More than 99 per cent. of those employ fewer than 50 employees. Some 44 per cent. of all non-governmental employees are in the small business sector and 37 per cent. of private sector turnover is generated in that sector. The sector not only represents a significant proportion of the total economy but performs an important role in delivering flexibility to the economy. That is the reason for the concern about the burden of increased regulation on small businesses.

The term "small businesses" embraces a range of enterprise sizes, as my hon. Friend said. Clearly, some small businesses are growing and seeking to accumulate capital; they may, in time, become medium enterprises. However, a large number of small businesses will never be anything other than just that. Many of them are one-man, self-employed enterprises. They, in particular, deliver a swing capability to our economy that is vital to the fast-moving responsiveness that we need if we are to continue to be flexible.

I am sure that the Chancellor would recognise that as the economy and the fortunes of firms move, they must be able to adjust the costs that they bear. The one-man business is uniquely able to adjust its cost in response to the changing environment; it makes more money one year, less the next. Typically, such a business will not require large streams of investment capability, so it can absorb changes in the environment in a way that larger and more structured businesses cannot. The price that small enterprises pay is a much higher rate of enterprise failure than is seen among larger enterprises, which is balanced by a faster rate of enterprise creation. We need to focus on the flexibility that microbusinesses and small businesses deliver because they provide a unique adjustment factor in the economy. One reason why the Government's IR35 initiative has been so damaging and destructive is the fact that it has hit at the most flexible part of the economy.

The Chancellor, whom I am happy to quote again, always talks about improvements to productivity being the key to our future success. I have been struck by a report by a New York organisation called the Conference Board, which analyses the productivity gap from the United States perspective. I shall quote from the executive summary—I could not afford the full report because it costs $1,000 and parliamentary resources do not stretch that far.

"To realise the potential efficiency gains from IT in Europe and Japan, businesses must make the most of expanded investment opportunities, but they must also support reforms that enable the restructuring of firms and transfers of resources. Regulatory rigidities inhibit reallocations of labour and capital to their most productive uses, reducing the benefits to be obtained from investment in new technologies.

Labour markets in the US have been subject to fewer restrictions on the redeployment of workers within and across production units than in many other OECD countries."

In other words, the report points out that industry's flexibility to adapt its working practices and reallocate labour and capital is a critical factor in obtaining the huge gains in productivity that the development of IT can offer. That is precisely where the regulatory burdens that are being imposed on business may impair our ability to realise those productivity gains.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I apologise to you, Mr. Cook, for my late arrival. That was occasioned by my attendance at a sitting of the Select Committee on Deregulation and Regulatory Reform, where we are trying to deal with the issue of the regulatory burden, which seems to have been a theme of Opposition Members' speeches today. I should like to ask the Opposition spokesman where he would lighten the regulatory burden. There have been comments on the working families tax credit, hints about the minimum wage and talk about stakeholder pensions. Will the hon. Gentleman give us specific examples of ways in which he would lighten the regulatory burden on small businesses?

Mr. Hammond: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make my remarks, I shall make several specific suggestions, to which I hope that the Minister will respond.

Many burdens that we have discussed this morning obviously affect businesses of all sizes. However, as has been said, some burdens will affect small businesses and larger businesses differently. Smaller businesses have limited manpower resources and, because of the indivisibility of individual units of labour, they cannot afford to have specialists dealing with all the different areas of regulation that the Government impose on them, so the issue becomes particularly acute for them.

I readily acknowledge that there is a problem for Government in dealing with smaller businesses. It is difficult for an organisation of the scale of the Government to engage with the vast array of different interests and agendas that smaller businesses will have. I welcome some of the Government's moves to encourage and foster enterprise in small business, and in particular the changes to the capital gains tax regime. Much of the Government's agenda focuses on delivering to businesses support services such as the Small Business Service, yet they continue to impose increasing levels of burdens through regulations. The Labour approach is based on lots more regulatory burden dealt with by lots more intervention in the form of innovations such as the Small Business Service. I should prefer a lighter-touch approach that does not try to counter the effects of regulatory burdens but tries as far as possible to avoid imposing new burdens and frees up businesses to create wealth rather than to administer a bureaucratically defined regime.

We have already heard a little about the Government's record. Some 3,800 new regulations were introduced in 2000.

Brian Cotter *rose—*

Mr. Hammond: I shall make some progress, if I may. The Government imposed £26 billion of additional business taxes and £15 billion of regulatory burdens during their first term in office, so it is perhaps unsurprising that Britain has been sliding down the international competitiveness league table.

The burdens that have been imposed fall into three broad categories. Some arose from the signing in 1997 of the social chapter. At the time, the Prime Minister promised us that that would not open the floodgates to a raft of European Union social legislation and that Britain would be able to shape the legislation flowing from Brussels. However, 24 sets of new or amended employment regulations were introduced in the previous Parliament, and the Government have clearly failed to stem the tide. We have seen the working time directive, the parental leave directive, new maternity and paternity leave arrangements, the part-time workers directive, the prospective temporary agency workers directive and, most recently, the notorious information and consultation directive, in respect of which the Government cannot even persuade their own MEPs to vote for the position that they are pushing in the Council of Ministers.

I want to deal with the charge, which rather stung me, that was made by one of the Minister's colleagues during Trade and Industry questions last week—that is, that what we call burdens on business are in fact legitimate moves by the Government to protect the rights of employees. Having tried to analyse that argument, it seems to me that anything that protects the rights of employees by adding to the non-wage costs of employment must come from the pot of resources that is available to pay those employees. As a result, by regulating, and thereby increasing the non-wage cost burden on business, the Government are, in effect, dividing up the pot between non-wage benefits—which are enjoyed in the form of greater employment protection, greater rights to maternity leave, and so on—and money wages. They are thereby redistributing the product of labour between different individuals. For example, non-parents will earn less than they might otherwise earn, owing to the imposition of non-wage costs on business to support parents. That is a subject for a serious debate. Simply to say that burdens on business are the flip side of employee rights is not the whole story—it must be thought about a little harder.

European legislation, apart from the social chapter, imposes a raft of further burdens on British businesses. Our European colleagues would no doubt see that as levelling the playing field, but our productivity gains do not allow us to absorb such burdens.

The third leg of the stool comprises home-grown burdens such as the Employment Relations Act 1999, student loans, the working families tax credit, the Child Support Agency, stakeholder pensions and other measures to which hon. Members have referred.

Mr. Love: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hammond: I will not, because I want to give the Minister plenty of time to respond.

I want to make a few suggestions to the Minister. He should put the interests of British business first and recognise that they are also the interests of British employees. He should not give away our relative advantage—the flexibility enjoyed by our small firms

[Mr. Hammond]

and microbusiness sector. If we make our economy look more like the European economies, but without achieving a huge rise in labour productivity, we will all suffer. I ask him to implement with less zeal the stream of legislation from Brussels, recognise the special burdens that those regulations impose on small business, use all possible small firms derogations and ask for more from the Council of Ministers. I ask him to control the Labour MEPs, at least, in Brussels to ensure that they support the Government in those efforts.

The Minister should introduce independent cost-impact assessments of all new regulations and go for better regulation, not more. He should introduce sunsetting and, above all, slow down. He should put the brake on the torrent of legislation and regulation that has flowed in the past four years. I ask him to give business an opportunity to digest such measures and give the Government a chance properly to measure their impact on the economy, so that we may move forward at a pace that everyone is capable of sustaining.

10.45 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I am pleased to represent the Government today on this important issue. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on securing the debate and I thank other hon. Members for their thoughtful contributions.

Reducing the regulatory burden is a key component in achieving our vision of making the United Kingdom the best place in the world to set up and run a business. That is why, for the fifth consecutive year, the number of small and medium-sized enterprises has grown, with the new SMEs outstripping those that are winding up. I know the value of the SME sector, and the present Government have taken, and will continue to take, key actions to minimise unnecessary burdens on business and to ensure that we achieve our vision.

I want to illustrate those practical examples of action later, but first I shall briefly paint the debate on to a broader canvas that takes in the totality of regulation, rather than just the narrow vision of burdens. Regulations and other Government formalities are introduced for many different and worthwhile reasons: for example, to provide consumer protection, to protect employees from unfair employment practices, to ensure safe work practices and to protect the environment. Last year, 180,000 people were injured and 160 killed in the workplace, and more than 30,000 consumers were harmed by faulty products. In light of those figures, it is easy to see why Governments have to regulate. Regulations are also introduced that create real benefits for business, setting pro-competition frameworks, ensuring that small businesses are paid on time and giving consumers confidence in certain markets through consumer protection legislation.

We all know that regulations can impose costs on business. We must take care to ensure that those costs are not disproportionate and do not impede innovation, competitiveness and growth. The present Government are well aware of that, and have taken a number of strong actions to ensure that burdens are minimised.

Mr. Love: Does my hon. Friend agree that Conservative Members are trying to rewrite history? Was it not the former right hon. Member for Henley, now Lord Heseltine, who imposed record increases in regulatory burdens when the Conservatives were in office?

Nigel Griffiths: I was keen to avoid party politicking, but my hon. Friend makes a very good point. From 1994 to 1996, the then Government introduced more than 10,000 regulations. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), who was a Minister in the previous Conservative Government, said in a Queen's Speech debate:

"We would be the first to say that we did not do very well".—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1999; Vol. 339, c. 250.]

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford quoted Mr. Rupert Murdoch, but I can bring him a little closer to home. The right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo), the former shadow Chancellor, noted on 5 July that

"after three years of Labour Government relatively we are less taxed and less regulated than under our Continental partners on average".

That is a telling and welcome admission.

Mr. Hammond: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Griffiths: No. I want to make progress and answer some of the many points that have been raised.

We have taken action to improve the preparation of future regulations, to address the problems that former Conservative Ministers recognised—as do we. We also want to make it easier to deal with the stock of existing regulations, such as the 10,000 that I mentioned a moment ago. Such action demonstrates that we are working right across the spectrum of regulation to ensure that regulations are well designed and easy for businesses to comply with.

We have put in place strong guidance on preparing regulatory impact assessments for new regulations, and published guidance on how those should be carried out. We have established the ministerial panel for regulatory accountability, a strong body which has the power to simplify existing regulations and ease regulatory pressure on business. It does that by providing a strategic overview of the Government's regulatory plans and by calling Ministers to account over regulatory proposals.

Last April, we established the Small Business Service, a key aim of which is to ensure that the concerns of small businesses are properly considered in the regulatory process, and that Departments think small first when designing regulations. We have also ensured that regulations currently in preparation are prepared under appropriate processes. Last November, we introduced a new code of practice to ensure better consultation. From the beginning of this year, consultation periods have, in most cases, been at least 12 weeks. We now require Departments to issue guidance on legislation at least 12 weeks before it comes into force. The SBS has recently issued guidance on that, helping other Departments to draft their guidance in a way that businesses can clearly and easily understand, to help them to comply with policy.

The Regulatory Reform Act 2001 will help to reform outdated and over-burdensome regulation. I have asked business organisations to suggest areas where that Act

can be used. However, we are not working just on the design of regulation. We are also ensuring that clear and timely guidance is available to businesses to enable them to comply easily with regulation. We are working hard on practical examples that will make it easier and less costly for business to comply with Government regulations.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I have come especially to listen to what the Minister has to say, but we have heard all this before. May I remind him that, two years ago, the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), gave a

"guarantee that we will not allow regulation to stifle enterprise"?

The Minister has spoken glowingly about the Cabinet Office Committee. In March, the then Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said:

"We have taken active steps to ensure that what regulations are introduced are necessary, simple, and easy to understand and implement...I call Ministers to come to the panel and justify their proposals if the panel thinks that they do not meet its criteria."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 23.]

However, for the past two years we have seen record introduction of regulation—an example of saying one thing and doing another. How can we be sure that what the Minister is now telling us about will work?

Nigel Griffiths: The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) obviously missed the point that I made at the beginning. We are now in the fifth consecutive year when the net number of SMEs has grown. That is partly because we have been putting in place a better, more favourable regulatory framework. We recognise that there are problems—otherwise, we would not be having today's debate. I am pleased that Patrick Carter's review of payroll administration, which several hon. Members have mentioned, will result in real benefits for business in the areas that have been discussed today.

The time saver initiative will save time for business by making it easier and faster for business to comply with Government administration. The enforcement concordat is ensuring that local government enforcement officers are working with good businesses, not against them. I recently delivered a speech at the local business partnerships conference, which was held to encourage and promote the network and provide a discussion forum for issues affecting businesses. The conference was another example of how the Government are taking practical steps to help business by bringing together leading enforcement officers, beacon councils and businesses that are affected and can best inform us.

Mr. Hammond: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Griffiths: No; I will make some progress and cover other points that were raised.

Last week, I held a conference with leading representatives of small businesses to discuss the strategy of the Small Business Service regulatory team. That strategy was strongly endorsed, and the meeting proposed several actions that the Government could take to help business. We will hold a similar event in the new year to assess progress. We are not resting on our laurels, but continually searching for ways to make life better for business.

Mr. Prisk: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Griffiths: No.

We have taken concrete action on many other matters, by working with businesses to limit the burdens on them. At the same time, we have responded to the needs of small businesses to provide a better regulatory format. For example, small businesses asked for more regulation on late payment of debt, and that regulation was included in the total, and yet we were castigated for the number of regulations. The ability of small businesses to charge interest on debt has brought about considerable reductions in the average time that it takes larger firms, in particular, to settle with smaller ones.

Mr. Prisk: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Griffiths: No.

It is vital that all Governments make life easier for business and take practical action to achieve that result. We recognise that the health of small businesses is important for our economy and that small businesses contribute £1 trillion in output to our economy and employ about 12 million people, which is a considerable proportion of our work force. While the motivators and drivers of the last century were undoubtedly the big corporations, in this century the drivers for progress, innovation, employment and keeping the UK ahead in international competition will be small businesses.

We have taken practical steps to ensure that regulation, when required, is well designed and minimises the burden on business, while still achieving the policy intent. We have taken practical steps to ensure that good guidance is available and that it is easier for business to comply with regulations. We will continue to minimise the burdens on business and ensure that we achieve our vision of making the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a business.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister told us that the number of small and medium enterprises had grown over each of the past five years. That is simply a reflection of the economic cycle. Does the Minister expect the number of small and medium enterprises to grow over the next two years?

Nigel Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman reminds me of economic cycles. We have not brought the country out of the boom-and-bust cycle of the past several Governments to let the benefits fritter away.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to make a prediction that I will not make in the light of circumstances after 11 September. No sensible Minister of any Government in the world would make predictions about the future of business based on the events of 11 September and compare them with predictions on 10 September. It is clear that our economy is in a much better position to weather the downturn than almost any other economy in the world. That has come about not by chance, but by the practical measures that have been taken since 1997

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to give us a stable economic framework. That framework helped small businesses thrive in the past four years, and helped the Government get to grips with regulation, which, as the quotations that I made from the words of previous Conservative Ministers show, was in danger of running out of control. Our policy strategy is focused on those attempts to get to grips with those regulations. Only about 4 per cent. of the plethora of regulations impinge on small businesses in terms of costs.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. We come to the next topic for our consideration.

Budd Report

11 am

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I am delighted to win the opportunity of holding the debate this morning—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. I request hon. Members leaving the Chamber do so quietly, to enable our business to proceed.

Dr. Ladyman: I have been trying to win the chance to hold this debate since the start of the year, and it has finally come through—on my birthday. Unaccountably, the card from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport has not arrived yet, but I am sure that it is held up at the post office. My delight at winning the debate was slightly tempered when I discovered in Edinburgh yesterday that I had to get up at 3.50 am to catch a plane to get here today.

The topic is of vital importance to my constituency. For hon. Members who do not know the constituency of South Thanet, I should explain that we have a wide variety of gambling interests that will be directly affected by the Budd report. We are first and foremost a seaside resort, and the thrust of my comments will be about the impact of the report on the seaside. We are also a permitted area, so there is a casino in Ramsgate, and another in Margate, in the constituency of North Thanet—I see that the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) is in his place.

In addition, we have several social clubs and two significant suppliers of gaming machines. We also have two world-leading manufacturers of the type of seaside arcade gaming machines that are sometimes called "pushers" but which the industry prefers to call "penny falls". For those who do not know what they are, I should explain that they are machines into which one puts a 2p piece and a little platform moves backwards and forwards, knocking off another couple of coins; young children are delighted when they win a few coins and adults are delighted that their children are so easily amused for a few minutes on holiday. Those machines are directly threatened by some of the recommendations in the Budd report.

I shall concentrate on seaside issues. I know that other hon. Members will comment on some of the other aspects of the report on which I shall touch only briefly.

Like all the other hon. Members present, I cannot see into the Strangers Gallery; nor may we speculate about who is present there, but it would not surprise me if business men who between them employ several hundred people in my constituency were listening to the debate. Those people also represent other business men from my constituency who employ several hundred more constituents. For us, this is a vital business. It is not something that anyone takes lightly. The industry is one of the mainstays of our local economy.

I do not expect the Minister to make firm commitments today. The consultation period on the Budd report has recently ended. He has said that he is still prepared to accept representations, and I know he will be reflecting on what he has been told. However, it is vital that he realises that some of the recommendations of the report are causing considerable blight to the industries in my constituency.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport has not yet commented on the recommendations one way or the other. No one knows what is in his or the Government's mind, or whether the recommendations, which are already having a significant effect on our local economy, will be accepted. The sooner he can comment about what he is and is not considering, the better it will be for us.

The report was thorough, touching on many aspects of gambling, and many of its recommendations have been widely accepted; there appears to be a consensus that they are good and sensible ideas. In a different world, where the sky was always blue or there was no gambling, and we were starting with a clean sheet of paper and deciding how to organise gambling, some other aspects of the report would be sensible. In our world, however, they are barmy and simply will not work. They will have a practical impact not only on employment but on problem gambling, social factors and crime. My right hon. Friend must sift those aspects out of the report before he accepts it.

I started to talk about blight. My right hon. Friend will be fully aware that all businesses have business plans based on the regulatory system in which they work today. That is the only way in which a business can plan. When a report is published that completely cuts away the foundation on which those plans were written, the consequences must be serious for those businesses and the economy that they support. That is exactly what has happened.

We can see that with the recommendation covering social clubs. During parliamentary questions yesterday, the Minister said that he had received 1,500 representations from a variety of not-for-profit organisations including political clubs, working people's clubs and other social clubs, so I know that he has been heavily lobbied on the subject. That will not have surprised him, because the Budd report effectively takes away the main plank of such clubs' business plans. We cannot expect to do that suddenly without its having devastating effects.

There has been less lobbying for other some businesses of which we need to be aware. Many are in seaside areas, and I call them marginal businesses. They include small hotels that are not making considerable profits, but perhaps are just breaking even. The presence of a small-prize gaming machine in such a hotel is the difference between the business carrying on and closing down. At a time when we are trying to regenerate seaside economies and hoping that they will recover, we cannot afford to lose any businesses, and the little gaming machines that Budd just sweeps away, almost with a stroke of the pen, are vital to marginal businesses.

Other businesses are less marginal because they have considerable assets. They are established businesses such as seaside arcades in areas of town that suit them, and the local authority—through planning permissions—and others are happy to accept such establishments in those locations.

If one recommendation in the Budd report—I think that it is number 43—is accepted, local authorities will have the power to decide that gaming will not be allowed in certain areas of their towns or districts. If Budd is applied literally, they will have that power retrospectively. In other words, someone whose business is currently thriving and worth a considerable amount of money could be left with no business. That creates a blight on the industry, as the Minster will readily appreciate. The recommendation is a sword of Damocles hanging over those businesses.

The blight on pubs and social clubs will affect every constituency. As far as I can see, Budd makes all those proposals without the slightest scrap of evidence that there is a gambling problem caused by that sector.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the Budd report's recommendations is to reduce the number of machines in pubs to two per public house? The Licensed Victuallers Association has estimated that if the proposal were implemented, the effect in Weston-super-Mare would be a tremendous loss of staff and facilities in pubs, many of which are struggling already.

Dr. Ladyman: I agree. The Budd recommendation was made on the premise that the presence of a gaming machine has a corrupting effect on children. If machines have such an effect, it does not matter whether there are two of them or 20. Surely it should be for the licensee to decide how many machines there should be to entertain his customers in a licensed premises. Whether it loses or gains him business should be a matter for him, not for regulation, which will have a devastating effect on many businesses.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Does my hon. Friend agree that many of the Budd report's recommendations are based on anecdotal evidence and speculation? There is little statistical, accountable evidence for its findings, the results of which could have serious effects on seaside resorts such as Blackpool, part of which I represent, and my hon. Friend's constituency?

Dr. Ladyman: My hon. Friend is right. I would call the evidence on which the report is based not even anecdotal, but blind prejudice. It expresses a view of small-stake gambling that neither I nor, I think, my constituents share.

We are trying to encourage families to use pubs and other licensed premises because the family has a civilising effect on them; it is nonsense to suggest that the presence of a gaming machine will have a corrupting influence. We do not assume that because children are allowed into pubs and see adults drinking alcohol, which they themselves will be allowed to do only when they reach the age of 18, it will turn them into alcoholics; we take the opposite view—that it will help them to understand social drinking. Why do we not take the same position on gambling?

The blight will not stop there. One of my main concerns is the effect on amusement-with-prize machines—the type found in seaside arcades. I hope that my right hon. Friend will not say that I do not need to worry about such things because the Budd report says that there will be some research and there may be another view of the matter in five years' time. That just means that the sword of Damocles would be hanging over those businesses, and they would be blighted, for five years or even longer.

On the subject of regulation and crime, we forget at our peril that the gaming legislation was introduced by a Labour Government to get the gangster out of

[Dr. Ladyman]

gaming, it was designed to stop the Kray twins dominating the gaming machine industry in London, and it was extremely successful in doing so. The industry is now well regulated. We have evidence of what will happen if the Budd report's recommendations are introduced, as it suggests a return to what happened in the 1960s. Why does the Minister not expect the same consequences as were seen in the 1960s?

If my right hon. Friend wants more evidence, he should consider what is happening in France. I quote from an article in *Coin Slot International* about an underworld war currently raging in France over illegal fruit machines, which

"claimed its latest victim when the body of a man was found riddled with more 9 mm bullets than could be counted."

That is what happens if there is no legal regulated way for people to operate in an industry and provide gaming machines. If all the gaming machines that offer significant jackpots were forced into casinos—as has happened in France—organised crime would take over the provision of those machines.

For further evidence, look at this country: machines with small prizes are usually regulated by local authorities, which are allowed section 34 certificates. Section 34 certificates govern where machines can be placed, and the local authorities monitor them. That works extremely well in an area such as Thanet, in which the machines are monitored carefully and thoroughly. Machines are not put in places where children can have access to them. However, other local authorities have a blanket ban. As a consequence, the only access to gaming machines in those authorities' areas is through an illegal source. Gaming machines can be found in taxi waiting rooms and cafes—places where children can get access to them—and organised crime is involved. If my right hon. Friend wants evidence of that, I suggest that he take a walk around the area that we are in now, because it is one of the areas in which gaming machines are largely associated with criminal activity. The ban proposed by Budd would not be effective.

I find other parts of the Budd report baffling—for example, the comments about the national lottery. PricewaterhouseCoopers has estimated that the effect on the national lottery—the loss to the good causes during the lifetime of the second licence—could be as high as £1.3 billion if the Budd report were accepted. It is nonsense to set up a lottery that provides useful and substantial amounts of money for good causes, but then to allow a big chunk of the money to be taken away from those good causes and fed into the gambling industry for no good reason.

I accept many of the Budd report's recommendations on casinos, with which it deals in considerable depth. Casino advertising and the abandonment of the 24-hour rule are long overdue, but I would be a bit worried if we were to allow gambling on credit cards. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider that issue. Of course, there is nothing to stop someone in a casino walking down the road to the bank machine and using a credit card to get money, which they then gamble in the casino—but, if they do that, at least they have a breathing space to cool down and think about what they are doing.

I like the idea of resort casinos, but they are successful in the United States because they work on the basis of high turnover and low margins. The gambling industry in this country tends not to work on that model, so those who think that huge resort casinos will be built on the Las Vegas or Nevada models are probably engaging in wishful thinking.

I have a personal concern about the ending of permitted areas: I admit to a vested interest, in that Thanet is a permitted area and would be opened up to considerably more competition if permitted areas were to be abandoned. However, I am also concerned about what we put in place to control the growth of casinos if we do not have permitted areas. Everyone agrees that something has to be put in place, so until someone comes up with a decent idea about what that something is, I suggest that we stick with the permitted areas.

The Minister could implement most of the report's recommendations about casinos through regulation. I do not believe that primary legislation is needed, so he could move forward quickly with the positive recommendations.

The recommendation that many of the machines in seaside arcades should be limited to 18-only areas would completely devastate the atmosphere of the seaside resort. I took my little girl to the arcades when I was on holiday with my family in Torquay—I see some west country colleagues in the Chamber today. My seven-year-old went into many of the arcades on the seafront with her little handful of 2p pieces to play pusher machines—all of which, I was delighted to see, were made in my constituency. It did not have a corrupting effect. She has not become a problem gambler as result—and if she became one in adulthood it would have nothing to do with the fact that she went into an arcade and had an exciting and enjoyable half-hour playing on pusher machines. People play pusher machines not to gamble but to buy time, to buy fun in an atmosphere of lights and excitement and to while away an hour while they are on holiday.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): While we are talking about families enjoying the traditional seaside experience, does my hon. Friend agree that many of the businesses that we see along our seafronts, as at Scarborough, have been put together by families? They understand what families want. My hon. Friend referred earlier to blue skies, but sadly, we do not get permanently blue skies, even in places like Scarborough and Whitby. Families can go to arcades and have a good experience at the seaside. That is probably what is at risk as a consequence of the Budd report.

Dr. Ladyman: My hon. Friend is right. In Scarborough and Whitby the skies usually are blue, although not quite so often as they are in Ramsgate, Margate and Broadstairs—but he has made an important point. Arcades provide an all-weather facility for people on their holidays. They are harmless fun and no more than that. It is nonsense to take cranes out of the seaside arcade or to class those small pusher machines, the so-called "penny fall" machines, and the wheel-them-in machines, as gambling that will have a corrupting influence on our youth.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): Does my hon. Friend agree that the particular problem that the

report tries to address is under-18 gambling? What it does not recognise is that holidaymakers come to seaside resorts for only a week, or two weeks, at a time. Does he not agree with the sentiments of one of my constituents, who says that a visit to an arcade is a big part of a family holiday, and an experience that people probably have only while on holiday? How would under-18s become addicted on a one or two-week holiday?

Dr. Ladyman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Budd recognises that fact when he says that fairgrounds should be allowed to have those machines. Travelling fairgrounds can have them because they do not stay in one place for long, so will not corrupt anyone. It is nonsense to suggest that they have a corrupting influence. Economically, such a ban would be pretty much of a disaster.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): Clacton-on-Sea is sunny and has very blue skies; it is on one of the best sunshine coasts in the country. I think that we should commend many of the seaside resort arcades for their self-discipline. My arcades in Clacton-on-Sea now have separate areas for adults only, and when children are found in arcades when they should be at school they are sent out and their names are taken. The arcades have strong disciplinary codes, and we should commend them.

Dr. Ladyman: My hon. Friend is right. The arcades in my constituency are rigorously policed. Children who play there when they should be at school are sent out. I have seen children trying to get into the over-18 areas; I had thought that operators might turn a blind eye, but that is not the case. I would also be perfectly happy with a recommendation that we use CCTV in such areas to ensure that there are further controls.

The economic impact of the Budd report has been estimated by the Henley centre. The report hints that it would like to review the situation in five years' time and introduce a complete ban on gaming machines in seaside arcades. Without a complete ban, the cost would be £20 million per annum in lost profits and 1,500 jobs. With a ban, the cost would be £117 million in lost profits and 5,000 lost jobs. The loss to the Treasury would be approximately £14 million in licence duties, £51 million in VAT, £29 million from national insurance, and £19 million from rates—a total loss to the Treasury alone of £113 million if the ban were implemented.

I can tell my right hon. Friend that the publication of the Budd report has already cost jobs in my constituency. Some local manufacturers have taken a pessimistic view of the future and allowed staff to go. There is usually a seasonal loss of staff, but that has been exacerbated by the Budd report creating uncertainty in the industry. Nobody will buy pusher machines until they know what my right hon. Friend intends to do.

Before I conclude, I shall refer to some research done by one of my local employers—a company called Crompton's—that sent out survey forms through *Coin Slot International* magazine to other operators. There were about 500 responses from operators of seaside arcades or family entertainment centres. To the question "Do you think that the proposed changes will affect jobs?", 91 per cent. of companies said yes. To the question "Do you believe that the public will be entertained enough by just casinos?", 98 per cent. said no. To "Do you currently experience any problems with under 18's?", 81 per cent. said no. To "Do you get more or less families than 5 years ago?", 40 per cent. said that more families were using their premises. If my right hon. Friend is interested, I could let him have the other statistics from the survey. Overall, the industry clearly believes that the Budd report will lead to substantial job losses. The losses have already started to take effect because of the blighting effect of the report, and they will continue until my right hon. Friend feels able to give the industry some comfort.

Will my right hon. Friend consider making a statement in the coming weeks? He could say that if recommendation 43 were accepted, local authorities would not be allowed to introduce changes retrospectively. We are all aware that the control of local authorities changes from time to time, and a new council can have a different attitude to gaming from that of the previous council. My right hon. Friend could make it clear that once an area has been designated for gaming and a business has been built there, the council will not be able to take a retrospective decision to close it down.

Seaside machines—coin-in, coin-out machines, penny falls and cranes—could be treated as trivial amusement-with-prize machines, which is what they are, and my right hon. Friend could make it clear that they will not be attacked, either now or in five years' time.

A snippet in *The Times* this morning suggests that my right hon. Friend has already decided to exempt social clubs from the Budd recommendations. I am not sure whether that is true, or a misreading of what was said yesterday, but I hope that he will provide the necessary statement in the near future.

My right hon. Friend could also move ahead on making changes to casinos, which do not require primary legislation. He could also break down the Budd report into its separate components and implement each separately on a different time scale rather than handle it all at once.

I can assure my right hon. Friend that if he introduces the Budd recommendations as written, he will be responsible for giving organised crime a fillip and closing down many social clubs and pubs. He will also find it difficult to get a drink anywhere in these islands, and he will be responsible for closing down most of the seaside. I would not like to be the politician responsible for that.

I am grateful for having had the opportunity to make these points, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to respond positively to them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. Having seen how many hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye, I advise the Chamber that it is the usual convention to start the first of the three winding-up speeches 30 minutes before the termination of the debate. At least eight hon. Members want to speak, so I appeal to those in the Chamber to keep their remarks pertinent and concise, which will be helpful to me.

11.30 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I shall continue to follow the thinly veiled threat of the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) to the Minister. Regular readers of the *Isle of Thanet Gazette* and the *Thanet Times*—that means most people in the Chamber—know that he and I have a reputation for not always agreeing with each other. Indeed, some people say that we never agree with each other. However, I shall not rain on his birthday parade and I take this opportunity, because it is cheaper than buying a stamp, of both wishing him a happy birthday and congratulating him on securing an important debate for seaside towns. I agreed with literally every word of his speech.

As the hon. Gentleman said, two of the country's foremost machine manufacturers are located in Thanet. One is run by Jim Crompton. I think that it was founded by him or his dad, the doyen of the manufacturing business and the inventor of the penny pusher machine. Such companies employ a significant number of local people and many outworkers and contractors use the United Kingdom as the test bed for those machines, which are world brand leaders. Having been tried out and any problems ironed out in the United Kingdom, machines are sent to the far east and other countries where their sales have been massive. They are worth a great deal of money to the local, national and international economy. That such firms are facing serious difficulties is not a state secret. It is happening because of the instability in the industry that has been caused by the Budd report.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the business is suffering acutely from blight. Banks are examining seriously the finances of the companies. They are querying whether they will survive because they wonder whether their customers in the seaside towns of the United Kingdom will survive. The Minister must take that point on board. I am not scaremongering, but if such a serious problem is to be resolved, it must be dealt with now, not in six months or six years. Otherwise, the companies will not survive.

I return unashamedly to the value of the arcades to seaside towns. It is fashionable in some quarters to say that amusement arcades are bad. Lurid pictures of arcades in Piccadilly and rent boys spring to mind. However, in the main, the arcades in Britain's seaside towns are policed well. They are well regulated and operated responsibly. They provide considerable facilities for the holidaymaker in the United Kingdom. God knows that with the tourist industry suffering as it is because of foot and mouth disease and the events on 11 September, we need every facility we have to encourage people to take holidays in the United Kingdom.

It is well known that Thanet seaside towns enjoy 12 weeks of unbridled sunshine throughout the summer months with scarcely a cloud in the sky. However, occasionally there is drizzle and the arcades provide shelter and amusement for people who have nowhere else to go and little to do if it is bucketing with rain. The removal of amusement arcades will destroy the golden mile, the golden half-mile and the golden hundred yards in seaside resorts. Herne bay in my constituency has Cain's amusement arcade. The whole of Margate seafront is interspersed with amusement arcades, pubs and fish and chip shops. The three are interrelated and killing one kills all three.

Amusement machines with prizes do not constitute a grim gambling den designed to fleece young people of their last four pence of pocket money. They are and were designed to be fun. Remove modest gaming machines and what remains? A few kids could either bring their electronic machines with them or play at home. The vital ingredients of the seaside resort will die.

There are two reasons why the Minister must act quickly to scotch the ill-thought-through elements of the Budd report and reintroduce stability to a vital sector of a vital industry—tourism. The Budd report is not all bad. Those of us with casinos in our towns welcome many of its recommendations on casinos. It is nonsense that someone who joins a club that is a member of a chain of casinos and travels from, say, Margate to Blackpool, must join another club and wait 24 hours before he can use his membership card to game in what is effectively the same establishment. That is rather like saying that a member of affiliated clubs may be a member of Margate Constitutional club or the British Legion club but cannot drink in an affiliated club in another seaside town. That is nonsense. I welcome anything that can be done not to relax the control, responsibility and need to police gambling, but to knock some sense into a nonsensical system, and on that basis I welcome much of what Budd has to say on those issues.

Mr. Cook, you asked us to be brief, and I shall be. I want finally to touch on an issue that I am sure that colleagues in the House will want to mention—the effect that the proposed restrictions on gaming machines are likely to have on clubs. I am sure that we are all, rightly, wearing poppies. I doubt that there is a Member in the House who is not. [HON. MEMBERS: "You are not."] Am I not? I have dropped it. How embarrassing! It has fallen out. All of us should be wearing poppies today.

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): The hon. Gentleman can borrow mine.

Mr. Gale: I shall borrow the Minister's. It is quite all right. I have bought three, but I shall go and buy a fourth.

All of us have received representations from the Royal British Legion. Most of us will have received representations from Conservative clubs, and one or two will have received representations from Labour and Liberal clubs, too. Social clubs, British Legion clubs and Royal Air Force Association clubs will all suffer immeasurably and possibly, in some cases, to the point of extinction if the measures are implemented. Those are three good reasons why the Minister must act quickly and positively to end the blight and lay the ghost to rest once and for all.

11.38 am

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on having secured this important debate. I intend to keep my contribution brief.

I, too, welcome the review that the Government have set up. Many of our gaming laws are out-dated. It is important to protect children and young people. There is much to commend in the Budd report, but in some instances its conclusions are wrong.

As a representative of the seaside towns in my constituency, I fully endorse the comments that hon. Members have made about seaside towns. However, I shall limit my comments to recommendation 70, which refers to the availability of up-to-£250 jackpot gaming machines in private clubs.

My constituency contains many private clubs, most of which are social clubs or continue to call themselves, in a wonderfully politically incorrect way, working men's clubs, although their membership extends much more widely than that description implies. As hon. Members know, such clubs are an important part of the local community and are to some extent part of the heritage of the north-east. They are not-for-profit organisations, mutual organisations or co-operatives and they are exactly the type of organisation that the Government should encourage, rather than undermine. They play an important role in the market, give choice and variety to consumers, and keep down beer prices in the local economy. In my experience, they are usually well-policed and, indeed, self-policed. Most members of or visitors to clubs would not dare to cross either the secretary or members of the committee. Under-18s cannot become members of clubs, admittance of under-18s is remarkably rare and, anyway, there is a law to deal with under-age drinking on such premises. We must set against that the useful role that clubs play. They often allow over-18s access to an environment in which they can be socialised into moderate consumption and behaviour on licensed premises. Sadly, that is often lacking in our pubs.

Our clubs have a difficult time. They face competition from public houses which can often access investment that is denied to many clubs. Their survival often depends on the local economy and that can fluctuate. There is a longer-term problem of a stay-at-home culture. Wine consumption is rising while beer consumption is falling. That says something about the way in which society is moving. Many of our clubs—and, indeed, pubs—face competition from duty-free imports that are beyond their control. Income from jackpot gaming machines is crucial to the survival of many clubs. They already pay their way in terms of their gaming licence and value added tax. Many clubs welcomed the changes in the 2000 Budget and wonder why they are apparently under threat.

Clubs use profits from gaming machines to keep down beer prices and annual membership subscriptions. However, many spread the benefits of those profits more widely. For example, North Shields Catholic club in my constituency does not operate £250 jackpot machines; it operates £75 jackpot machines, which would be affected if the changes were made. The machines return a profit of between £6,000 and £7,000 per year. Part of that subsidises beer prices, but some returns to the local community to help people suffering from Alzheimer's disease and multiple sclerosis, and people who have received hip replacements. A Friday luncheon club for the infirm is also held.

North Shields Catholic club hosts meetings of the North Shields branch of the North East Pensioners Association. The secretary of that branch said that the club

"do not charge us for the use of the facilities and they are extremely kind to us. They would find it difficult to run the club without the revenue from the bandits and we would be without our meeting place."

There we have the matter in a nutshell. The recommendation is to tackle a problem that might not exist; it probably came from someone who had not frequented such clubs and does not understand how they work.

The secretary continued:

"I cannot understand a Labour Government even contemplating such a move."

Quite frankly, neither can I. The Government have the opportunity to avoid making a mistake and I hope that they take it.

11.43 am

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on securing the debate. As someone who departed at an unearthly hour from even further north than Edinburgh, I understand how he feels this morning.

I am not a gambler. I have never been to a bookmaker in my life, and I must be one of the few people to visit Las Vegas and not even play a slot machine. However, I have received a substantial postbag about the matter and I dug out the report to allow further investigation. I shall concentrate on the effect on clubs, to which the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) referred. I represent a rural constituency, which is made up largely of small towns and villages. All have sports clubs, pensioners clubs and other clubs and many will be devastated if the proposals are introduced.

The annual accounts for 2000 of a bowling club in a village in my constituency showed a surplus of £3,300. Its gaming machines earned £4,700 and, clearly, if it lost that income, it would be plunged into deficit. That would make it difficult—if not impossible—for the club to survive. It has searched for ways to deal with such a drop in income but if it were to increase its membership fees, many of its members—and, in particular, the elderly ones—would have to leave the club because they would be unable to pay their subscriptions. Falling membership and finances would lead to a cycle of decline, which would be particularly difficult to reverse in a rural area where the pool of potential members is relatively small. If the bowling club fell into that cycle of decline, it might lead to its demise. As the hon. Member for Tynemouth has stated, such clubs provide a focus for many communities and that would be lost, along with many of the other activities that are carried out at such clubs.

I also want to point out that golf clubs in particular, but also other sports clubs, such as cricket clubs—cricket is still played in Scotland—run youth development programmes. If they lost the income from gaming machines, many of them would be put in jeopardy. A golf club in Carnoustie provides a good example. Hon. Members will be aware that golf is very important to the economy of Angus and particularly to Carnoustie. The Scottish Executive is seeking to ensure that every nine-year-old child should have access to the sport of golf within the coming few years, but its work could be put in jeopardy if golf clubs do not have enough money.

I wondered why the Budd report made the recommendations. Its terms of reference state that it wants to secure protection for children and vulnerable

[Mr. Michael Weir]

persons, but it also claims that it will take account of the wider social impact of the recommendations and paragraph 1.26 defines what it means by that. It states:

"We take this as referring not only to the risk of increased problem gambling but also to the broader effect on communities."

One such broader effect might be the loss of clubs that have a huge part to play within communities. That would be disastrous for rural areas, many of which are already suffering from the fallout from foot and mouth, as well as from the loss of tourism and the general downturn in agriculture.

The Budd report makes some reasonable recommendations, such as those regarding machines in cafes and taxi offices. Many local authorities have already passed resolutions and taken action, especially in Scotland, to remove such machines from fish and chip shops, cafes and similar premises.

The main basis for the recommendation in respect of clubs appears to be in paragraph 23.38, which states:

"the 1968 Act does not prohibit children from playing on jackpot machines, and there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that they do. We are anxious to ensure that children are not exposed to high stake/high prize machines and our preferred option would be to remove jackpot machines from private clubs."

The reference is to anecdotal evidence, as hon. Members will note and as has already been stated. Nowhere in the report is detailed evidence given. It is a running theme throughout the report that more research is required into gambling and it would be a travesty if clubs were to be decimated on the basis of merely anecdotal evidence.

In many such clubs the chances of youngsters playing the machines are lower than on other premises. The machines are almost invariably located in bar areas where staff are on the look-out for people's ages. The staff in a club are more likely to know their ages and to notice when junior members are attempting to play the machines. I asked about that in a survey of clubs in my constituency and all of them were clear that they had strict rules preventing youngsters from playing the machines. It seems bizarre to crack down on that when anyone over 16 can go into their local supermarket or newsagent and buy as many national lottery scratch cards as they wish. Given the jackpots on those cards, they are much more likely to be addictive than jackpot machines. It also seems slightly strange that we are trying to encourage sport with substantial funds from the national lottery, which is, after all, a form of gambling, while considering a proposal that would severely restrict the funds raised by sports and other clubs.

The proposal has the dubious merit of uniting almost every age group in opposition to it—even those who, like me, previously had no interest in gambling. I accept that gambling can lead to misery and personal ruin for many individuals, but we are not proposing an end to gambling. As has been said, in many ways this argument mirrors the argument about the licensing and sale of alcohol. I appreciate that the consultation process is only just ending and no doubt the Minister has a huge number of submissions to wade through. However, I ask him to take the matter on board, put clubs out of their misery and announce quickly that the recommendation will not be accepted.

11.50 am

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): Thank you, Mr. Cook, for giving me the opportunity to participate in this morning's important debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on securing it.

There is no doubt that Sir Alan Budd and the other members of the review body were given a difficult task: to modernise the regulation of gambling in the UK. British gambling has long been regarded as among the best in the world, and I hope that when the Government respond to the report, UK gambling will establish itself as the best in the world. I shall confine my remarks to one or two specific recommendations in the report.

This morning, we have heard a travelogue about British shores, primarily the seaside resorts. I should now like to move into the hinterland of south Yorkshire. As every Member knows, the sun shines a lot brighter in Barnsley and Doncaster than in Rotherham and Sheffield.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): In private, one or two Members have said that the Budd report should be shoved where the sun does not shine. That could include my constituency, which is probably the furthest from the coast. Does my hon. Friend accept that there is much concern among clubs and associations in Northampton, whether Royal Navy clubs, working men's clubs or political clubs, that it is estimated that 20 per cent. of those clubs might close if the recommendations are approved?

Jeff Ennis: I thank my hon. Friend for making a telling point, with which I concur and on which I would like to enlarge.

I want to speak against the inclusion in the report of recommendation 70. The Minister has already referred to the fact that he received a great deal of representation on the issue. In fact, he referred to 1,500 representations from clubs in his response to an oral question in the House yesterday, and rightly so. Following on from the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), I can tell the Minister that my constituency has 41 clubs, many of which depend on jackpot machines for their financial survival. Many of those clubs have written to me and the Minister. Ten years ago, there probably would have been about 80 such clubs, but many of them closed as a direct consequence of the pit closure programme undertaken by a previous Government in the early 1990s. In addition, as a result of changing social habits, people do a lot more of their entertaining at home, rather than in the formal setting of a club atmosphere. The closure rate underlines the great difficulty in surviving, which many clubs face even without the removal of jackpot machines.

Many clubs in former mining communities are not just places to enjoy a drink and have a good night out; they form the heart of many local communities, as has been said. Many clubs support local sports organisations, local dance groups and local music groups. The most famous example in my constituency is the long association between Grimethorpe miners' welfare institute club and the world-famous

Grimethorpe colliery band. Some even act as outreach centres for local colleges, which is an important initiative to help former miners back to work. We should not underestimate the regeneration initiatives that the Government have implemented in, for example, working men's clubs. Many clubs have a children's section that raises money for annual trips to seaside resorts such as Skegness, Bridlington, Scarborough and Whitby.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: What about Great Yarmouth?

Jeff Ennis: Great Yarmouth is a bit too far away, but we should include Blackpool. We should not underestimate the impact of these initiatives on local mining communities. For many children, the local working men's club trip is their only annual holiday. Likewise, many clubs have an old folks section that raises money for a Christmas party and allocates cash to elderly members to help them enjoy Christmas. Many clubs also support local charities. I attended a recent event held by my own local club—Brierley social club—which raised more than £1,000 for Grimethorpe St. John Ambulance brigade. Many clubs also raise funds for the purchase of special equipment by local hospitals, and for organisations such as Macmillan nurses.

Many clubs are under severe financial pressure. If recommendation 70 is implemented, I guarantee that it will lead directly to the closure of some clubs in my constituency and the constituencies of other hon. Members. I suppose that I should declare an interest: I am a member of the CIU, my father worked as club steward of Brierley British Legion club for more than 25 years and I lived on the premises for at least 10 years before I got married. I know exactly what it is like to be at the centre of a local community.

I know that the Minister will not be able to tell us in his concluding remarks that recommendation 70 is dead and buried, but it would be nice if he could say that we will shortly receive an invitation to its funeral.

I shall deal with the report's other recommendations briefly as I am conscious of time and that other hon. Members want to speak. One main recommendation—to set up a gambling commission as the single regulatory authority to oversee all gambling in the United Kingdom—appears to have been well received by all sections of the gambling industry and I share that view.

Recommendation 103, which would allow betting on the UK national lottery—on which other Members have briefly touched—is a major concern of Camelot. It said in its submission to the review that, if implemented, the recommendation could have a detrimental impact of up to £400 million a year on returns to the Exchequer and to good causes. I do not know whether Camelot is scaremongering, but I am not convinced of the need to allow betting on our lottery. After all, the bookies already have their own numbers game and take bets on the Irish lottery. Camelot says that 20 per cent. of Irish lottery sales have been lost to betting since the provision was introduced in Ireland.

In conclusion, I congratulate Sir Alan Budd and his team on producing an excellent report. It has given us all food for thought, and we eagerly await the Government's response to its recommendations.

11.58 am

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I shall try to be brief, but I should first congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on securing this debate. I agree with virtually everything that he said—apart from his slightly dismissive attitude towards the concept of resort casinos. In my Blackpool constituency, casinos are seen as providing an enormous opportunity to regenerate the resort.

Like my hon. Friend's constituency, mine already has casinos, amusement arcades and social clubs—the three main types of establishment that will be affected. The recommendation to abolish the 24-hour rule and allow advertising will impact on our existing casinos, but it will also offer the opportunity to develop casinos as a tourism product. The millions of people who visit Blackpool are looking forward to that. The idea enjoys widespread support in the local community, because it could provide many more jobs and regenerate tourism in the town.

However, one or two people have certain reservations, especially with regard to safeguarding the interests of children, young people and—as has been mentioned—those who are addicted to gambling. When my right hon. Friend the Minister considers the proposal, I hope that he will take account of the opportunities and reassure those with genuine concerns so that a balanced response can be reached.

I agree with the comments of all hon. Members on amusement arcades. However, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis), who represents the South Yorkshire hinterland, I must say that the seaside sector is a special case. If one message comes out of the Budd report, it is a lack of understanding of the whole concept of seaside amusement arcades and how much families enjoy visiting them. A recent MORI poll showed that 72 per cent. of people are in favour of, or not opposed to, fruit machines in pubs, clubs and amusement arcades. We must take into account that consensus of opinion.

The amusement arcades that I have visited are careful about how they police their business. They do not want young children coming in and misusing their premises or parents complaining about such behaviour—they want a family atmosphere in which mums, dads and grandparents can have a cup of tea. Although the sun shines for 99 per cent. of the time in Blackpool, hon. Members who have attended party conferences there will realise that it rains occasionally and people visit amusement arcades to benefit not only from the amusements, but from some of the other facilities on offer. Let us appreciate the importance of traditional amusement arcades and the contribution that they make to tourism in seaside towns.

I support everything that has been said about working men's clubs, social clubs, the British Legion and Royal Air Force Association clubs. I have even had a letter from a Conservative club. Everybody is united in the view that the proposals could have a devastating effect on such clubs, which are often the centre of their local communities. The Budd report has good elements—it is a shame that we are concentrating on those with which we disagree—such as recommendations on safeguarding the needs of young people, stricter

[Mrs. Joan Humble]

enforcement, and monitoring the qualifications of those who work in gaming establishments. However, we must be aware of the dramatic and disastrous effects that it could have on seaside towns and social clubs.

12.3 pm

Nick Harvey (North Devon): I welcome the debate and congratulate the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on securing it. I also welcome the Government's decision to review arcade gambling rules. The Budd report makes some welcome proposals, but it has serious flaws, which I hope that the Minister will deal with in framing his response to it.

The hon. Members for South Thanet and for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) gave useful expositions of the potential impact of the suggested changes on our seaside resorts. I represent Ilfracombe, Woolacombe, Croyde, Combe Martin and Lynmouth, and the points that were made about the interrelationship between arcades and other parts of the tourism industry were correct. We should be wary of embarking on actions that would have knock-on consequences across the tourism industry, which is already seriously ailing, if not reeling.

Gambling is a significant industry, which should be handled with care. It contributes £42 billion a year to UK plc, of which it retains a relatively small £7.3 billion. Although we probably do not like to think of ourselves as a nation of gamblers, 72 per cent. of us have gambled in the course of the past year, with an average expenditure of £3.50 a week.

The overall thrust of the review is welcome—it has a largely deregulatory theme, although it is peppered with some reactionary proposals. I also welcome the fact that it recognises the problem of gambling, calling for more research to be done in that area. It suggests the establishment of a new gambling commission with new and wider powers. That is a welcome proposal, and the commission should take on some of the challenges of addressing the problems of addictive gambling. In a sense, the new body is the Gaming Board in all but name, but it has a wider remit and broader investigative powers. They are welcome, but must be used with caution.

The report also suggests that local authorities should have the power to institute a blanket ban on all or certain types of gambling premises within their area. That would have to be carefully examined. I welcome the idea of local authorities having the discretion to make final decisions, but I think it essential that they should look at all applications and licences on a case-by-case basis, rather than imposing a blanket ban. It would also make sense for the same authority to be dealing locally with gambling, liquor and entertainment licences.

Many hon. Members have rightly referred to the impact that the proposals would have on social clubs. Many of those, from all over the country, have been writing in to us because they often rely on the income that they make from jackpot machines to be economically viable. There is currently no provision for Gaming Board inspectors to have the right to enter private clubs. That may be one reason for the proposals in the Budd report. The police, similarly, have no right of entry unless they have grounds for suspecting that an offence is being committed in the club.

It would make more sense to allow investigations into clubs than to ban the use of the machines altogether. I have communicated in written representations to the Minister my view that private clubs should be allowed to continue to operate jackpot machines on their premises. The stakes on such machines, already relatively high, act as a deterrent to children. The proposed doubling of the stake to a pound would provide a further disincentive. Proposals to allow registered clubs to use all-cash machines as an alternative, as pubs and other licensed premises do, should be examined cautiously.

It is clearly anomalous that the Gaming Board has no right to enter clubs to look into such things. In representations from the pub trade, it has been pointed out that the playing field is not level because pubs are not allowed to have jackpot machines. Minors are rarely, if ever, allowed to enter a pub unaccompanied by an adult, as they are in some clubs. Penalties for those running pubs are considerable if that is found to be happening. If we were simply setting out to have a level playing field, it would make more sense to allow those machines in pubs than to get them out of clubs.

Hon. Members have referred to casinos. Some of the proposals for those are welcome, such as ending the rule on permitted areas, which is long overdue, and repealing the rule on 24-hour membership. However, the idea that employers should be required to obtain a certificate from the Criminal Records Bureau each time a person is promoted or changes employer seems bureaucratic, time-consuming and potentially expensive.

The suggestion that casinos should have a minimum floor size is interesting but, in my view, flawed. The measure would be more useful if it were applied to the total space in the casino rather than just to the table space. I can see that the measure aims to prevent the proliferation of casinos, but it is essentially illiberal. Where demand exists for gaming tables, why should it not be filled, providing that any new facility meets statutory requirements? There was some confusion in that passage of the report. The Government should examine it carefully before arriving at conclusions.

In the short time that I have, I would also like to comment on the proposals on lotteries and the impact that they would have on the national lottery. There are many concerns about the deregulation concerning the rules governing lotteries, especially given the success that the national lottery has had in raising money for good causes. In opening the debate, the hon. Gentleman referred to the PricewaterhouseCoopers estimate that £1.3 billion could be lost annually to good causes. Of all the proposals in the report, that is one of the ones that will have the most profound impact, and the Government must examine it with the greatest caution. Out of every pound spent, the lottery contributes up to 44p to the Government's revenues. I should have thought that they, or at least Treasury Ministers, would think cautiously about that. The national lottery has been an outstanding success, and allowing a proliferation of lotteries, some of which would not be as well run and would have uncertain outcomes and impacts, is potentially dangerous.

I welcome the fact that the Government set out upon the review. The report contains several useful suggestions, but some of them would have a profound and damaging impact on many different areas, not least social clubs and seaside resorts. The Minister will be

unable to show his hand completely, but many people are waiting on tenterhooks for some welcome signs that the Government will pick up the report a la carte, and not take it up lock, stock and barrel.

12.10 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on securing this debate—and I wish him many happy returns on his birthday. I also look forward to hearing the Minister conclude what has been a positive debate.

In my view, and in that of the official Opposition, the Budd report is a step in the right direction. We welcome its deregulatory thrust. Moving licences from magistrates courts to local councils would be fine if the Government were simultaneously prepared to issue planning policy guidance to prevent the NIMBY syndrome. Several hon. Members referred to the issue of permitted areas, to which PPG would be pertinent. Many of us with rural constituencies such as those in north Yorkshire find that magistrates courts are few and far between. As for retrospection, we should like to see the removal of retrospective powers.

With jackpot licences, there should be a safeguard for under-18s, but we are concerned that the impact on youths has been insufficiently considered in the Budd report. What specific research have the Government undertaken following the limited consultation process? This is the first major review since 1978, and it is important to put on record the fact that the 1978 review took two years to reach its conclusions; the Budd report has taken only one year.

About 33 million adults in this country—72 per cent. of the population—have participated in gambling in the past year. More than half the population have gambled in the past week—not as high a proportion as in the United States, where 63 per cent. have gambled, or in Sweden, where nine out of 10 adults gamble. The suicide rate is significantly higher in Sweden than in Britain, but I do not know whether we should draw the conclusion that that is a result of the higher incidence of gambling in Sweden.

The Budd report recommends deregulation for adults, which we support, but it also recommends tightening regulations for children, which is why we should like to know about the Government's research.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss McIntosh: No, I have only eight minutes.

Several hon. Members have expressed their concern about recommendation 70, which is something that I support. In the article in *The Times*, the Government were reported to have alluded to a possible exemption for social clubs. Perhaps the Minister will put on record today whether that is a leak of Government policy.

I have several questions for the Minister. If he cannot reply to them today, perhaps he will be able to respond in writing. The idea of a single regulator in the form of a gambling commission is welcome, but will he respond to hon. Members who have raised questions about fruit machines in pubs? My experience is that they are an accepted institution in pubs and places of leisure, and I question the Government's assessment of the impact of their removal on pub incomes. That could have a dramatic impact in seaside towns and rural constituencies.

On the question of seaside amusements, can the Minister say what impact has been estimated in areas particularly hard hit by the collapse of tourism? No one has yet mentioned the recommendation, which, I suggest, will be difficult to police. How will the Government ask police to prevent people under 18 from gambling on the internet? The recommendation is that operators should prevent such gambling, but how can age be proved online? As for the licensing of premises and the role of local authorities, I repeat that we believe that it is right for local councils to be the planning authority, subject to the removal of blanket retrospection and to the Government's agreeing to issue planning policy guidance.

I do not believe that retrospection is in keeping with the broadly regulatory thrust of the Budd report. Budd's proposals for casinos would permit the development of resort casinos. As a result, will Harrogate or Edinburgh become the Las Vegas of the north? The report states that whether a particular location should be granted a monopoly right to provide a gambling centre is a matter of public policy and outside Budd's terms of reference. Can the Minister indicate the Government's thoughts on such a public policy matter? Can he also tell us what impact the more liberal and less regulated market envisaged by the report will have on Camelot as the national lottery operator?

I am immensely grateful to the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) for placing on record the impressive contribution, particularly to good causes, made by the national lottery, which was set up by the last Conservative Government. Has the Minister assessed whether that contribution could be jeopardised by the Budd conclusions? Will the Government consider publishing a White Paper on their proposals for legislative change before introducing a Bill? I ask that because the Budd report has been concluded in just over one year. More than 200 memoranda of evidence were received and there were 20 sessions of all evidence, but there has been no pre-consultation period prior to the Budd report, so it is incumbent on the Government to offer a White Paper. That would be welcome indeed.

On seaside gambling and section 34(1) machines, we urge the Minister to put Budd to one side and leave the law as it stands, pending further research into child gambling, and the implications for change in seaside tourism that we have heard about this morning. Will the Minister see fit to amend the law to prohibit those under 18 from playing section 34(5)(e) and section 31 machines, wherever situated? The official Opposition support the proposals for deregulation of casinos generally, but in the context of casinos' no-minimum-stake, no-maximum-prize machines, will the Minister undertake to review the impact on attitudes to casino expansion, and other gambling premises? I agree to the licensing by local councils, subject to the withdrawal of blanket retrospection and the issuing of planning policy guidance. We await the Minister's response with bated breath.

12.18 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on securing the debate, which is part of the on-going process of consultation; hon. Members' contributions this morning have been very helpful to me, and to my officials. The comments have been objective—slightly more objective than weather forecasts in the United Kingdom. I wish my hon. Friend many happy returns and I will see him in the bar later.

The fact that so many hon. Members are present and that they have argued so forcefully shows the concerns felt in their constituencies. It is not in our interest for industries, whether they are in manufacturing or tourism, to be damaged by Government action.

The 1978 royal commission was mentioned, but the last real review of gambling was in the 1960s, and things have changed dramatically since then. Although the debate has rightly focused on specific issues, we are discussing an industry that is worth tens of billions of pounds and makes a major contribution to the nation's well-being and enjoyment. We want to ensure that we get things right.

Several changes since 1960 have forced the review. The internet and interactive television are increasingly important gambling media throughout the world. There is a much bigger picture to consider, and I give credit to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), for taking the initiative in setting up the important gambling review when he was a Minister.

My Department is responsible for the gambling industry; it is a major and well-respected employer and we must ensure that its integrity is maintained when we consider legislation. As the Budd report reflects, with the introduction of the national lottery, gambling has become a mainstream recreation and leisure activity, rather than being seen as rather seedy. We must be careful how we approach the issue, and take account of all the risks involved. The debate has focused on the Budd report, the risks of deregulation, problem gambling and young people's access to gambling machines.

No one has argued that there should not have been a review; indeed, the prospect of a review was broadly welcomed. Sir Alan and his colleagues took evidence from a wide range of people. We published the report in July and asked for comments, and we shall take the points made in the debate into consideration.

The consultation ended on 31 October. We received more than 2,000 comments, which we are going through carefully, and I am mindful of what has been said today. We considered the experience of countries where the laws were changed—Australia, for example—and where fundamental mistakes were made, as it is difficult to claw back if there are errors. We must be cautious and prudent as we proceed.

Blight is a strong word, but as I said when I was at the Department of Trade and Industry, uncertainty is an expensive commodity in business. I still believe that, and I will try to apply the principle of getting decisions made as quickly as possible. We intend to review all the responses, and I hope that we will be able to make some announcements early in the new year about how to take the process forward. I am mindful of what has been said today, and we must get the Government's position clear. There will be further discussions about that, including more Adjournment debates and questions in the House, which is right. When we come to a decision, we will then have to find out how we can manage the change and see it through.

I cannot answer many of the questions—indeed, I would not answer them, even if I could. I have asked people to examine the Budd report, which is a serious piece of work that took a lot of time to take evidence and come to conclusions. We respect those conclusions and want them to be debated properly. Equally, we want to ensure that we go through the process thoroughly, in the knowledge that there are industries that want us to do that as expeditiously as possible. I assure hon. Members that we will do that. There are many and varied ways in which we can manage through change. It does not all have to come as one big bang, and after we have made our decisions, we will think about a management strategy for delivery.

Ms Ward: Will the Minister examine the age at which gambling can take place? At the moment the age limit is 16 for the national lottery, but the proposals would maintain 18 as the limit for every other form of gambling. Will he consider that carefully, discuss with other Departments the need to review the age at which people attain their right to gamble, and decide whether to reduce that universally to 16?

Mr. Caborn: Several people raised that question in their submissions for consultation, and it will be part of the review.

We have had many representations. Of the 2,000 representations, about 1,500 were about gaming machines, especially the recommendation that members clubs, including sporting, social, community and political clubs, should no longer be allowed to install jackpot slot machines. I have a vested interest, as I am a member of the CIU. Four of its secretaries met me one Sunday evening in my club, the Sheffield Trades and Labour club—but I can assure hon. Members that they were not there to buy me drinks. I took their points and told them that they could make representations via the Ministry, and that if they wanted to put their thoughts in writing rather than verbally, it would be helpful. They did not resort to the vernacular.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): The 1,500 clubs that have written to the Minister are emphatic in assuring him, and our Government, that they are capable of policing gaming machines in their own clubs. I speak as the acting chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on non-profit-making clubs. There are 200 members from this House and the House of Lords, and the Minister will know that they are all urging him to drop recommendation 70.

Mr. Caborn: I am aware of those representations, and we take them on board. We do not want to do anything that would affect the social infrastructure of the surrounding areas. I told the House yesterday that about £250 million goes into clubs' finances, according to the information that has been passed to us.

Slot machines in pubs and other licensed premises are at present allowed a maximum prize of £15. The gambling review body recommended that members'

clubs and pubs should both be limited to machines with a maximum prize of £25. Underlying that recommendation was the review body's serious concern that the present law does not sufficiently protect children and vulnerable people in relation to gambling machines. I accept what has been said this morning, and we will examine the matter seriously. If the clubs took steps to ensure that concerns were met, that would be extremely helpful for the Government in reaching a decision.

As a result of evidence from this country and overseas, the review body was worried that gaming machines potentially involved a hard form of gambling with addictive characteristics. It noted that most countries do not allow children to play slot machines. As far as I know, we are the only country in the western world that allows young people to play slot machines, even at the seaside. That is a characteristic of the UK and something that we have to take—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I regret that I must bring this important debate to an end, but I have no alternative. We now move to the next debate.

Employment (South Devon)

12.30 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I welcome the opportunity to raise the issues of employment and unemployment in—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Will those who are leaving Westminster Hall please do so silently to enable the hon. Gentleman to be heard by the Chair?

Richard Younger-Ross: Thank you, Mr. Winterton.

I welcome the opportunity to debate employment and unemployment in south Devon. The title of the debate mentions employment because I wanted to touch on low pay and the social deprivation that that causes, as well as on the rise in unemployment in south Devon.

First, I have to dispel a couple of myths. I am sure that most hon. Members have spent time on holiday in Devon and that they remember thatched cottages, white cobbed walls, little streets and sandy beaches. We all have those happy childhood memories, but the reality is far harder, as many people know. Devon is not just a picture-postcard area; there is also social deprivation and poverty.

If we consider how tourism has changed in the last 30 years, we can appreciate some of the dramatic social changes that have occurred. People no longer flock on to trains down to Torquay and Teignmouth and into the South Hams; they go to Luton airport and fly abroad. The tourism industry in Devon has declined. Tourist establishments have been converted into residential care homes, which are now being turned into flats. As they become residential, employment opportunities are lost. There has been a structural decline in what we might call the mainstays or props of the traditional south-west industry.

The other great prop for the south-west, including south Devon, was agriculture. As we all know, it, too, has declined in the last 30 or 40 years. It has been mechanised, which means that fewer people work on the land. Of course, agriculture has had two particularly bitter blows in recent years; the BSE crisis in the 1980s and 1990s and the more recent tragedy of foot and mouth.

Tourism, agriculture and other traditional mainstays of the area are low-income industries. The average income in south Devon is still £100 a week less than the UK average. According to the latest figures that I could find, about 15 per cent. of Berkshire's population pays higher-rate income tax, whereas the figure for Devon is less than 3 per cent., placing it fourth from bottom of the list. That gives us an idea that vast amounts of money are not floating around. Without those high incomes, it is harder for small industries, newsagents and corner stores to flourish.

We would all agree that national unemployment levels are low compared with those of the 1980s and early 1990s. We are grateful for that change, but low unemployment does not mean that an area is wealthy. Low unemployment may mean that many people work for very little money, and it may conceal social deprivation. Low unemployment should not be used as

[Richard Younger-Ross]

an excuse for saying, "Well, everything is all right because everyone has a job." People may have a job and still be struggling. They may not claim benefits because they have been self-employed; Devon has a high percentage of people who have been self-employed. When one is self-employed—I speak from experience because I used to work for myself—one does not sign on when work dries up, because one cannot. One struggles, gets by and borrows money until one gets a little more work. In the meantime, the debts and the problems get bigger. Repairs to the house are not done; one does without.

That reality is often little understood. Public policy is concentrated on areas of high unemployment and city deprivation. The Government have done work on inner-city deprivation but they need to look at social deprivation in rural and other areas, in addition to those that are more obvious or, to use the current expression, more "in your face". Such deprivation is increasing in south Devon. Torbay, a neighbouring area, has had a 10.9 per cent. increase in unemployment over the past year. Totnes, another neighbouring constituency, has had a 7.4 increase in unemployment over the past year.

Teignbridge has had a slight decline in unemployment of 1.4 per cent. However, there are increasing redundancies in the Torbay area, the Teignbridge area and south Devon generally. In my constituency, Centrax, a company that makes parts and settings for jet engines and gas turbines, has just announced 250 job losses. The clay extract company Watts, Blake and Bearne announced earlier this year 60 losses in headquarters staff by reorganising, and recently announced another 50 losses. In addition, Devon Desserts, a successful company that is in the process of liquidation and is being bought out, has lost 16 managers; 400 jobs are hanging in the balance.

It has long been recognised that low-income areas need the introduction of high-skilled jobs. My region has had successes. We had the success of Centrax, for example, which was established in Newton Abbott by Robert Barr, who worked with Frank Whittle on jet engines. It has gone from strength to strength. There is also Nortel, a company in a neighbouring constituency that employs many of my constituents. It has been very successful in the telecommunications industry and in manufacturing mobile phone sets and other linked equipment. However, it has just announced 4,000 job losses. If 4,000 job losses occurred all at once in any major city, everyone would say, "This is dramatic. It is a great loss." However, I do not hear statements decrying these job losses; the Prime Minister is not saying, "Oh, that is a great disaster." Nor do I see the interest in doing something about it. I am sure that, in other contexts and places, that would have occurred.

Centrax has suffered a double blow. Its 250 job losses are occurring as a direct result of the events of 11 September. The jet engine components that it makes go to Rolls-Royce, which makes jet engines for the American executive jet market; people are no longer ordering such jets. The airlines have cut back. That is understandable and cannot be helped but the company has also been affected by direct Government policy.

Centrax also makes gas turbines. It is affected badly by the climate change levy that has been applied on combined heat and power units and also by the new electricity trading arrangement. The NETA agreement means that companies with combined heat and power are charged and penalised if they put electricity into the grid at the wrong time, rather than being able to sell their spare electricity at any time. The result of that has been a 60 per cent. downturn in the CHP sector and, whereas Centrax might have expected to build five or six turbine sets during the next six months, they will build only one. The Government could take direct action.

I have a general request, and several specific points. My request is that the Government examine how grants are given; what assistance is given and how does it work? The job transition service and the rapid response fund were mentioned in item 4.36 of the November 2000 pre-Budget report, stating:

"The service will provide help for people made redundant to move into new jobs".

The Government might help people to move into new jobs but if such people want skilled work, they will have to look in other areas. We in south Devon cannot afford to lose our skills base. If those people stay in south Devon, they may have to move from high to low pay. As I indicated, that has a knock-on effect on other industries and on smaller shops, which are still struggling in my part of the country.

Aid could be given to the aerospace industry by Government contract, although that would not necessarily have an immediate effect on Centrax. However, if the Government were to bring forward military programmes, that might help. If the Government reconsidered their investment in research and development, that might help. I ask the Minister to consider those specific points and pass them on to her colleagues in those Departments responsible for such matters.

The Government's policies directly affect CHP. The climate change levy could be cut for CHP units. We could ensure that the NETA is revised so that small providers are not penalised, and so that it is environmentally friendly and links in with the Government's stated intentions on sustainability. That would promote joined-up government.

Finally, with respect to agriculture and tourism, there is no reason why the Government should not support Devon county council's recovery programme and ensure that it is fully funded. I ask the Minister to do that.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): It is good to have the Minister with us. We wish her well.

12.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): Thank you for those good wishes, Mr. Winterton. I believe that this is the first Adjournment debate for the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross). I wish to congratulate him on securing it, and on raising issues that I know are of concern to his constituents and which I share.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the difficulties that he and his constituents are facing, partly because of changes in the local economic base and partly because of

job losses. I will concentrate on some of his points more than others. My parents have lived in his constituency for the past 20-odd years, so I know the area somewhat and can speak with some knowledge of its attractions and the difficulties that it faces. I have first-hand experience as a regular visitor who enjoys the tourism opportunities that the area offers.

Torbay is not in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but it is worth noting that Torbay is described as the UK's premier tourist resort. He mentioned that there are still many successes and many good things happening in that area. I was pleased to hear that Torbay had a successful summer season and that it continued to do well into the autumn. There are good aspects of what has been happening in that part of the country.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I do not believe that the Government appreciate for one minute the impact of the loss of 4,300 jobs in Torbay since February. The increase in tourism was a direct result of good weather this year, but it in no way begins to negate the impact of those job losses. If those loses had happened in one go in other parts of the country, they would have made the national news. The Minister cannot dismiss the impact by saying that we had a good tourist season.

Miss Melanie Johnson: I was trying to open with some remarks about tourism and I was going to move on to the job losses. If the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) holds his fire for a few minutes, he will see that I will address those issues. I have a little bit of time, so it is worth addressing some of the points that have been raised.

Tourism is still a force to be reckoned with and is still a major part of the economic base of the area. There have been some good tourism stories, even this year, as well as difficulties. I take the point that the hon. Member for Teignbridge made about the relationship with low pay and how people can have a rosy view of what the countryside represents and the difficulties that it faces. We recognise that. Much of the Government's activity increasingly focuses specifically on policies that address the issues facing rural areas all around the country, including the south-west. One of our major changes that will have had a major impact in areas where there is a tradition of low pay is the introduction of the national minimum wage, which I am sure has benefited many in both Torbay and Teignbridge.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge spoke about the difficulties that he and his constituents face because of the loss announced in late October of up to 250 jobs in the aircraft engines sector, which is about a quarter of the work force at Centrax in Newton Abbot. He also explained the impact more widely on Devon, including the job losses in various constituencies; these losses also affect his constituency to a degree. We regret those job losses and local agencies are working closely with the companies to provide the help needed by the employees affected.

The job losses in the telecommunications sector are not a problem specific to south Devon or even the UK, but reflect a sharp downturn in the global telecommunications markets after a period of rapid and sustained growth, from which south Devon benefited considerably. There has been a huge increase in jobs in this sector, although I appreciate that numbers have dropped down to pre-1998 levels. Paignton remains by far Nortel's largest global manufacturing operation for its lasers, amplifiers and related components used in optical systems for telecommunications. It is also an important centre of research and development. I entirely understand the points that the hon. Gentleman made about the need to keep the skills base in the area and to build on it.

The Employment Service and Benefits Agency locally are in close touch with Centrax in Newton Abbott about the number and timing of the job losses proposed, so that they are in the best possible position to provide the advice and support that the employees affected will need, particularly to find another job. I am sure that hon. Members share my understanding that future employment is the first thing on people's mind if they face job losses. There will be an application for large-scale redundancy status.

Richard Younger-Ross: It is not simply a matter of finding alternative employment, but of finding a comparable salary. It is no good for someone who is earning £300 a week one week to earn £100 the next. People have mortgages, cars and hire purchase agreements which are lost if they have to downgrade. People tend to move away and that is what I fear will happen.

Miss Johnson: Yes, that was exactly what I meant a moment ago when I spoke about the importance of sustaining centres of research and development as a means of sustaining higher-skilled and better-paid jobs in the sector.

At Centrax, there will be an application for large-scale redundancy status, which will provide immediate access to jobsearch and training programmes, usually available only to the long-term unemployed. Officials in the Department of Trade and Industry remain in close dialogue with companies in the aerospace sector and with the Society of British Aerospace Companies to monitor and evaluate developments. The current reduction in air travel following the tragic events of 11 September is having an inevitable knock-on effect for companies, as the hon. Gentleman recognised, at all levels in the aerospace industry.

Initial discussions with the industry suggest a reduction of production in line with the airlines' capacity reduction of about 20 per cent., but the position is evolving and no reliance can be placed on those provisional numbers. In the longer term, the sector is optimistic about returning to growth. The UK aerospace industry is an excellent example of what the Government hope to achieve in our drive towards a knowledge-intensive, high-productivity economy. Large orders have recently been placed for Airbus. There is still good news nationally in the aerospace industry.

I should like to deal with the redundancies at Nortel Networks, Paignton and JDS Uniphase, Torquay. All the local agencies—including the Employment Service, the regional development association and the Government Office for the region—have been working closely with the companies and the local authority

[Miss Johnson]

throughout the year to ensure that the necessary specific help is delivered. I emphasise that we are succeeding in working effectively across all those agencies to formulate a programme involving large-scale redundancy status, which provides immediate access to the various Government jobsearch and training programmes.

Mr. Sanders: Is the Minister aware that the contract given to Devon training for skills to offer training to people who have not yet been unemployed for six months has, for some reason, been cancelled? Many of my constituents have contacted my office in the past two weeks to inform me that their training programmes are no longer available. Will the Minister investigate that problem and correct it?

Miss Johnson: I shall certainly ask my departmental officials to examine the problem and to discuss it further with him. We shall see what we can do about it.

The Employment Service and the Benefits Agency have continued to try to meet the needs of affected employees. The Government rapid response funding of £250,000 is providing training and support to help back into employment those employees made redundant by Nortel and JDS Uniphase in Torquay. Such help can be accessed for up to 12 months after redundancy. So far, 475 individuals have been supported, with 365 securing employment as a result. I accept that the employment might not be comparable, but it is good news that 365—slightly more than three-quarters—have secured jobs.

South Devon has many advantages to offer, including a beautiful environment and a skilled work force; qualities that have attracted high-tech companies to the area. The current employment difficulties do not alter that attractiveness in the medium and longer term. It is important that the area is marketed effectively to attract the right sort of investment when market recovery comes. That is a job for Invest UK and the regional development agency, working in partnership with the local authorities. The regional development agency is working closely with Nortel as part of its inward investor aftercare programme and Invest UK is in touch with inward investors whenever possible to market existing facilities and skills within the UK.

Invest UK, the Department of Trade and Industry's communications and information industries directorate, the Government Office for the region, the Employment Service and the regional development agency are to meet the hon. Member for Torbay on 13 November to discuss the support that is available to Torbay and the help that is being given through a local task force to help to market Nortel's vacated building to potential inward investors. We hope that we might be able to get a comparable operation to come into the area. Everyone is working with that objective in mind, and I appreciate the support of local Members in trying to achieve it. The chief executive of Invest UK is to visit Devon on 19 and 20 November to discuss inward investment with businesses, the RDA, the Government Office for the region, and Torbay, Plymouth and Devon councils. Much is being done to try to pick up the threads and ensure that jobs of a comparable nature are created. South Devon should not look simply to inward investment as a means of increasing employment opportunities and diversifying its economy. A close look should be taken, with all the local partners, at the opportunities for encouraging and supporting business growth locally, including the expansion of businesses, building on potential cluster strengths and opportunities and developing the capacity for entrepreneurship.

South Devon has a range of programmes to help the local economy and to improve skills and employability, including the new European objective 2 programme in the south-west, which is worth £108 million in European grant over seven years. That does not cover the Teignbridge constituency. However, objective 3, the new deal and the new DTI enterprise grant are all opportunities to be grasped.

I am pleased that two major projects by Torbay council and Paignton zoo to regenerate Torquay's harbour area are close to receiving formal offers of support from the objective 2 European regional development fund. Business units are included as part of that scheme. I understand that the total European grant could be worth more than £3.6 million and that those projects have been the focus of Torbay's attention so far. I hope that it will now be possible to consider more widely the potential for objective 2 to support economic development opportunities in the area. There are travel-to-work areas around Newton Abbot and in the Teignbridge area, including Exeter; many people are relatively mobile and can move around locally. Regardless of the specific area for which objective money is available, it can create jobs in neighbouring areas.

So far, little advantage has been taken locally in south Devon of the opportunities that the European social fund provides through the objective 2 and objective 3 programmes to upskill and retrain the labour force. It should be possible to make linkages—for example, between capital projects to provide new employment opportunities such as business units using the European regional development fund and training and retraining support through the European social fund—to ensure that local people have the right skills to access job opportunities.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): The hon. Lady mentioned capital projects. Does she include the Kingskerswell bypass?

Miss Johnson: I know that that has been campaigned about for a long time, and I am sure that local Members will continue to do so. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is not a matter for my Department.

This year, 640 young people in south Devon have left the new deal, 64 per cent. of whom have gone into jobs. Of those, 80 per cent. remain in sustained jobs. That is better than the national average of 75 per cent. The DTI has made nine offers of enterprise grant to small and medium-sized enterprises in south Devon, totalling nearly £0.4 million towards project costs of £2.6 million. That accounts for almost 30 per cent. of the enterprise grant offered in the eligible areas of the south-west as a whole. However, only two applications—both successful—have been made by businesses in Torbay and only one in Teignbridge. No bids were made by

Torbay in the first year. That is a missed opportunity. There is scope for more bids to be made using the support that is already available to business; I am sure that hon. Members will now be egging people on to do so.

The local regional development agency has been supporting, with more than £5 million, projects worth more than £9 million of investment in south Devon, some of which are completed. Torbay is one of the RDA's five priority areas for regeneration in the south-west. The RDA is, for example, supporting the phase two development of Long Road business park, in Paignton, and the Torquay Living Coasts project to revitalise the waterfront. It is also investing £125,000 from the skills development fund to increase skills for supporting tourism business competitiveness in Torbay.

The Government are trying to help in every way that they can, and to mitigate the effects of 11 September on the economy of south Devon. I am sure that we will continue to do all we can to assist local businesses and local employment. However, I conclude by saying that the news is not all bad and that there are many items of good news for south Devon.

Electronic Tagging

1 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise an issue that is important to my constituents.

As a society, we are judged on our system of justice. It is important that we balance punishment of offenders with their rehabilitation. Punishment is important to show that our society does not approve of what has happened. It should also act as a deterrent to others, so that they see what happens if they break the law. Punishment should also enable the victim of the crime to feel that what was done to them has been paid for. However, rehabilitation is equally important in ensuring that people who have committed a crime can get on with their life once they have paid for their crime.

I apologise, Mr. Winterton, if it seems that I am going back to the first principles of the judicial system, but doing so will prove important to the debate. My constituency includes the centre of Reading—in fact, it reaches some way west of the centre—and covers almost the entire night-time economy. When I moved to Reading in 1984, it had the night-time economy of the smallish market town it then was. However, in the intervening years it has changed massively. It has grown into a larger, dynamic, thrusting city aspirant. It has changed from the home of the three Bs—beer, bulbs and biscuits—to the centre of the Thames valley high-tech service area. It is home to many international companies, such as Microsoft, and is a regional shopping centre. Of the three Bs, only the brewing of beer remains.

As Reading has grown, so has its night-time economy. When I moved to Reading, people who lived there used to go out at weekends to pubs and restaurants in villages nearby. There were just a few town centre pubs and restaurants, and they had a rather unsavoury reputation. However, in the past few years a large number of attractive pubs and restaurants have opened. Reading now draws in thousands of people every weekend. They travel some distance—sometimes from areas such as west London—for a night out in Reading.

As a result, more people are walking the streets of Reading at night, which has helped to make it a safer place. As a woman, I now have no fear of walking around central Reading at night on my own. However, one downside of growth has been an increase in crime, particularly drink-related crime, which usually involves violence. In the past few months there have been fatalities in the Minster street area of central Reading that were entirely the result of drink-related crime.

I believe that some of these problems are connected to the drinking culture that our licensing system encourages. I will continue to work for the modernisation of our licensing system, so that we can reduce the problems that it creates. I will also work to help reduce the need for a massive police presence on the streets at 11.30 at night, and again at 2.30 in the morning, to deal with the thousands of people who are simultaneously ejected from venues.

I have talked about Reading's night-time economy because it provides the background to the substance of today's debate: electronic tagging. A constituent of mine

[Jane Griffiths]

who was out at night in Reading with his friends got involved in some trouble with others and was arrested. He was found guilty of actual bodily harm and on 20 July he was sentenced to three months' imprisonment with a further three months suspended. He was imprisoned in Reading young offenders institution—more famously known as Reading gaol in Reading town—about which a beautiful poem was written by one of Reading's more famous, if less willing, residents, the genius Oscar Wilde.

I shall not name the constituent involved, at the request of his family. He had been serving his three months' imprisonment on a home detention curfew, which extended until 19 October this year. The curfew ran daily between 7.15 pm and 7.15 am. Home detention curfews were introduced on 28 January by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Prisoners sentenced to custody of three months or more are eligible to be released on home detention curfew. Prisoners must be over 18 on their release date; they are required to be at a specific address for at least nine hours a day, where they are monitored by an electronic tag. All eligible prisoners must pass a risk assessment and have a suitable address before they will be granted a home detention curfew, and the final decision is made by the prison governor.

Someone released on home detention curfew is subject to the same supervision as someone released early. Anyone released on home detention curfew can be recalled if they break the terms of their curfew. That can happen if they go out, if they present a danger to the public or if there is a change in their circumstances. They can also be recalled if it proves impossible to monitor them or they are charged with a new offence.

Curfew orders are a welcome addition to the judicial system. They balance the punishment and rehabilitation aspects of the system to which I referred earlier, with the balance probably favouring rehabilitation. A curfew order allows someone to try to rebuild their life while punishing them for what they have done. For example, it is possible for a curfew to be established in such a way that someone can work during the day but cannot go out at night, making it an appropriate punishment in my constituent's case. Every night when he could not go out with his friends, he was reminded about his previous behaviour.

It is important that people who transgress have the chance to get their life back on track, and work is an important part of that. The curfew order's success depends on the monitoring of the person against whom it is made. This involves the offender wearing an electronic tag, which, in combination with equipment located at the curfew address, monitors when the offender is at the address. If the offender leaves the address during curfew hours, or attempts to move or damage the equipment or tag, the private companies that monitor the schemes are alerted.

I was visited at my surgery at Whitley advice shop on Monday 15 October by my constituent's parents. When his parents visited me, four days of his detention order remained. At the surgery, they presented me with a letter that set out the following situation. At 4.30 pm on Friday 12 October, the sentencing unit at the Home Office revoked my constituent's licence on the grounds that it had been breached. The alleged breach took place during the 12-hour period between 11 October and 12 October. At 7.30 pm on 12 October, my constituent was arrested by Thames Valley police and returned to Reading young offenders institution. The case appears straightforward because the order can be revoked at any time if it is breached. However, my constituent's parents were adamant that the order had not been breached and that their son had been at home on the night of the alleged breach. They were also worried because their son had been offered a job, which he was due to begin on 15 October. His father rang up the firm to say that his son would not be in that day and was worried that his son would lose the job.

When I returned to my office, I passed the matter on to my caseworker, who telephoned Reliance Monitoring, the firm responsible for monitoring the scheme, and was referred to a named member of the electronic monitoring team at the Home Office. My caseworker telephoned the electronic monitoring team but no one was available, so a message was left on the voice mail. On the next day, we had still not received a reply so we rang again. This time, my assistant spoke to the named member of the team, who seemed very cagey and promised that she would ring back because she was looking into the matter. When my office was called back, we were told that there was a question mark over the electronic tag, as Reliance Monitoring had found it to be dormant. Upon asking questions to gather further information, specifically about whether the tag was working, my office asked for the situation to be put in writing. The following conversation took place. The electronic monitoring team said, "Why do you want it in writing?" My caseworker replied, "Because my MP would like to discuss it and make representations to Ministers." The electronic monitoring team then asked, "Is she Conservative or Labour?" My caseworker said, "She's Labour." My caseworker then received an e-mail setting out the situation in writing. My caseworker did not know whether the e-mail would have been different had I been a Conservative. I am at loss as to why that question was asked.

The e-mail said that the Home Office electronic monitoring team was informed by Reliance Monitoring on the afternoon of 16 October that the tag was in dormant mode—it had shut down and had stopped transmitting for an unknown reason. The e-mail said that that could have occurred for a number of reasons and that Reliance was to have faxed that information to the sentence enforcement unit on the afternoon of 16 October in time for an appeal by my constituent. It was suggested that my office contact the sentence enforcement unit. The e-mail also said that my constituent had failed to answer the telephone between 7 and 8 pm and had not responded to a knock on the door between 1.20 and 1.30 am on 12 October. It stated that it is the offender's responsibility to let the monitoring company have access to investigate a suspected violation at any time of the night. This is noted in the release licence, or in words to that effect. It is also the offender's responsibility to answer the telephone.

There is some lack of clarity as to what Reliance Monitoring did. In discussion with my office, Reliance staff originally said that they called at my constituent's house at 10.30 pm, finding the lights off and no one home. The statement was later altered to say that they

called at the house at 2.30 am. I have not been able to establish whether they called to gain access to the house or, upon seeing that the lights were off and no one, apparently, was home, did not try to gain access. Reliance claims to have made the required telephone calls to my constituent, who failed to answer and return the calls. My constituent acknowledged that he missed the calls but that he had thought nothing of it.

On arriving to arrest my constituent, Thames Valley police checked with Reliance Monitoring to see if it could pick up a signal from the tag. No signal was coming from the tag, but the officers had no choice but to arrest my constituent; as the licence had already been revoked, they had no discretion over the matter. My office then phoned the sentencing enforcement unit. The home detention curfew manager explained that my constituent would need to go through an appeal. I faxed a letter of support to the home detention curfew manager and contacted the Home Office which was happy to help, but the time scale meant that the appeal hearing could not physically be speeded up.

My constituent's appeal was heard and he was released on Thursday 18 October. The home detention curfew plays an important role in the criminal justice system, but we must have confidence that it works. I would like assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that we can be confident that technical malfunctions will not cause United Kingdom citizens to spend days, possibly longer, in prison when they should not be there. Is there any information about how many tags have so failed, causing the problems suffered by my constituent? The importance of allowing monitoring should be made clear to offenders, including the importance of answering the telephone. I do not believe that that is made clear to everyone released in this way.

The system is important and I support it, as do other hon. Members, but we must be confident that it works properly.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) for raising the case of her constituent who was released under licence on home detention curfew. I am also grateful for the help she gave her constituent and the liaison that she undertook with officials to help sort out what was going wrong with that case. On the issues that she has raised, I will take up any matters that I can to ensure that the system is working as well as possible.

Inquiries suggest that this was an isolated case. I will explain why in a moment. As my hon. Friend said, her constituent's licence was revoked when it appeared that he was absent for an entire curfew period of 12 hours. As a result, he was recalled to prison. He appealed against that decision, the monitoring equipment was tested and found to be faulty, and he was released. I share my hon. Friend's concern at what happened, and want to tell her about some of the steps that we have taken to prevent a recurrence.

I will first explain how the home detention curfew scheme and electronic monitoring works in general, and then set out the facts in this case and the action that we have taken in response. The scheme was provided for by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and began to operate in January 1999. As my hon. Friend recognised, the scheme's aim is to ease the transition of prisoners from custody to the community by enabling short-term prisoners to serve up to the last two months of the custodial part of their sentence in the community, subject to an electronically monitored curfew. Most prisoners serving sentences of between three months and four years are eligible for release under the scheme. As my hon. Friend said, the prison governor decides on behalf of the Secretary of State whether a prisoner can be released on HDC. The decision is made on the basis of a stringent, robust risk assessment that takes into account the risk of harm to the public, the risk of re-offending during the curfew period and the likelihood of compliance with the curfew.

The law requires a minimum curfew of nine hours a day for released prisoners. In practice, as was the case for my hon. Friend's constituent, the curfew is normally 12 hours, typically running from around 7 pm to 7 am. I think that it was 7.15 pm to 7.15 am in this case. The electronic monitoring of those under curfew is carried out by private sector companies, such as Reliance, under contract to the Home Office. They provide a complete service, supplying and maintaining tagging equipment, monitoring compliance with the curfew and following up any breaches. Those are reported to the Prison Service's sentence enforcement unit, which exercises on behalf of the Secretary of State the power to revoke a licence and recall a curfewee to prison.

On the day of release from prison, the contractors visit the released prisoner at the curfew address. They fit a tag, usually around the offender's ankle, and install a monitoring unit at that address. The tag sends a signal to the monitoring unit at frequent intervals. The signal is sent down the telephone line to a central computer at the monitoring centre, also operated by the contractor. The tag is calibrated to the monitoring unit, so that if the person goes out of range—in practice, goes outside the house where the unit is located—the signal is not received. The monitoring staff are then alerted to begin enforcement procedures. As standard practice, those involve a telephone call and a visit if necessary. If the available evidence suggests that the curfewee has breached the conditions of the licence, it can be revoked and the curfewee recalled to prison.

I turn from the general position to my hon. Friend's constituent, who was released on home detention curfew on 4 September to an address in Reading. His curfew was due to expire on 19 October. In accordance with procedure, staff from the monitoring company visited him on 4 September to fit the tag and install the monitoring equipment. That was completed successfully, and the equipment at that stage—and apparently for most of the licence period—was working properly.

On 11 October, at the start of the curfew period at 7.15 pm, the computer at the monitoring centre recorded an absence of signal from the tag. The contractor's staff tried to telephone my hon. Friend's constituent at 7.24 pm and 7.47 pm, but there was no answer. A visit was scheduled to the curfew address. Records indicate that that took place between 1.20 am and 1.30 am on 12 October. The staff were unable to enter the premises. I take my hon. Friend's point—it is a matter that I will follow up—that it is unclear exactly what occurred during that visit: whether the door was

[Beverley Hughes]

knocked and there was no answer, or whether further efforts were made. I think that the door was knocked but I am not clear whether anything else was done.

The central computer continued to record an absent signal until the end of the curfew period at 7.15 am on 12 October. The contractor reported that to the sentence enforcement unit. Inquiries were made of the prison from which the person was released, the probation service, the contractor and the police. The inquiries showed that the absence was not authorised and the licence was revoked that day in accordance with the law. My hon. Friend's constituent was arrested that evening and transferred to prison the following day. He subsequently appealed against the revocation.

On 15 October, the contractor's staff retrieved and tested the tag that my hon. Friend's constituent had been wearing from the prison to which he was returned. They discovered that the tag was in dormant mode. That is the mode in which the tag operates when it is not in use to monitor people, and when it has been removed from one person before being fitted to another. That prevents the accumulation of unnecessary data and means that the tag does not send a signal to the monitoring unit. The tag resets itself from time to time as a precautionary response to any possible interference with its power supply, although it is programmed to continue normal operation. As far as we are aware, this is the first occasion that a tag has reset itself to dormant mode, rather than being programmed to do so by the contractor's staff when it is not in use. We do not yet know why that happened in this case, and the contractor has asked the manufacturers to examine the tag.

The contractor notified the sentence enforcement unit of the tag's fault. That cast doubt on the safety of the revocation of the individual's licence and, consequently, his appeal was upheld and he was released from prison on 18 October.

The malfunction of even a single tag of the many that are fitted is a matter of concern. We discussed that with the contractor and relevant operating procedures have changed as a response. In future, on all occasions when a tag resets itself, the contractor's staff will visit the curfewee to replace the tag and return it to the manufacturer. That will ensure that a tag cannot reset itself to dormant mode and continue to be worn by a curfewee.

I realise that that will be of little consolation to the individual in this case and to his family. However, as I said at the outset, the incident seems to be isolated and action has been taken to prevent a recurrence.

Over the past 12 months, the sentence enforcement unit received 71 appeals against revocation of licences. That is 10 per cent. of the 700 revocations that were made during the same period. We conducted a manual sift of all appeals, which revealed that only eight of the 71 prisoners who appealed claimed that the breach arose because of equipment failure. Only eight people claimed that the breach was technical. All eight cases were investigated fully. In only one case—unfortunately that of my hon. Friend's constituent—was the breach found to have arisen from a fault in the equipment. The most common finding in the other seven cases was that the tag had been deliberately damaged or cut off by the person himself. I accept that such information is not necessarily helpful to the person under discussion, but I am confident, because of our subsequent inquiries, that this is the only case in which the tag was responsible for what seemed to be a breach that resulted in the consequences described.

On a more general note, my hon. Friend is aware, notwithstanding the unfortunate circumstances of the case, of what an important role home detention curfew plays in enabling offenders to make the transition from custody to the community more effectively. More than 40,000 people have been released on home detention curfew, with only a small minority—less than 5 per cent.—having their licences revoked for one reason or another. Indeed, within that 5 per cent., the number of people whose licences have been revoked because of a serious issue, such as committing an offence, is smaller still and is less than 2 per cent.

The system has a success rate of more than 90 per cent. It helps prisoners to make the transition, which is important if we are to resettle offenders effectively back into their families and communities and help them to resume life without further offending.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the issue. I shall investigate whether we can clarify procedures and make them as robust as possible. We want contractors to telephone or make contact in response to an apparent breach. I hope that she accepts that we have followed up her point systematically.

Jane Griffiths: Can my hon. Friend assure me that the obligation on offenders to answer telephone calls and to allow access is made clear? It has become apparent in my investigations that such a procedure has not been made clear to those on release.

Beverley Hughes: I assure my hon. Friend that I shall check that the offender's responsibilities are clearly understood and that there is a proper procedure whereby we can ensure that we have a record of individuals having the process fully explained to them so that there is no misunderstanding. I thank my hon. Friend for helping us to improve a successful system even further.

Princess Royal Hospital (Mid-Sussex)

1.28 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Thank you, Mr. Winterton, for giving me the opportunity—for the second time, at your feet—to raise in Parliament the developments taking place in the health service in mid-Sussex. I am grateful to the Minister for giving up her time to respond to the debate today. My constituents have understandable anxieties about the plans. I had the chance to debate the matter with the Minister's predecessor on 29 November last year. At that time, I drew the then Minister's attention to the wholly unsatisfactory proposals of the Central Sussex Partnership Programme document, "Modern Hospital Services for Central Sussex—A challenge for us all".

My constituents and I believe that those proposals were reckless, foolish and wholly lacking in common sense. I pay tribute to the way in which the responsible authorities, the Minister and her Department paid careful attention to a tidal wave of public opinion. The proposals that were put forward subsequently in the second document, entitled "Strengthening Hospital Services in Central Sussex", contain much good sense and much that we accept needs to be developed for the future.

At the time, I made it plain to the Minister that some services would need to be shuffled between the Princess Royal hospital in Haywards Heath and the Royal Sussex county hospital in Brighton; that I would support such changes, provided that the professionals deemed them sensible; and that, inevitably, neither institution would be likely to have exactly what it wanted.

I reinforced that in my letter of 18 October to the present Minister, in which I further emphasised the requirement to consider the proposals in conjunction with the wider review that was taking place in east Surrey and north-west Sussex. Indeed, as the Minister knows, in light of the consultation now taking place, there is a serious debate about the location of, for example, breast care services; a matter that is, naturally, arousing a good deal of anxiety. There are and will be other areas of uncertainty as the plans are revealed.

The Princess Royal is a modern acute hospital with 328 beds in Haywards Heath. Under the proposals, the accident and emergency department—which was, ludicrously, threatened with closure—will be strengthened, which we all welcome. The decision has produced welcome reassurance locally. The department dealt with more than 30,000 patients last year, a number that has steadily risen since the late 1990s. Elderly people are expertly cared for on specialist wards, and the hospital also provides comprehensive surgical and orthopaedic surgery, including for all emergencies.

During the past year, 8,729 patients were admitted to the Princess Royal as emergency cases, and 3,673 were admitted for treatment as planned patients and stayed one or two nights. Last year, the busy out-patient department dealt with 75,258 patients. The hospital directly employs 49 consultant medical staff, 427 nursing staff, 218 technical support staff, 65 midwives, 71 junior medical staff and 343 support staff. The Princess Royal employs a total of 1,173 worthy and excellent people. As the Minister will appreciate, it is a busy and popular local hospital.

The Government's main proposal is, effectively, that the Princess Royal hospital and the Royal Sussex county hospital in Brighton, supported by other local services, merge. The effect would be one major university hospital trust, centred largely on the Royal Sussex county hospital and including the Princess Royal. The plans would place all acute hospital services under one management and would bring together doctors, nurses and other clinical staff to work in a more joined-up and coherent way. All of us would welcome that, and although some understandable reservations about the proposals have been expressed, in making a judgment in the interests of my constituents, I generally support the plan. However, I draw the Minister's attention to genuine and increasing anxieties about the present and future funding of the merged trust, given the especially pressing current financial difficulties.

The Royal Sussex county hospital in Brighton failed in all its published performance targets, and it is said that there is some doubt about the state of its finances; and, indeed, some of its management. In the run-up to the proposed merger, the Princess Royal, through no fault of its own, projects a year-end deficit of £3.3 million. It has been consistently inadequately funded not only by the present Government, but by the previous one. As a result of the challenging level of demand and the ad hoc arrangements in several areas, it spends at least £538,000 a year on beds for which it has received no funding. That is clearly unsustainable for the future. As I said when the Minister kindly received a delegation that I led from my area, delayed transfers create a significant problem, and the continuing cost of treatment and nursing adds a further burden of at least £500,000 to the budget.

The Government have recently given some extra money to cope with the problem, for which we are grateful. However, the problem remains serious throughout the south-east and elsewhere, and the future looks unclear and worrying.

To the more than £1 million that I have mentioned, one can add a further £1 million of unfunded cost pressures that the trust has identified, which are not resourced by an already hard-pressed West Sussex health authority.

In addition, the Princess Royal hospital has to pay further sums to nursing agencies. The cost of agency nurses to the NHS—as you will know, Mr. Winterton, from your experience on the Select Committee—can be truly outrageous. During the August bank holiday last year, it was necessary for one ward to obtain a D-grade nurse for a 12-hour shift. The agency charged £1,019 for a single shift. Last year, the trust spent £310,000 on agency staff. At the end of this current financial year, it is predicted to spend £620,000 on such staff. Clearly, that is wholly unacceptable, unaffordable and symptomatic of the great difficulty in nurse recruitment and retention throughout the south-east. That is of special concern to my constituency.

Because of a consistent failure by the health authority to invest in the nursing infrastructure, the Princess Royal hospital has very low levels of funded establishments on many wards compared with other hospitals in the south-east. Indeed, while the Princess Royal employs 0.84 of a nurse per bed, the Royal Sussex county hospital employs 1.1 nurses per bed. Putting it bluntly, the Royal Sussex employs 20 per cent. more

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

nurses than the Princess Royal. The Princess Royal estimates that increasing staffing levels at the hospital by 10 per cent., and providing adequate care and reducing agency nursing costs, would cost at least £1.5 million. Given the West Sussex health authority's increasingly difficult financial situation, it appears unlikely that that will be funded. I know that the Minister realises that steps will have to be taken to cover those obligations, which cannot long continue to be fulfilled without significant damage to patient care.

Some of the existing cost pressures have been funded, but not sufficiently to meet, for example, the iniquitous European Union working time requirements and the onerous current service demands. Furthermore, the regulation covering junior doctors' working hours has resulted in an additional eight posts across medicine, general surgery and trauma. To achieve compliance, the posts will cost a further £420,000 in a full year. Then there is the cost of additional work undertaken to meet the in-patient waiting time target—a further £750,000—and, as the Minister will see, there is a read-across to the cost of delayed transfers. There are also particular difficulties in the Princess Royal's excellent special baby care unit, where the nursing establishment is only just barely adequate to maintain a rota. Indeed, our heroic midwives are staffed at a level that is well below that of comparable units in Sussex.

The position is clear. While I cannot comment on the finances of the Royal Sussex, the Princess Royal is consistently and persistently seriously underfunded, probably to the tune of £4.5 million or £5 million annually. That is at the heart of the debate and must now be resolved. It is neither prudent nor sensible for the merger to take place without the financial affairs of both parties to the proposed merger being put straight. As the Minister may know, the newly merged Surrey and Sussex trusts started with a £4 million deficit, from which they have never recovered. It is grossly unfair to the managers of the hospital trusts, and the patients, that the deficits are not removed, as it puts everyone at a disadvantage from day one. I want the Minister to understand—I am sure that she does—that it would be improper and a serious failure of public policy for the merger to be launched without being fully funded, and thus unable to undertake the demanding tasks that it faces.

I would go one step further. Given the Government's rhetoric, much of which is admirable, on the health service, and their failure to deliver on the reform of much of the public service, it would be a grotesque deceit on Mid-Sussex and my constituents—and other constituents—for such matters not to be dealt with properly and honourably.

1.38pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) on securing the debate about the funding of the Princess Royal hospital. I am aware of the concerns about health services in Mid-Sussex, and I am slightly better informed about them as a result of a visit that I received from the hon. Gentleman, local councillors and representatives of the local community health council. That meeting was informative, and gave me an insight into the situation on the ground in the community. That is important; it is easy for Ministers to look at papers and submissions, and to fail to have a sense of the practical issues.

The hon. Gentleman's choice of subject has pleased me—although he might not think that that is the case—as it gives me an opportunity to outline some of the additional funding that has been received by the Mid-Sussex NHS trust and the West Sussex health authority, and to explain some of the reforms that the Government are seeking to make to ensure that that extra investment has the maximum impact. The hon. Gentleman has generously acknowledged that his region has received additional support, and I understand his wish to secure an even better position for his local health services.

The funding allocation received by the West Sussex health authority has dramatically improved over the past few years; since 1997, there has been an increase of £231 million. That is a huge amount of extra investment in health for that community. The Government have also been able to provide health trusts such as the West Sussex health authority with three-year spending plans, providing forecasts and a degree of stability. That enables them to plan the growth that they intend to implement, instead of their being stuck on the annual revenue merry-go-round that previously made it difficult for organisations within the health service—and in the public sector in general—to try to plan the way forward.

However, the Government are acutely aware of the concerns that have been raised about the general funding formula in the health service. A wide-ranging review is underway, examining the formula used to make cash allocations to health authorities and to primary care trusts. As a result of the shift in the balance of power, primary care trusts will, in future, spend about 75 per cent. of the entire health service budget. Ensuring that we get the funding allocations right at the level of the primary care trust will be crucial to securing the delivery of acute services and specialised services at tertiary level. If we do not get things right on the ground floor, they might go wrong later on.

The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex acknowledged not only the increases in funding, but the need to try to ensure that the extra finance is accompanied by reform so that the way in which the whole system in our hospitals works can be improved. He has highlighted particular issues with regard to underfunding, but some of the comments that he has made also have more general application.

It is acknowledged that the health service throughout the country has a problem with the recruitment and retention of its staff, its most important resource. That problem is particularly acute in London and the south-east. There are several reasons for that, not the least of which is the buoyant economy in that region. Spiralling house prices make it difficult for public-sector workers of any kind, but nurses and therapists in particular, to get access to the housing market and, therefore, to take up jobs locally.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): A daughter of a constituent of mine qualified as a nurse from Edinburgh university, and then arrived in Brighton and applied for a job there. Her application

took three months to deal with and it was six months before a job was offered to her, by which time she had found employment in the private sector. I took that matter up with the West Sussex health authority, as the process of recruiting nurses in Brighton did not seem to me to be as efficient as it might have been. At a grassroots level, that is worth investigating.

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point and I shall look into the matter. Our procedures need to be as efficient as they can be if we are to maximise people's skills and talents.

I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that despite the difficulties of recruitment and retention, there are 17,000 more nurses working in the health service than there were in 1997; we are making considerable progress, but there is a great deal more to do.

I am pleased to be able to tell the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex that as part of the working lives initiative—a raft of measures to try to recruit and retain more staff—West Sussex health authority received £400,000 to enable it to pay the cost-of-living supplements for nurses in the area. That has made quite an impact in keeping people in the service. The initiative is at the forefront of the new schemes to provide affordable housing for key public sector workers. Mid-Sussex has 10 places on starter homes schemes, which means that staff earning less than £35,000 a year can get on the first rung of the housing market, something that everyone will welcome. I am pleased that Mid-Sussex is at the forefront of those new and innovative schemes.

We introduced an organisation called NHS Professionals 12 months ago to try to deal with the widespread use of agency nurses. It is the national health service's in-house agency, providing work for people who want to work on a part-time, temporary or casual basis, and at different times of the week, perhaps to fit in with childcare responsibilities. NHS Professionals provides extensive services, especially in the south-east, so that trusts do not have to meet exorbitant costs, as in the horrifying example quoted by the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex. NHS Professionals is an innovative way of plugging the gaps at times of peak demand when the service needs greater capacity.

The hon. Gentleman is convinced that the trust is under-funded, but at the beginning of the year it forecast a break-even financial position. It is not under-funded in an ongoing, systemic way; the problems can be addressed by the recovery plans now being put in place, although there may have been some weaknesses in financial controls in the in-year management of the budget. There may perhaps have been some weak monitoring of the in-year cost pressures on the system. We must be rigorous and robust in ensuring that the performance improvement and recovery plans agreed with the region are monitored and followed through; if there are issues that are completely beyond the control of the trust, we must ensure that we address them.

We cannot allow cost pressures to arise in any system without trying to bear down on them and to explore whether different ways of providing and organising the service can give equally high quality NHS services to local people.

The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex was generous in saying that he supports some of the inevitable service reconfigurations that will result from the merger. They will enable the trust to achieve better standards in each of those sites than it does now. They will also enable some doctors to specialise more in their particular expertise, and they will raise NHS standards for local people.

The financial picture is more complex than it appears. In the past year, there has been a lot of investment to increase capacity at the Princess Royal hospital. There is an extra consultant psychiatrist, gastroenterologist, orthopaedic surgeon, anaesthetist, radiologist, accident and emergency consultant and additional diagnostic facilities and staff. There is a commitment to ensure that the Princess Royal can offer top-quality services to the local community. As the hon. Gentleman said, there is confirmation that full accident and emergency services will be provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week on that site, which has reassured the local community.

Extra resources have been allocated this year to Mid-Sussex from a couple of nationwide schemes. Last week, the Secretary of State announced the strategy on reforming emergency care, which is designed to deal with some of the pressures at the front end of our accident and emergency departments, which are operating under tremendous pressure. The members of staff are doing a marvellous job, but we believe that if organisational changes were made to care delivery, they would be able to see more patients and give them the right care at the right time in the right place.

Reorganising accident and emergency into streaming systems will mean that patients' ailments are cared for by appropriate and relevant staff, so that more simple matters are dealt with by nurse practitioners and more complex matters by consultants, so we can get through the waiting list much more quickly. That strategy is backed up by a considerable amount of money; £118 million will be invested nationally, and the West Sussex health authority will receive an additional £780,000 from that to help it implement the changes.

Pressures creep through the whole hospital system once people move on from accident and emergency departments. The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex raised the question of delayed discharges, which have caused huge problems throughout the national health service in the past year. He will be aware that, three weeks ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced an extra £300 million over the next three years to deal with the problem. It is a problem not simply for the hospital service that beds are occupied by people who no longer need to be there, but for the people in those beds. Once their acute medical care has finished, it is not in their best interest to remain in an acute hospital. More appropriate care should be found, whether that is in the nursing home or residential care sector, or through support with domiciliary care packages that maintain patients' independence at home. The programme is important, both in terms of freeing up capacity in hospitals and ensuring that people get the right care in the right place.

I am delighted to be able to inform the hon. Gentleman that, because of West Sussex's particular problems, it has received a disproportionate amount of the £300 million to be allocated. That recognises the particular challenges that it faces. Some £300,000 has already been invested to transfer patients into nursing homes and residential care, with a further £100,000 being made available immediately; more allocations will

[Ms Blears]

be made as the year goes on. Those two schemes have already had the combined effect of releasing 22 beds in the hospital, which represents a 50 per cent. reduction in the number of blocked beds. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that that is a welcome development.

The challenge for us is to sustain that position and ensure that the number of delayed discharges does not rise again, which is why the money is also connected to a rigorous cash-for-change programme. There must be a change in the way the system works; otherwise we will simply return to the same position year after year. Unless we reach a position in which local social services work hand in hand with the health service to put in place domiciliary and residential care packages, the changes we are making now will not be sustained. That will be in no one's interests; whether that is the acute patients who need their elective surgery or those who need more appropriate care. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the increased investment must be followed by changes to the system to ensure that we maximise our investment.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the Minister and I acknowledge that considerable extra sums are being invested. However, that was not the point that I was trying to make. It is true that a number of new posts have been established, but that merely reflects the demand with which the Princess Royal hospital has to cope. I agree that the trust's affairs must be properly run and the value must be got from every pound. Does the Minister agree that it would be wrong to launch the merged trust even with extra investment in people, facilities and everything else? The Princess Royal hospital has been underfunded over the years, although it may now have received more money. However, does she agree that it would be wrong to launch the merged trust without addressing the yoke of considerable deficits that hang around the necks of both parties to the transaction? If that is not dealt with, there will inevitably be a bad start.

Ms Blears: Much as I would like to agree with the hon. Gentleman, I cannot agree that wiping the slate clean must be a precondition of the changes that must occur in the health community. The service reconfigurations, which the hon. Gentleman acknowledged will bring improvements, will mean that the trust works more effectively and efficiently, and in the best interests of patients. There will be savings because of the reconfiguration, but that is not the prime motive, which is to raise standards and to ensure that the right services are in the right place in the local community. We should not have a precondition of removing the deficit completely. It is important that we can achieve the recovery plan that was agreed with the region; that shows a clear way forward in ensuring that the trust breaks even and balances its books while not compromising the services available to patients. Over the next few months, we must ensure that the plan is monitored. If unforeseen pressures that are not in the recovery plan cannot be dealt with, that is a matter for reconsideration. The trust can get off to a good start by implementing some of the changes.

The hon. Gentleman performed a great service by raising these matters so that they are in all peoples' minds. It is challenging—an overused word in this place—and realistic to manage our way through and to ensure that extra investment does not create further problems down the line, but instead improves the service imaginatively and creatively and reduces in-year pressures. That can be done and it will result in better services for the hon. Gentleman's constituents. That must be the overriding concern of all hon. Members'. Any process changes that are put into effect should not just shuffle pieces on a draughtboard but improve the outcome and services for local people.

I am aware that the hon. Gentleman raised a wide range of matters, including staffing and new investment. He also mentioned compliance with junior doctors' hours; that is a further pressure on the health service, but it is right. The Mid-Sussex NHS trust has worked towards compliance and recruited eight additional doctors in general medicine and general surgery. A further four grade F nurses have been recruited and trained. They perform some duties that medical staff performed previously. That is a new way of working to get maximum benefit. Those nurses are perfectly capable of carrying out such duties and enjoy the full support of doctors and consultants when performing them. We want more value from our investment. The Mid-Sussex NHS trust is taking on board the new agenda that people can work in different ways, have a wider skill mix and undertake duties that we would not have previously dreamt of being undertaken by nurses. However, nurses do that well, with full regard for their patients' safety and security.

I am optimistic that the trust can go ahead with its proposals. It is important to examine the proposals in the context of the wider review, which the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex forcefully impressed on me. I shall ensure that the matter is not dealt with simply in isolation. The whole community must feel that its health services are the best that can be provided for local people. It must have confidence and trust and feel that people listen to its point of view when making fundamental decisions. I give a commitment to ensure that we do that, that we take on board all of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised and that we try to ensure that finances reflect the true situation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 7 November 2001

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Gibraltar

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

9.30am

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing this important debate to take place. I also thank the Minister and shadow Minister for attending and the Minister for answering the questions that will be raised.

The purpose of the debate is to discuss the future of Gibraltar and in particular its sovereignty. Members will be aware of the appropriate timing of the debate, as talks are continuing between the British and Spanish Governments about Gibraltar. I hope that the debate will provide the opportunity for clarification of the Government's plans, as well as assurances about the future sovereignty of Gibraltar.

The 30,000 people of Gibraltar are United Kingdom citizens, who have been loyal for almost 300 years. Their loyalty should never be questioned. At all times, during both world wars and when we were engaged in the Falklands and the Gulf, Gibraltar has supported the British armed forces. We should never forget what they have given on behalf of the United Kingdom.

Let me ask some questions. Which country has a border-crossing procedure that takes a minimum of one and a half hours, at all times of day on every day of the year? Which country prevents UK military flights from overflying its airspace, although both countries are members of NATO ? Which country provides reduced security for British citizens by denying them participation in the open skies agreement and related security provisions? Which country refuses further telephone connections to restrict the economic development of Gibraltar? Which country actively campaigned to restrict its neighbour from joining UEFA and even stopped judges from attending a dog show? Which country refuses to accept that people should have the right to determine their own future? Which country stops cruise ships from sailing to its neighbour; they have to go to a neutral port? Which country stops a ferry crossing the straights from Algeciras?

I am not referring to some tin-pot south American dictatorship, based on fascism; I am talking about Spain in the 21st century and its relationship with Gibraltar. Both belong to the European Union. The citizens of Gibraltar are naturally concerned about the outcome of discussions between the British and Spanish Governments. After all, we are dealing with their future and their right to self-determination.

The Minister has visited Gibraltar and is aware of the feelings of its people. I hope that he will keep their views at the forefront of all discussions with his Spanish counterparts. I commend the Minister on his work and on his determination to work with the Spanish to solve various issues, alongside my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. That needs to continue. Dialogue is important. I always tell people that discussions cost nothing; they are important and are a way forward. We cannot continue to allow anomalies to exist.

The uncertainty of change always causes anxiety but that has only been made worse by the actions of the Spanish Government, who continue to pursue their claim to Gibraltar. Why does Spain have a claim? The British have been in Gibraltar for almost 300 years, but the Spanish were there for only a couple of hundred years before that. Gibraltar belonged to the moors before that and Spain did not even exist. One could argue that Spain has the least claim over Gibraltar. Britain, however, did exist. Dutch marines and the Royal Marines fought in Gibraltar. The Royal Marines who will be going into Afghanistan carry Gibraltar on their crest. It is their most famous battle and it is silly for people to deny that.

We should recognise that Gibraltar has been British for 300 years since the treaty of Utrecht and its people have developed a clear sense of identity, with their own culture and heritage, as part of the United Kingdom. The territory is economically self-sufficient with an economy based mainly on tourism, ship repairing, port activities and financial services. The armed forces are there as well. We should remember that Gibraltar's industries are a major employer in southern Spain. Those using the border crossing are generally people from Spain going to work in Gibraltar rather than vice versa. Gibraltar has helped to ensure that that underdeveloped part of Spain has become economically more sound.

As Members will be aware, Gibraltar is also a full member of the EU, having entered as part of the UK in 1973. The people of Gibraltar value the political stability that membership of the EU brings which, unfortunately, is not being delivered. Given Gibraltar's membership of the EU, it is difficult to comprehend the actions taken by the Spanish, which are often extremely damaging to Gibraltar and its citizens. The Minister is well aware of such actions and although I do not want to spend too much time on the matter, it is necessary to remind the House of the appalling conduct of Spain. There are continual delays at the border, in clear violation of the EU freedom of movement laws. Spain refuses to recognize Gibraltar's telephone dialling code, which means that Gibraltar has run out of new telephone numbers. The Gibraltarians cannot create more numbers because of Spain.

Spain forbids Spanish operators from signing mobile roaming agreements with Gibraltar, so Gibraltarian mobile phones do not work in Spain in clear breach of EU competition rules. Spain has taken active steps to disfranchise Gibraltarians by taking the UK to court to prevent us including Gibraltar in European parliamentary elections. Continuous attempts have been made to damage Gibraltar's status as a finance centre with allusions to money laundering, which does not occur there. The case that the Government of Gibraltar are not in charge of the policing of Gibraltar can also be refuted. The Governor is in charge of policing, but the myth that he is not continues to be sustained by Spain, along with that of Gibraltar's involvement in drug running. Why would a smuggler want to smuggle drugs into Gibraltar and have to smuggle them back over a border that has one and a half

[Mr. Lindsay Hoyle]

hour queues? Why would he not just smuggle them into Spain? It should be recognised that Spain is the route for most drugs.

Spain should be careful. The Spanish should examine the sale of property along the Costa del Sol, as people are cashing in their currencies before euros are introduced. Spain ought to wonder where that money is coming from and consider allegations closer to home rather than making allegations against the financial institutions in Gibraltar. We must not forget that those institutions operate under the rules of the City of London, which have been tightened and strengthened by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

We have to talk about the prohibition of air and maritime links between Gibraltar and Spain, as well as Spain's obstruction of Gibraltar's participation in international sporting federations. When considering such examples it is little wonder that Gibraltarians are anxious about talks between the two Governments over the future of their country.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I come from an area where we have similar problems. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the people of Gibraltar understand the use of the word sovereignty but are a little concerned that the sharing of the sovereignty of Gibraltar with Spain is more in the mind of some of our representatives than Gibraltarians would want?

Mr. Hoyle: I know that there is concern about that. I believe, and the Minister has stated clearly, that the future of Gibraltar should not be decided over the heads of the people of Gibraltar, who have the right to self-determination.

Fears will have been made worse by recent press speculation about secret deals and in particular the comments made by Josep Pique, the Spanish Foreign Minister, that the British Government should not give the people of Gibraltar the right to vote on any matter involving sovereignty during discussions on Gibraltar's future and that they should be ignored when a decision is taken.

I find it difficult to believe that a country such as Spain, which is young in democratic terms and has come out of a dictatorship, which has seen fascism and gone through many years without the right to vote, refuses to recognize the rights of 30,000 citizens of Gibraltar to determine their own future. One must question whether that is hypocrisy. People may say that Gibraltar is part of a colonial past of which we should rid ourselves, but Spain's hypocrisy lies in the fact that the people of Ceuta and Melilla, two enclaves in north Africa that are not even on the same continent as Spain, are given full European Union rights. No one seems bothered about that.

If people want overseas territories to be modernised, let us please let that happen. Let us get away from some of the old colonial pressures. Let us consider what France has done in incorporating French New Guinea, Corsica and its other overseas territories, as Spain has done and as has been done in the Dutch West Indies. There is a model for us to consider. The British Government have decided on a different model, but neither is wrong. We must respect the wishes of people in overseas territories and those who are democratically elected should have respect for the people of Gibraltar. We must never lose sight of that. Thankfully, the Minister who is responding to the debate today has fought for and recognises democracy and will never give up on it.

We should remember Spain's hypocrisy, and the fact that the Canary islands are further from Madrid than Gibraltar is from London. Spain must recognise that it should treat the people of Gibraltar in the same way as it treats people in its own overseas territories.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): The hon. Gentleman is right to contrast the way in which the Canary islands and Gibraltar are treated. The Canary islands have received enormous amounts of EU aid, new roads and airports and coastal defences, which sharply contrasts with the aid that Gibraltar is not receiving, although it is a full member of the EU and the Canary islands are associate members.

Mr. Hoyle: That is right. The two enclaves in north Africa are treated in the same way—this debate concerns how overseas territories are treated. Spain's actions towards Gibraltar and its unwillingness to recognize the right to self-determination of the Gibraltarians are not the actions of a responsible member of the EU. I am aware that Spain is a useful ally in the EU on many other matters, but in relation to Gibraltar I am afraid that this is not the case.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Would the hon. Gentleman accept a solution that made Gibraltar, like the Canary islands, an autonomous region of Spain? Is that what he is suggesting?

Mr. Hoyle: I believe in democracy and the rights of the people of Gibraltar to self-determination. A new Member of this House who has just been democratically elected should recognise that fact—and a trade union member should too, as many people in Gibraltar are members of the Transport and General Workers' union.

Given the concerns of the people of Gibraltar and the concerns that I and fellow hon. Members have, it is essential that the Minister provides certain assurances before further discussions and before decisions are taken. First, and most importantly, does the Minister agree that sovereignty is not negotiable without the consent of the people? I am aware of previous statements on this matter, but it is essential to clarify the point. Despite the views of the Spanish Government, no decision regarding sovereignty can be taken without a referendum.

Secondly, the Gibraltar Government must have their own voice at talks regarding the future of Gibraltar. If the Government of Gibraltar decide to go, they should have their own voice—the decision is for the Chief Minister to take. Those two assurances will guarantee the people of Gibraltar a voice in discussions on their future. They should have nothing less. Indeed, they should have the final say in determining their future. The problem is that the Foreign Office has sought to make it

impossible for Gibraltar to attend the talks. That is no good for anyone and will not help to move the debate on.

I am sure that the Minister will look favourably on my requests and is working to ensure that future talks reach an amiable agreement. It might be a little more difficult to convince the Spanish Government to adhere to those requests, but I am sure that our Ministers will persuade them.

I have made my views clear. The Minister is aware of the views and feelings of the citizens of Gibraltar, which I ask him to represent in talks with the Spanish. I hope that he will guarantee that the people of Gibraltar are treated fairly and have the right to determine their future. That will end the anomalies that allow UK citizens to be treated so badly. We should look after the people of the UK, but we seem to have forgotten the loyalty of the 30,000 UK passport holders in Gibraltar.

9.45 am

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I want to make a simple point. I have no special knowledge of foreign affairs, but I have the pleasure of regularly going on holiday to Gibraltar. My wife and daughter went there recently while I was working hard in politics here.

The Minister should be aware of the uncertainty in Gibraltar, which is a great worry. In the past, people always said, "Britain's okay, it's strong, it will never sell us out." Now, there is growing uncertainty and when people discover that I am a Member of Parliament, they ask me what is going on, because things seem to be happening in the background.

Feelings in Gibraltar are abundantly clear. As the Minister well knows, a referendum has shown an astonishing 98 per cent. support for retaining connections with the United Kingdom, so there is no doubt about the level of commitment. I have respected the Minister over the years and have always regarded him as sound, sensible and straightforward, particularly on European issues. I do not mean to disrespect the Labour party or to say that no other Labour Members are like that, but there are people in all parties whom one can trust and I have always regarded the Minister as straight, honourable and decent. I have been staggered by his recent comments, however, which conflict not only with reality but with his earlier comments. There might be a good reason for that: he might have come across facts and issues of which I am not fully aware, or which I am not intelligent enough to understand. However, he will understand that people are worried and are asking, "Is something funny going on?"

We should also remember that Spain is a major recipient of European Economic Community funding and it annoys people in Gibraltar that they get nothing even though they suffer considerable stress, worry, unemployment and misery.

I could go on for a long time, but I and the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who made an excellent speech, believe that there is only one thing for the Government to say: no constitutional change must be made unless the people of Gibraltar want it.

What worries me most about the EEC—it used to worry the Minister—is that democracy does not matter a damn and that the views of the people do not count. I had the pleasure of being in Germany when people were talking about joining this single currency business and I met no one who wanted it. It seemed that the whole German community opposed it, but the politicians were for it. To that extent, the views of the people did not matter at all. People come to my surgery almost every week to ask about things that worry them, such as the export of live cattle or the amount that the EU spends on growing high-tar tobacco that it dumps in the third world, or even about the age of homosexual consent. People are worried about those things, but when they discuss them they have to be told, "I'm terribly sorry. Your MPs do not matter." Then they say, "Well, can we go to the European Parliament?" The answer to that is, "There is no point because, if the European Parliament closed its doors tomorrow, no one would notice apart from the taxi drivers of Strasbourg."

What can we say to the people of Gibraltar? We must tell them, "Your views matter. It is not a question of Ministers meeting in secret with representatives of the European Union to come to a dirty deal and sell you out." If that were to happen, my faith in British democracy and the British system of government would disappear. There is an easy answer. The Minister need not present complex arguments about his dealings over borders and about how things can be improved. He should simply tell us that the views of the people of Gibraltar, and nothing else, are what matter to Britain. After all, it is their place. They live there and their views are what matter.

Many of Britain's great problems, which Governments of all parties have faced, could have been overcome if we had simply had the decency and integrity to treat the views of the people as what counted. Without that clear message, the uncertainty in Gibraltar will continue.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): My hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour linked events in Gibraltar and the democratic deficit in the European Union. Does he accept that there is no question of a democratic deficit in Gibraltar if 98 per cent. of its population have made it crystal clear in a referendum that they want to retain their links with the United Kingdom?

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend is right. It is a pleasure and honour to have him as a neighbour. He will make a splendid contribution to democracy. Something that worries me about getting old is who will defend democracy when I fade away, but the presence of my hon. Friend tells me that I need not worry and can relax.

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Gentleman is more likely to go out with a bang.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I did not hear that. I am sorry but the hon. Gentleman does not speak very clearly. He must come from somewhere—[*Interruption.*]

We want a simple message to be given to the people of Gibraltar: that their views count and nothing will happen without their agreement. If we cannot send that message and do not think that the views of the people count, there is no point in pretending that we are a democracy. I congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley on requesting the debate and on his honest, fair

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

assessment of the situation. I hope that we can all agree on a new popular front—that nothing but democracy and the views of the people of Gibraltar will count in deciding this issue.

9.52 am

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): In a recent parliamentary question I asked the Foreign Secretary whether it was right, in 2001, that we should maintain the anachronism of what is effectively an outpost colony within a major European partner. I stand by my view, despite having since received several insulting e-mails. If their tone indicates the standard of debate about Gibraltar and its relations with the United Kingdom and Spain, that is depressing.

We need to examine how to bring about positive relations between the countries concerned. That does not mean taking the view that there will never be any change with respect to Gibraltar. However, the context of the debate needs to be made clear. The previous two speakers rightly maintained the need for democracy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) made clear, the Government stand by the commitment to the people of Gibraltar that was set out in the preamble to the 1969 constitution, which enshrines the principle of the consent of the people of Gibraltar to any change in sovereignty. On the need for democracy in Gibraltar, the Government stand by the preamble to the constitution. That is the context for our debate. Those who would raise doubts in the minds of the people of Gibraltar about the Government stance on the constitution do no service to them or our relations with Spain.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): How can the hon. Lady say that Gibraltar is a colonial outpost when Britain does not tell the Gibraltarians what to do? The Gibraltarians say what they want to do themselves. Does she accept that Gibraltarians are a legitimate democratic unit and are entitled to express their views and have their wishes followed and understood?

Margaret Moran: Obviously, the Government's commitment means that the Gibraltarians will have the opportunity to give their views. That is set out in the constitution and the Government stand by it.

The dispute has effectively raged since 1713 and it cannot continue until 2002 or 2050 without a resolution. The talks are nothing new. A recent article by Geoffrey Howe, previously a Conservative Foreign Secretary, made it clear that some of the discussions have gone on in detail for 17 years.

Mr. Hoyle: Does my hon. Friend agree that Spain's two enclaves in north Africa ought to be the model used for Gibraltar?

Margaret Moran: It would be ill-advised of us to try to pre-determine the outcome of any discussions, as many hon. Members have said. The Gibraltarian people should debate with Spain and the United Kingdom how to achieve a better future for Gibraltar.

Having said that the constitutional commitment has been reaffirmed, I think it important that we move forward. Geoffrey Howe's discussions started 17 years ago with Fernando Moran—he is not a relative of mine—and appeared to make progress. However, they were halted once again. It is now time that we modernised our relationship with Gibraltar and Spain and put the discussions back on track. We need a vision for the future of Gibraltar rather than constant reference to its history.

Gibraltar needs to capitalise on its natural strengths, by which I do not mean only tourism and the naval base. Increasingly, it is a regional financial services centre. Its business links can be further advanced through more positive relations with the UK and Spain.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I noted carefully that the hon. Lady said that we needed a vision for the future of Gibraltar, but that is not so. The people of Gibraltar have a vision for the future of their country and we must support them.

Margaret Moran: We are all party to the future of Gibraltar, and "we" includes the people of Gibraltar. It is important that we have a collective vision of how we can enhance Gibraltar's natural opportunities, its business links, its sharing of a common language and law system with us and its reputation for sound regulation. More positive relations with the UK and Spain could further enhance those opportunities. It is important that we recognise the possibility of developing Gibraltar airport, which could bring further economic and commercial benefits to the people of Gibraltar and those in neighbouring regions of Spain.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I apologise for missing the start of the debate.

As someone who has visited Gibraltar several times, both as a Member of Parliament and before I was one, I know that its people have a clear vision of what they want to do and of the economic and social developments that the hon. Lady talks about. However, their neighbour, Spain, increasingly frustrates them from achieving their ambitions. Surely this Government and Parliament should encourage Spain to allow them to seek and fulfil their destiny.

Margaret Moran: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point and it is precisely the argument that I am trying to advance. We cannot resolve some of the problems articulated by my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley unless there is a more positive dialogue and relationship between Spain and this country. That would end some of the disadvantages that Gibraltarians suffer in their everyday lives—for example, the restrictions on flights and telephones and the border queues. We shall not resolve issues such as the border delays, which are unfair and unwarranted, simply by banging the table or threatening legal action which would be long drawn out and uncertain. Spain can be compelled to change the border regime, but we shall achieve that only through dialogue and more positive relations.

Gibraltar needs to show more imagination. We have within our grasp the opportunity to end 300 years of what in some circles would be called Spanish harassment and the colonial trappings of the relationship with the United Kingdom. We should try to maximise that opportunity. Surely, Gibraltarians would be interested in new arrangements that would bring about good relations with Spain and greater self-government for Gibraltar, giving them a greater say in their own affairs. That must be a positive way forward for Gibraltar.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Does the hon. Lady accept that the Government of Gibraltar have always been willing to talk to the Government of Spain? Does she agree—it is important that she is precise about this—that the people of Gibraltar are entitled to the United Nations right of self-determination? Will she give a yes or no answer?

Margaret Moran: I—[*Interruption.*] I was astonished by the question. Of course, the people of Gibraltar are entitled to United Nations—[*Interruption.*] The fact of the matter is that we understand the concerns of the Gibraltarian people. Britain's commitment to Gibraltarians makes their participation in the dialogue not only essential but safe. They have that safeguard for their constitution. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said that Gibraltar will speak to Spain. I hope that that will be the case in the further discussions in November and that Mr. Caruana will be at those discussions so that there may be some progress, which is long overdue.

We recognise the need for Gibraltarians to see early evidence of the potential benefits of improved co-operation with Spain to build up faith in the dialogue process. The quid pro quo is that Spain needs to show greater flexibility, particularly on some of the problems, for example the ways in which Gibraltarians are hindered in going about their daily business. There must be some movement and early benefit to show Gibraltarians that there are real advantages in a more positive relationship with Spain.

It is not for us to dictate the new dispensation for Gibraltar. The constitutional commitment is clear: it is for Gibraltar to decide in a referendum. It is patronising to suggest that any option should be ruled out of talks before the people of Gibraltar have had a chance to consider the options on their merits. A veto on constitutional change is not a veto on any change whatever.

We acknowledge the concerns that have been raised about uncertainty in the dialogue process, but the Gibraltar Government need to be part of the dialogue and to be positive. It is important that the Chief Minister participates in the Brussels process. Britain and Spain respect the need for him to have a separate voice in the process and he is best placed to voice Gibraltar's interests and wishes. The way to resolve the long-standing disputes about the future of Gibraltar is through dialogue, particularly between friends and allies. We seek a positive future and look to the opportunities that dialogue presents. We must focus not on the history of Gibraltar, but on a new vision of a European future in which it has positive relations with the UK and, in particular, with Spain.

10.5 am

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I will be brief because many hon. Members wish to speak. That fact shows the importance and timeliness of today's debate. We should thank the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle).

We can take it as read that all those present are loyal and committed to our country and to Gibraltar. That is what the people of Gibraltar deserve, because they have also shown loyalty and commitment in the past three centuries. Many of us also love Spain and take a positive view about the many wonderful developments that have occurred there since democracy returned. Spain is now a pluralist country with devolved power and different levels of government, such as in Catalonia.

The Minister knows that I respect him greatly, but I should tell him that the British Government have been very wobbly on this issue for far too long. There is no reason why we cannot have a perfectly good relationship with our friend and neighbour Spain, while saying, "On this issue, you have to move on. You must give up this old-fashioned, out-of-date, pre-democracy position." If we enter into talks in Barcelona on 20 November with the attitude that everything is up for negotiation and that we should start from the beginning and ignore history and if we let Spain assume that it can negotiate sovereignty, formal agreements such as the treaty of Utrecht and the result of the Gibraltar referendum will be betrayed. Such an attitude would also be entirely unrealistic in terms of our obligation to maintain the existing position.

We must make the Spanish Government understand that they have to behave as adult Europeans on this issue. They behave that way in all other respects, but they have never responded appropriately to the Gibraltar question, and they need to be given a clear message. Will the Government make it clear to Spain that, although Gibraltar is a colony, the right to self-determination prevails? Will the Minister confirm that it remains Government policy to allow the people of Gibraltar to decide their future and to have the right of self-determination? Will he also make it absolutely clear that newspaper reports in the past two months on the sharing of sovereignty are inaccurate? The Government and the people of Gibraltar need to be assured that that is not on the agenda, so that the issue can be put to one side. The Minister knows the constitutional problems that such a change would present.

Will the Minister also confirm that the gradual passing of control to Spain is not on the agenda? Of course, there should be talks on the nonsense of border controls, the telephone exchange and so on. As the hon. Member for Chorley pointed out, the argument that Spain consistently adopts is pretty rich, given its territorial position in north Africa.

Over the years, Gibraltar Governments have fully understood their obligations to the European Union, of which Gibraltar is a proud member. They have also understood their obligation to deal with past problems such as customs and excise and financial controls. They have responded by doing all that was asked of them and by taking on the burden of EU obligations.

However, in one regard, we have failed Gibraltarians completely, as the case of the Gibraltarian woman who obtained a European Court judgment demonstrated.

[Simon Hughes]

We failed to grant them their right to be full European Union citizens by failing to establish their right to vote in European elections. If the EU does not agree on how the matter should proceed, will the UK Government legislate in good time to ensure that the people of Gibraltar are granted their full right to participate in European elections?

Mr. Hoyle: Does the hon. Gentleman think that there is also a case for elections in Gibraltar resulting in representation in the House of Commons?

Simon Hughes: That is a perfectly proper option. In the first instance, I am keen to ensure that, in some way or other, the people of Gibraltar have a vote at the next European elections. The constituency to which they belong might be a matter for discussion, but the British Government should take the initiative.

I urge the Minister to show again the strength that he showed when he stood up for democracy in South Africa in his youth. He made many pronouncements from the Back Benches and, since becoming Minister for Europe, he has made many assertions about the importance of a modern, democratic Europe. I welcome him to the job, but he must do better than his predecessors, who gave Gibraltarians little consolation over the years. We need firm, clear and progressive views, not wobble.

10.10 am

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): I commend the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) for his stand against the desires of some to remove the rights of the people of Gibraltar. I also commend the work of Albert Poggio MBE and the Gibraltar Government office in London for their work to enable people in the United Kingdom, including Members of Parliament, to know the truth about the situation in Gibraltar.

I felt ashamed on hearing the remarks of the hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran). What are we here to do if not to stand up for democracy? The reality is that the people of Gibraltar are being bullied, and have been for a long time. It is outrageous and completely unacceptable for us in the democratic Parliament of the United Kingdom to allow the people of Gibraltar to be treated in a way that none of us would allow our constituents to be treated.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rosindell: Not at the moment.

Gibraltar's people are as British as the rest of us; they are loyal decent subjects of Her Majesty the Queen. Gibraltar is British, and its people want it to remain so. We owe them the same support and loyalty that they give to the United Kingdom.

I am pleased that the Minister for Europe is here. He has a reputation for standing up for democracy and human rights. I hope that he will continue to live up to that reputation by standing up for the democratic rights of the people of Gibraltar, as he has done for peoples in other parts of the world. I was surprised to read a quote from the Minister in a recent newspaper article, in which he talked about "normalising" the situation and getting the people of Gibraltar to "modernise" their thinking. What is more modern than to allow people to choose their own future and to decide their own destiny? That is what we are talking about for the people of Gibraltar. How can we talk of modernising something when democracy is what counts?

The hon. Member for Luton, South spoke of an anachronism, and about three countries. That shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the situation. The people of Gibraltar are not the people of a third country; they are British and will remain so. Whatever people say and do and whatever the misunderstandings projected by hon. Members and others, the people of Gibraltar must be allowed to decide their own future.

I have visited Gibraltar many times, and I have also visited the Falkland Islands and Argentina. I have good relations with the Conservative party's sister parties in Spain and Argentina. I ask hon. Members who are sceptical about the rights of the people of Gibraltar to consider what has happened to the party in Argentina. It has adapted the way in which it handles matters to try to bring about better relations with the people of the Falkland Islands. To some extent, it has succeeded.

We should contrast that with the outrageous bullying tactics of successive Spanish Governments, including, shamefully, its current Government. Spain's Foreign Minister recently described Gibraltar as a parasite on the Spanish economy. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is scandalous that any British Government—if we had a Conservative Government, I would say the same—should for so long have allowed the people of Gibraltar to be treated in this shameful, unacceptable, undemocratic and bullying fashion by Spanish Governments.

Mr. Bryant: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman agrees with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), who said during a previous debate on Gibraltar that

"nothing is to be gained by bombast and megaphone diplomacy."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 8 June 2000; Vol. 351, c. 119WH.]

We need a genuine debate, not talk of bullying, hypocrisy and similar nonsense.

Mr. Rosindell: That says it all. I am utterly astonished that any hon. Member could make such a ridiculous comment. Those of us who have come to the Chamber to speak up for the people of Gibraltar are not engaged in megaphone diplomacy—we are acting on behalf of people whose democratic rights are being denied to them by the Spanish Government. The hon. Member for Chorley described a whole range of unacceptable behaviour by that Government, who are supposed to represent a modern, democratic member of the European Union.

We should consider the situation on the border, where people have to wait for hours in appalling circumstances to get into Gibraltar. We should consider the Spanish Government's refusal to recognise the Gibraltar telephone code and their objection to Gibraltarians voting in European elections even though, for better or worse, they are part of the European Union and should

be entitled to vote in them. We should consider the open skies agreement, on which the Government, sadly, appear to have capitulated. Even sporting events are affected. Disgracefully, a dog show was disrupted. Such behaviour is outrageous, and cannot be justified by any Member of Parliament who claims to believe in any form of democracy. None of us should tolerate it for a moment longer.

I wish to convey my immense admiration to the people of Gibraltar for their steadfast refusal to buckle under the crude and illegal pressure placed on them by the Spanish Government. Gibraltar has been a sovereign British territory for 288 years, and the British people of Gibraltar are happy with that arrangement. The entire situation is underwritten in the treaty of Utrecht, which states that Gibraltar is to be

"held and enjoyed absolutely by all manner of right for ever, without any exception or impediment whatsoever"

by Great Britain. Meanwhile, Spain appears oblivious to the hypocrisy of its sovereignty over two less successful territories in Morocco, where it is doing the exact opposite of what it claims in respect of Gibraltar. How can that doublespeak be justified?

Later this month, discussions on Gibraltar's future will take place. There should be no such discussions. Why should we discuss the rights of British people? Would any of us discuss negotiating away the sovereignty of our constituents? We would never do so. If we were to do so, we would not deserve to be Members of Parliament. The people of Gibraltar should be given the same rights as our constituents. They should be able to vote in all elections, including elections to the House of Commons, and they should have equal rights across the board. How can anyone disagree with that proposal?

It is time that we had a consistent approach to not only Gibraltar and the Falklands, but all our overseas territories. I hope that the Minister will take that on board when we discuss the British Overseas Territories Bill. All overseas territories want to remain sovereign under the Crown. They want to remain connected with the United Kingdom, and their inhabitants should have the same rights as the rest of our people. I hope that that point will be considered in the British Overseas Territories Bill. Every British person, wherever they may be, should have the right to choose a representative and to vote in elections to the House. That is what democracy is all about.

I am saddened by the need for this debate. Spain, which proclaims itself to be a modern democracy, is not prepared to treat British territory in the way that it would treat any other part of the European Union. I appeal to our allies in Spain, Britain's friend, to reconsider its attitude and approach, which has achieved nothing. Its approach has caused a great deal of upset and heartache for the people of Gibraltar. The matter will never be resolved until Spain adopts the democratic, modern approach of accepting the human rights and the right to self-determination of the people of Gibraltar. It can only be hoped that Spain's diplomatic tantrums continue to wash over the proud Gibraltarian people as harmlessly as the sea spray assaults their great rock. Let the message go out from the House that Gibraltar will never be ceded to Spain and that it will remain British in perpetuity.

10.22 am

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I would say to the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) that a bombastic debate is not useful. We must make a genuine and honest attempt to achieve proper outcomes that give the people of Gibraltar a better standard of living and better opportunities to build their lives. They must have an opportunity to live as full and forthright members of the European Union.

I am glad that we are having today's debate because there should be discussion. The hon. Member for Romford, who has just declared that there should be no discussion, is flying in the face of reason. The status quo is not sustainable for the reasons advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle). The quality of life for Gibraltarians, which relates to issues such as border delays and phone lines, has no prospect of improvement under the status quo. Indeed, we have not considered the number of Gibraltarians who choose to use the Spanish national health service rather than St. Bernard's hospital. If we had a genuine, calm, decent, honest debate in which we did not start chucking around words such as "hypocrisy", we might be able to achieve significant benefits for Gibraltarians.

The present situation is unsustainable because Gibraltar will become increasingly isolated within the European Union. European Union elements that may be of benefit will contain an exclusion for Gibraltar that will make things increasingly difficult for its economy and for its people to live their lives.

Mr. Rosindell: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how Gibraltar would be disadvantaged? It is a member of the European Union, as we are members. How can he justify any suggestion that one set of European Union citizens should be disadvantaged in any way because of a territorial claim by another member state?

Mr. Bryant: I agree that European Union citizens should not be disadvantaged, but we have heard no proposals on how to change the status quo from any hon. Members who have spoken today. The open skies directive no longer applies to Gibraltar and other territorial issues in EU directives will make things more difficult for Gibraltar's economy.

Mr. Francois: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bryant: I may give way in a moment.

Many hon. Members who have spoken have not realised that the present situation is also unsustainable simply because Spain has changed. Between 1969 and 1972, when I was young, I lived in Spain. I remember the Government under Franco. I remember driving past the political prison in Carabanchel and seeing the guards outside with their Darth Vader hats. The country has changed dramatically. Some people have been rather caustic about Spanish democracy. Spain has, in fact, managed the transition to democracy with considerable aplomb, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) mentioned. We need to recognise those issues.

I look for a new solution, but I openly say to hon. Members who have spoken in a different vein that Gibraltar should be taking part in the Brussels process

[Mr. Bryant]

on the basis of safety and dignity, as Mr. Caruana said when he first took office. I firmly believe that that is true and I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) who said in a previous debate that the Foreign Affairs Committee

"does not believe that co-operation with Spain should in any way be equated with appeasement. The tendency in Gibraltar to criticise successive British Governments in that regard is regrettable. Co-operation is, in our view, the most sensible way forward."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 8 June 2000; Vol. 351, c. 119WH.]

That is an almost impossible case to answer.

Simon Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman understand that the Gibraltar Government have always said that they have been entirely happy to have an arrangement with the provincial Government over the border in Andalucia, so that the matters of that region can be worked out collaboratively? They are happy to participate in local government arrangements across Spain with the Spanish. So they have never been unwilling to come to practical arrangements, provided that Spain accepts that Britain has sovereignty. They must determine for themselves who the Government of Gibraltar are; that is up to them. If Spain were willing to take that off the agenda, there could be lots of co-operation.

Mr. Bryant: I agree, but that is all the more reason for Mr. Caruana to take part in the Brussels process at the end of the month, not least because he has asked for safety and dignity. I have no problem in saying that the constitution of 23 May 1969 is entirely right.

Furthermore, Her Majesty's Government will never enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would live under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes. Several hon. Members have sought reassurance on that and it must be the fundamental principle on which we proceed. That should not prevent us from discussing enhanced co-operation that might involve EU money, NATO, customs, telephone lines, and other matters that would materially affect people's lives. Mr. Caruana should take part in such discussions and there should be some discussion of sovereignty.

We should not decide the conclusions of those discussions in advance. However, by virtue of the constitution, and as successive Governments have stated, at the end of the process the people of Gibraltar should have a referendum on any proposals. The British and Spanish Governments would then honour that referendum.

Mr. Francois: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bryant: I am sorry. I said that I would give way, but I want to finish my argument.

Mr. Francois *rose—*

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman will obviously not give way.

Mr. Bryant: I shall press on, because others want to speak.

If it is not possible to resolve the issue under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and Mr. Aznar, it is unlikely ever to be resolved. On behalf of the British and Spanish Governments and, most of all, the people of Gibraltar, I would feel ashamed if we got to 2050 without having come to a better resolution. I ask hon. Members who have argued differently in the debate which solution they propose.

Mr. Rosindell: Democracy.

Mr. Bryant: It is not good enough just to shout out a single word. Democracy is a good principle, but we have to create a better opportunity for the people of Gibraltar.

10.30 am

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on securing this important debate at a crucial period in the history of the people of Gibraltar.

I have visited Gibraltar twice, most recently in September this year, with the hon. Member for Chorley, other hon. Members and Members of the European Parliament. In a series of meetings, we were left in no doubt that the people of Gibraltar regard themselves as British, value their historic links with Britain and wish to remain British. Above all, they want the right to self-determination so that they can decide for themselves their own future. Surely they should have that right in a democratic world.

It was pointed out to us that historically there should be no question of Gibraltar's right to remain British, because that right is enshrined under the treaty of Utrecht. For any change to occur, Britain would first have to relinquish its claim on the territory. So, my first question to the Minister for Europe is easy. Does the Government have any intention of relinquishing our claim on Gibraltar? The political leaders in Gibraltar demand the right to self-determination. Chief Minister, Peter Caruana and the Opposition leaders, Joe Bassano and Joseph Garcia, are united in their view on self-determination.

Albert Poggio MBE, the United Kingdom representative of the Government of Gibraltar, sent hon. Members a copy of a declaration of unity that was signed on 4 October this year by all Members of the Gibraltar House of Assembly, four past and present Speakers of the House of Assembly and 20 former members of the Gibraltar legislature. It states:

"We, the undersigned, being all the elected Members...declare and endorse the following propositions, which unite and reflect the views of the overwhelming majority of the people of Gibraltar.

1.The people of Gibraltar will never, ever, compromise or give up our inalienable right to self-determination, that is, the right to decide our future in our land

2.The people of Gibraltar will never compromise or give up our sovereignty, not for good relations with anybody and not for economic benefits either.

3.The people of Gibraltar will not compromise our right to self-determination, still less sovereignty, in exchange for respect for rights which are ours anyway, and which others should be made to respect unconditionally".

They

"a. CALL UPON Her Majesty's Government to honour, respect and uphold our EU rights by ensuring that we participate in all EC and EU measures in the same manner and to the same

extent as all other citizens and territories of the European Union AND WE CONDEMN Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom for capitulating under pressure to the suspension of Gibraltar from the EU Single Skies measures, and the Government of the Kingdom of Spain for demanding it.

b. REAFFIRM that Gibraltar wants good, neighbourly, European relations with Spain based on reasonable dialogue and mutual respect. Spain is obliged to respect our EU and other rights.

c. ASSERT that Gibraltar belongs to the people of Gibraltar and is neither Spain's to claim, nor Britain's to give away."

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) made the Government's negotiation tactics obvious. Their aim is to discuss sovereignty with Spain in the hope that Spain will grant Gibraltar economic benefits. The Government would put that proposal to the people of Gibraltar in a referendum so that people could see that there would be economic benefits, but only if they accepted the poisoned chalice of interference in their affairs by the Spanish. It is obvious that those are the Government's tactics.

Mr. Jones: I do not know if it is obvious—we will have to wait for the Minister to give his response—but it is certainly a concern of many people in Gibraltar, not least the members of the Assembly there.

Mr. Rosindell: In September, it was my privilege to travel to Gibraltar with the hon. Gentleman. In the light of the declaration that he has read out, would he agree that it was astonishing to see the leaders of all three political parties—Joseph Garcia of the Liberal party, Joe Bassano of the Gibraltar Socialist Labour party and Peter Caruana, the leader of the Gibraltar Social Democrats—in total unity in their determination to ensure that the people of Gibraltar decide their own future?

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Order. This is becoming a second speech. I think the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) has got the point.

Mr. Jones: Yes, I agree with the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell). It was one of the finest examples of constructive opposition that I have seen.

Those of us who were present on national day, 10 September, were in no doubt that the people of Gibraltar support the declaration. Half of the population of 32,000 turned out in the main square to celebrate their Britishness and to demonstrate their wishes to us and to other visitors. Undoubtedly, visitors from Spain observed that gathering and we have already heard about the number of difficulties that exist between Gibraltar and Spain.

I will concentrate on the open skies agreement that was mentioned in the declaration. I tabled two questions, the first was sent to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to ask what criteria were assessed when deciding to sign the European open skies agreement. The Minister replied:

"The European Commission presented its legislative proposals on the European Single Sky to the Transport Council on the 16 October.

The Government is considering its response to these proposals, but has not signed any agreement."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 483w.]

I also tabled a question to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that asked what assessment had been made of the impact of excluding Gibraltar from the European single sky agreement. I received a long answer from the Minister, for which I am grateful. It said:

"We consider that the Commission's proposed Single Sky package offers the best way of reducing delays and improving safety, and is essential for improving the use and management of EU airspace. Spain insisted that Gibraltar airport be suspended from the scope of application of the Single Sky legislative measures. Given the importance which the UK attaches to the initiative, we reluctantly agreed that clauses suspending the application of the measure to Gibraltar airport will be inserted when the proposal is considered by the Council."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2001; Vol. 373, c. 811w.]

It seems to me that we caved in and allowed the Spanish Government to dictate terms. That goes to the heart of the problem, which the people of Gibraltar see as Spain claiming Gibraltar and Britain not batting for the people of Gibraltar. I am conscious of the fact that the Minister and the Opposition spokesman have to wind up, but if the people of Gibraltar wish to remain British, they should be given the right to vote in the European elections. If they want to be attached to the south-west region for those elections, I am sure that we would all welcome that.

10.39 am

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I thank the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) for initiating the debate. It has been more than a year since the House properly discussed Gibraltar and this has provided a useful opportunity to discuss the issues at a very important time. I am sure that the whole House will join me in offering commiserations to Spain for yesterday's car bomb in Madrid. We all condemn terrorism wherever it is perpetrated.

The House may be amused to know that I have a personal link with Gibraltar. My father was commanding officer of 224 Squadron in the early 1960s and as a youngster I used to spend a lot of time running up the beach near the border with La Linea as he was flying his Shackletons on maritime reconnaissance over the Mediterranean. That was 40 years ago, but I have vivid memories of Gibraltar. My brother was born there and the last time I saw him he seemed British to me.

This is an important time for Gibraltar. The Foreign Secretary will meet his Spanish counterpart in Barcelona on 20 November to discuss the future and they have agreed to resolve that future by the end of the year. That has inevitably given rise to rumours and concerns that require the Minister to offer reassurance. I am sorry to say that there have been too many examples of the Government's lack of clarity. They have failed to reject the proposals of Abel Matutes for joint sovereignty. Those proposals sat on the desk of the previous Foreign Secretary for four years and now that the Government are negotiating with Spain—we would like to know about what—we have still had no assurance that they are doing so on the basis that those proposals are unacceptable. When the Conservative party was in office, the then Foreign Secretary, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, rejected those proposals. I hope that the Minister will assure us that he will do the same.

Unfortunately, that is not the only instance of the Government's failure to respond unequivocally to Spanish claims. On 15 March, the Spanish Foreign

[Mr. Alan Duncan]

Minister, Mr. Pique, referred to Gibraltar as a "gigantic duty free shop" and an "economic parasite" on Spain. In our view, those are ill-chosen words, and it is disappointing that the Government have not responded to those remarks and still more disappointing that they have failed to do so even after the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs criticised them six months ago for their lack of response. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to reject those comments on the record in response to the recommendations of the Select Committee.

Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, on 30 October, Mr. Pique said:

"the people of Gibraltar cannot have the right of veto over matters being discussed by two sovereign states".

Does the Minister agree that the citizens of Gibraltar have good reason to be wary of the current negotiations with Spain? Gibraltarians have a right to veto any proposed change in their status and if they want to remain under British sovereignty, they should. They have never voted for anything else and should be free from outside pressure. Gibraltar's position is very clear and supported by a massive majority on any measure that has ever been taken. Will the Minister tell the House what he intends to discuss and what will be on the agenda in his meetings with the Spanish?

The Minister could give one crucial assurance that would allay many fears. The Government could confirm unequivocally that Gibraltar retains the right to face no change in its status without the wholehearted consent of Gibraltarians. Will the Minister confirm that the preamble to the Gibraltar legislation of 1969 still stands and will govern all his conduct and discussions throughout the next few months?

I want to leave the Minister as much time as possible. Other hon. Members have spoken about the restriction of movement, the open skies agreement and other matters that appear to Gibraltarians to be an attempt to bully them into some form of submission. I would like an assurance that Gibraltarians will be able to vote in European elections.

The views of the hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) are puzzling. She views the status of Gibraltar as a British territory as an anachronistic relic. Is it an anachronistic relic of colonialism to respect the wishes of the people of Gibraltar and to respect the fact that they want it to remain a British overseas territory? If so, she believes that democracy itself has become an anachronistic relic. To approach issues of foreign policy in a simplistic way will cause great problems, because when an issue is tackled simplistically, it causes problems elsewhere on the globe. The hon. Lady thinks that a small territory whose only land border is shared with a larger neighbour should, whatever the wishes of its inhabitants, allow the larger neighbour to incorporate it. That logic is at best mad, and at worst—I dare not say. Does the hon. Lady think that East Timor should be part of Indonesia? If she follows her simple line of thought, she will find that it raises similar problems across the globe.

We seek the Minister's assurance that he is doing nothing behind the scenes to cause the House concern.

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Order. Some hon. Members who have contributed to the debate may have visited Gibraltar as a guest of the Government of Gibraltar, or in some other capacity. They may wish to make that interest clear for the record, if they have not already done so.

Mr. Hoyle: I would like to do so.

Mrs. Laing *indicated assent.*

Mr. Rosindell *indicated assent.*

Sir Teddy Taylor *indicated assent.*

Miss Kirkbride *indicated assent.*

Mr. Nigel Jones *indicated assent.*

10.46 am

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) for securing this debate. The all-party Gibraltar group, of which he is chairman, does a valuable job.

I shall answer the questions that hon. Members have asked after I have placed the Government's policy on the record. Like the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, I believe that we have a unique opportunity to resolve the historic tensions between Gibraltar and Spain, to settle differences and to move forward to a better future for the people of the rock. We have a new opportunity to achieve three wins: a win for Gibraltar, a win for Britain, and a win for Spain. If we lack the courage to grasp the opportunity and retreat because of lack of political will or absence of vision, we shall all lose. The main losers, however, will be the people of Gibraltar.

Gibraltarians have nothing to fear from the discussions in Brussels; our dialogue with Spain is not a threat, but an opportunity for Gibraltar to secure a safer, more prosperous future. I know from a recent visit that Gibraltar is a proud place and that Gibraltarians are proud people. They are hugely suspicious of Spain and of British Ministers and officials. They do not like to feel that they are being told what to do. But no one is telling anyone what to do. When the dialogue ends, the people of Gibraltar will be able to form a judgment. I ask the people of Gibraltar to judge us by our actions and by outcomes, not by myths and prejudices.

I assure the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) that the Government stand by the constitutional commitment given to Gibraltar in the preamble to the Order in Council that established the 1969 constitution. It states:

"Her Majesty's Government will never enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes".

I shall go further and, for the first time, give this pledge: we will never ask any Gibraltarian to sacrifice his or her citizenship unless they freely choose to do so. Gibraltarians shall remain British citizens for as long as they want.

Europe has changed, and is changing. Gibraltar should not be left behind in those changes. Some politicians and pressure groups cry, "Stop this change, I want to get off." They let Gibraltar down. They are stuck in the previous generation, when the Iberian peninsula was a very different place. Spain was under the rule of Franco, and Gibraltar was threatened. Spain has long since undergone profound transformation, and it is now one of Europe's leading democracies. It is one of our closest NATO allies and one of our strongest partners in the European Union.

I was among those who refused to visit Spain when it was under the rule of Franco, but 13 million Britons now holiday in Spain every year. Some 500,000 Britons—more than 15 times the population of Gibraltar—have made Spain their home. Hundreds of Gibraltarians have properties in Spain. Many more shop and spend their leisure time there. The people of Britain and Spain have never been closer and, despite aggravation, the people of Gibraltar and Spain have never been closer.

The politics of 1969 must be replaced by the politics of 2001. The British Government must make choices. Will we try to reach a new deal for Gibraltar, or will we duck the issue and pretend that matters can continue as they are even though they take Gibraltar nowhere fast? Does Spain have the courage to make hard decisions? Does Gibraltar have the vision to contemplate a new deal? The choices will not go away. If they are ducked, Gibraltar will be left behind.

The dispute with Spain about Gibraltar is a constant factor in the otherwise excellent relationship between Britain and Spain. For a long time, Spain has placed grossly unsatisfactory and damaging obstacles in the way of normal life for the people of Gibraltar. The obstacles include restrictions on the use of the airport, long and unpredictable delays in crossing the border, restrictions on telecommunications and even restrictions on organising dog shows.

The dispute has gone on for so long that attitudes on both sides have hardened. The only key movement made by Spain was an offer of more than triple the number of telephone numbers available—from 30,000 to 100,000—and that was announced at the first meeting of the resumed Brussels process. The time has come for Spain clearly to demonstrate its new attitude through action. It could, for example, open up normal red and green channels at the border; allow normal procedures for the diversion of Gibraltar-bound flights in bad weather; ensure that Gibraltarian mobile telephones work in Spain; and ensure that telephone calls from other countries get through.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) said, the status quo is not sustainable, because Gibraltar's relations with Spain are abnormal and will remain so if the status quo prevails. Spain's historic aspirations are unattainable, and the continuous aggravation with Gibraltar is anachronistic and unseemly. Britain's relations with both Spain and Gibraltar are damaged by the status quo.

Mrs. Laing: Will the Minister give way?

Peter Hain: I will give way at the end of my speech if I have the chance. For the European Union, the status quo is a permanent threat to Britain and Spain's relationships—with each other and with our European partners. That is to Gibraltar's detriment.

As the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) said, we recently agreed to suspend application of the EU single sky agreement and aviation security legislation to Gibraltar. We did not take that decision lightly, but we must face reality; it is imperative that we have a safe air traffic system in Europe. The suspended implementation of that legislation will have a minimal impact on the people of Gibraltar and their security. None the less, I understand the feelings of those in Gibraltar who demonstrated on 4 October against the suspension of the single sky agreement and of the many senior figures in Gibraltar who signed the declaration on the subject.

I understand why some suggest that the solution is straightforward—that Britain should bang the table and demand that Spain and the European Commission sort out these and other problems—but a fortress Gibraltar would achieve nothing. Proponents of a fortress Gibraltar do not understand the realities of modern Europe or the need for consensus. The blunderbuss approach that we are persistently exhorted to adopt on Gibraltar's behalf would receive little or no support from our EU partners or from the Commission.

A second line of argument states that we should take all Gibraltar's complaints on the EU to the European Court of Justice. Even when that is possible, the legal processes involved are slow and uncertain, and there is no guarantee of a helpful outcome. We will get further, sooner, if all sides have the political will to find a solution. We and our European colleagues face huge challenges, big decisions and hard choices on the future of the EU, economic reform, security from terrorism, our environments and many other issues. Our European partners do not understand why a dispute between two member states over a territory with a population one fifteenth that of Luxembourg should be a deciding factor in such decisions.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Order. It is obvious that the Minister has no intention of giving way at the moment.

Peter Hain: As I have promised, I will give way at the end of the debate if I have the chance to do so.

As a result of regular discussions with the Spanish Government, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I firmly believe that Madrid's approach to Gibraltar is genuinely starting to change. We have no fixed blueprint. As I said to the House on 30 October, there is no secret deal with Spain; there is no hidden agenda. In fact, the position is quite the opposite. There is a mutually frank desire to resolve an unsustainable status quo, and it would be irresponsible of the Foreign Secretary and I not to pursue it.

I say to Conservative Members who tell us not to talk to Spain that the Conservative Government talked to Spain persistently to try to resolve such issues. Indeed, the former Foreign Secretary, Lord Howe of Aberavon,

[Peter Hain]

wrote about that recently in *The Times* and the former European Minister, Lord Garel-Jones, has written about it in the *Gibraltar Chronicle*.

If we cannot make serious progress within, say, a year, the Government and the House will attend to other priorities of great importance. Gibraltar will be left with a live dispute and problems with the rest of Europe. Continued tension with Spain will be a day-to-day reality. I am giving an honest assessment of political reality and those who choose to ignore it are doing the people of Gibraltar a grave disservice. As well as confronting reality, let us consider the huge opportunity for Gibraltar provided by the current situation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) said, let us have the vision and the boldness to grasp it. If we reach the agreement that I firmly believe is now within our grasp, Gibraltar will have a free flow of people, goods and services on and off the Spanish mainland. It will become the financial services hub for Andalucia and the wider region, and that will bring more jobs and prosperity to all. Agreement about allowing the airport to be fully developed—which is thwarted by the current impasse—would transform the opportunities for travel and tourism in the whole region.

The Government's objective is that decisions about Gibraltar are made in Gibraltar by elected representatives of the people of Gibraltar and not by officials and Ministers in London. The best way in which to achieve a new deal for Gibraltar is through dialogue. Gibraltar has nothing to fear and everything to gain from such a dialogue. That is why we have worked so hard to enable the Gibraltar Government to join the meetings under the Brussels process, with its guaranteed separate voice—as Britain and Spain have agreed jointly. Spanish Ministers have assured us that they would welcome the attendance of the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, who will be treated with the respect and dignity that his position deserves. There is no reason why he cannot attend such meetings, and I again invited him to do so by telephone last night. The next meeting is on 20 November and more meetings are planned thereafter.

However, if Gibraltar feels unable to accept the invitation to join the Brussels process, the process must and will go forward. It is vital that the momentum and good will that we have established are sustained. The dispute that led the Conservative Government to agree the Brussels communiqué in 1984 will not go away. It would be the height of irresponsibility on my part to pretend that it will. This is a moment of destiny for Gibraltar. The Foreign Secretary and I mean business. We shall do all that we can to resolve the impasse and build a new future for Gibraltar.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Peter Hain: I wish to respond briefly to the specific questions that have been put to me and then I shall give way. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) asked about voting in European parliamentary elections. I assure him that we shall secure such a position urgently in accordance with the court judgment. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) said that Gibraltar's view counts—of course, it does. The hon. Member for Romford said that we should not discuss such matters with Spain, yet our Conservative predecessors held such discussions consistently.

Mr. Duncan: Will the Minister give way?

Peter Hain: I have been asked questions, and I am trying to answer them. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton asked about the Matutes proposals. At the ministerial meeting on 26 July between the Foreign Secretary and the Spanish Foreign Minister, we agreed to set aside the proposals and to focus on the future.

This has been a good debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Peter Hain: I shall happily take an intervention from the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing).

Mrs. Laing: I should like an assurance from the Minister that he will not repeat his chilling remark that, because Gibraltar is small, it is insignificant: 30,000 people are 30,000 people.

Peter Hain: The hon. Lady mischievously puts words into my mouth. [HON. MEMBERS: "You said it."] What I said was that we needed the agreement of our European partners to advance Gibraltar's interests. To do that, we need to build consensus with Spain. We are trying to do that, and the hon. Lady should support us.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): My right hon. Friend said twice that the status quo was unsustainable. Does status quo involve sovereignty?

Peter Hain: As the Chief Minister said, in any discussion, he would expect Spain to raise its long-standing sovereignty claim. However, we are not prepared to enter into discussions on the basis of fixed agendas. We must find out whether we can find a way forward.

Sub-Post Offices

11 am

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise this issue. I am slightly surprised to find that this is the first such opportunity in this Parliament, if only because in the last Parliament the topic seemed to recur with alarming regularity, and hardly surprisingly, because of the great anxiety felt by hon. Members of all parties about the potential loss of the sub-post office network.

We know that post office closures are not a new phenomenon and have been happening over a long period, but an acceleration followed the Government's ill-judged announcements on automated credit transfer, which had a significant effect on people's decisions about whether their businesses could remain viable.

During the last Parliament, about a year and a half ago, significant anxiety was expressed about the future of the post office network. In April 2000, the National Federation of SubPostmasters organised a fantastic rally, which I was happy to attend, just across the road, in Methodist Central Hall. The message from that meeting was how worried people were, to the point at which the Prime Minister himself realised that the game was up and something had to be done. Petitions were organised throughout the country. In my region, the *Western Daily Press* accumulated more than 1 million signatures to express people's anxiety at what was happening to the post office network.

The response was belated, but when it came it was welcome. It took the form of the performance and innovation unit report, which contained several proposals to maintain the post office network. One of the most important was the concept of a universal bank that would deal directly with social and financial exclusion and, it was hoped, provide a stream of revenue to enable smaller post offices to continue.

In addition to the universal bank, a measure of protection was introduced through the Postal Services Act 2000, and the past 12 months have brought the advent of new technology in our post offices, such as the Horizon system, which is now in place. That welcome raft of Government proposals did a great deal to allay the worst of people's fears about what was happening to the post office network. People took the proposals at face value and realised that if they all came to fruition there was the prospect of maintaining a viable network. It is no disparagement to the Minister responding to today's debate to note that many people were also persuaded by the transparent energy and enthusiasm of the previous Minister, now the Minister for Employment and the Regions, whose clear commitment to the Post Office was obvious in all his dealings with the matter.

What has disappointed many people, and certainly me, is that it has all gone very quiet since the election. There has been a paucity of announcements from the Government on the situation, and little progress has been made in terms of setting up the universal bank, which is supposed to be coming into operation in 2003. That is a clear deadline, but I detect no urgency on the part of Government, and there has been no substantive progress—but perhaps we will hear different when the Minister replies.

It is of even greater concern that despite all the assurances, and the framework that the Government have acclaimed, the problem remains: many sub-post offices are still being closed throughout the country. I heard with amazement the Minister of State, Scotland Office, saying yesterday that there were no closures in his constituency and everything was fine. That is all hunky-dory for his constituency, although it does not accord with the experience of many other hon. Members. Indeed, a parliamentary reply earlier this year showed that, in the financial year up to March 2001, no fewer than 547 post offices closed. That is a significant number, and it should be a matter of alarm.

That view was reinforced yesterday, as a pure happenstance, by the Countryside Agency report, with which I am sure the Minister will be familiar. It singles out post offices as the service in rural areas that is still showing decline, while in other areas there seems to have been a reversal of decline. In a press release to accompany the report, the deputy chairman of the Countryside Agency says:

> "The current pressures on the Post Office and doubts about the future of the Universal Bank could lead to further closures, despite the government's commitment to maintain the rural network."

That is undoubtedly the case.

What is the motor for those closures? Part of it is purely demographic—a continuation of what has happened previously. Much of it, however, is due to the uncertainty about the future of the universal bank and the post office network, which the Government have allowed to continue. When there is uncertainty, people cannot produce viable plans to take on new business or maintain their current business through bank borrowings or other means. Without the confidence of a guaranteed revenue stream in the future that will make businesses viable, closures will follow, irrespective of the good intentions of the Government or anyone else, and local communities will be damaged.

It will be not only rural communities that are damaged—I represent a rural area and feel passionately about services in our villages—but urban and suburban communities. Many of the losses in recent years have been on the edge of towns and in the poorer areas of towns and cities, which is equally worrying for those who depend on such post offices. The people about whom we should care most are those vulnerable individuals who may be dependent on benefits and pensions, and who rely on their local post office for the cash in their hand each week. Such people budget week to week—this is something that Ministers sometimes forget—in terms not of a monthly cheque that goes into a bank account, but in terms of the cash that they have in their hand, which they need to spend to keep body and soul together. It is desperately important to them that they can continue to draw money over the post office counter, and that it is close and available to them in their local communities.

I wish to ask a series of questions. If the Minister is able to answer them, some of the concerns that have been expressed might melt away. First, who is running the show? That is a fundamental question for the Government to answer. I am unclear about who is responsible for establishing the universal bank and for maintaining the post office network. It is clear that the Minister's Department still has a role as the sponsoring Department. Indeed, I understand that the budget still

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lies with the Department of Trade and Industry, which will support any subsidies required by the system. However, we are also told that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has been installed as some sort of universal bank tsar. We hope that the bank can be sorted out, but opinions differ about his precise role: he might be a Treasury man, or his task might be to do what is best in terms of the delivery of benefits. It is certainly unclear whether his purpose is to do what is best for post offices and their customers.

I seek clarification about the specific responsibilities of the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury—which is the unseen force here—and about how their activities interact.

My second question is, when will the protracted negotiations to set up the universal bank reach a clear conclusion? Although 2003 is fast approaching, we do not yet know what form that bank will have, and we have not received detailed information about the services that it will provide. However, we have heard clear intentions about those services. Several clearing banks and other financial institutions have regularly entered the discussions about the project: sometimes they have expressed their determination to make it work, but at other times they have sounded distinctly lukewarm about it. We need to know when there will be clarity about the matter. When will the financial negotiations for setting up the bank conclude, and when will we learn of their outcome?

Thirdly, how will the universal bank work? That question raises a specific problem: if the bank is to do what many hon. Members—and postmasters—wish, which is to provide over-the-counter services to the millions of people who take their benefits or pensions in cash, there will need to be a substantial commitment to the basic Post Office account, the third tier of financial transaction available in post offices. All of the surveys that have been conducted prove that those millions of customers will not be attracted by the offer of a basic bank account through the Post Office, or by using their post office to operate a bank account that has been opened elsewhere. The Post Office basic account is crucial to future operation. I have heard estimates that 5 or 6 million people ought to be using that form of transaction, yet we are also authoritatively informed that the Treasury believe that that figure should be no more than 2 million. The Minister will be able to tell me whether that is true.

I also want the Minister to tell me whether there is to be a cap on the number of Post Office basic accounts. If there is, how will it operate? Will the Government fund only up to 2 million accounts, beyond which the Post Office will be on its own in financing the transactions? That would put a huge financial burden on the Post Office and undermine the operation's purpose. Will the cap be on individual post offices, so that the number of transactions for which they will be reimbursed is limited? Again in that case, the burden and risk fall on individual post offices.

If neither of those mechanisms is used, how will the cap be applied? If there is to be a cap, how will that affect post offices that serve the least well-off areas? It is easy to see that once there is a universal bank in a more affluent area, people will transfer to bank accounts of one sort or another. They will be happy with that and not have a significant problem. However, in less well-off areas, more people are likely to want their basic post office account. If that is so, how will rationing work within the post office network to ensure that the post offices that we wish to survive are not the ones that cannot survive because they are unviable? That is a key question.

My fourth question is: when will we see investment by the national post office network in information technology that is connected to the local Horizon IT in sub-post offices, so that it can be used to its full potential? Currently, we have the nonsense that the average post office has a wonderful piece of kit on its counter that could enable it to do much, but most of the operations cannot be done because the next tier up is not available; the Government have not clarified their intentions. When will we have the necessary investment that will repay the investment of local post offices to provide a wider range of services?

My fifth question is very easy and the Minister can place the answer in the Library this afternoon. Will he identify the network of rural post offices that the Government intend to save? I believe—he can correct me if I am wrong—that that information is not yet available. The matter has been raised in parliamentary questions and Ministers have replied that there are 9,000 such post offices and therefore too many to list. It is not too many to list and many people would be interested to know the strategically important rural post offices that the Government intend to preserve. If we knew that, we would be in a better position to assist our constituents.

I turn to my sixth question. The Post Office has run an innovative pilot scheme in Leicestershire, the your guide scheme. That extends the concept of the general practitioner role of the Post Office. I do not come from Leicestershire, but I am told that the scheme has been well received and that people are keen on it. If that is so, why are we not quickly extending the pilot scheme to bring more post offices into its ambit? If a scheme is successful, we must share that success. It would send an excellent signal to people who are wrestling with business decisions about their individual post office. They would be shown that on its way was a lifeline that gave them an enhanced role.

Many hon. Members wish to join the debate and I do not want to take up too much time. I quote the general secretary of the National Federation of SubPostmasters, Colin Baker:

> "Our customers have already chosen their local post office. What they now expect...is a quick, simple, no-fuss swap of their pension and order books for a post office-based account when the change in paying benefits takes place in 2003."

That is precisely what we are looking for and the Minister could, if he wished, confirm that that is happening. What we need, but more importantly what the post office network and its customers need, is some clarity and commitment to build confidence that the things that are being discussed are actually happening.

The Government may feel that the issue is old and belongs to the previous Parliament. They may feel that it was a good issue before the general election but that they sorted it, all has gone quiet and they are on the home straight. I assure Ministers and anyone else who is listening that that is far from the case.

If the debate serves any purpose at all, I hope that it will get some answers from the Minister. It should act as a warning to the Government that the community of interests that supports our post office network is still there and is examining carefully the Government's actions. That community is as ready to exert whatever political influence it can muster during the months and years ahead as it ever was. It will not take much to rekindle the interest that was exhibited last year. We want our post office network to survive. We feel that it serves a necessary purpose in communities up and down the country and we are impatient that the Government seem to be taking so long to deliver effective action to make that a reality.

11.21 am

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on securing this debate and on his speech. I have a long-standing interest in the matter, arising not least from my work as an adviser to the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs during its major investigation into social exclusion in Wales, the results of which were published in a report last year.

I would like to speak briefly about the context in Wales. There are many negative features, such as the recently announced reduction in the number of collections in rural areas to one a day. In my constituency, the reduction in the hours of service provided to the public by local post offices is something that the organisation has refused to change its mind about. The centralisation of sorting in my part of rural Wales is a problem. For example, there is the ludicrous situation where a letter sent from Rhoshirwaun to Rhiw on the Llyn peninsula, a matter of a few miles, is taken to Chester to be sorted, sometimes taking many days to return, even with a first-class stamp. Another aspect, which has already been referred to, is the automated transfer of pensions and benefits.

Since my election in June, a number of further difficulties have emerged, such as the recruiting of sub-postmasters in my constituency. It is extremely difficult to recruit people who are ready to take on such work. In evidence given to the Welsh Affairs Committee on 4 July, the Post Office said that small rural post offices have an income of perhaps only £3,000 to £4,000 per annum, and that income is fixed. Small, full-time post offices in rural areas pay only £7,000 to £8,000 a year for a 40-hour week. As was confirmed to the Committee, that was roughly the minimum wage at the time. I do not think that that is enough for such responsible work and the National Federation of SubPostmasters agrees.

It was confirmed that, in three quarters of the Welsh constituencies, more than 50 per cent. of sub-post offices rely on benefit payments for a significant proportion of their business. Those sub-post offices are important to rural communities in Wales, but there have been closures, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said. Between 1995 and 2000 there were 150 closures in Wales. In 1999 there were 10 closures. In 2000 there were 40—the rate is accelerating.

Sub-post offices perform a variety of vital functions. They are sources of Government information and are a vital feature of rural Welsh community life. One of the first films made in Welsh, "Y Nosón Lawen", featuring performances of popular songs and poetry, had at the end, as the payoff to its sponsors, one of the characters depositing money in a national savings account—where else but at the local sub-post office?

Before we become too charmed by a rose cottage view of rural life, let me emphasise that Welsh rural communities are under threat from well-known sources. The crisis in agriculture, the lack of alternative job opportunities, the sky-high house prices—my area has both low incomes and some of the highest house prices in Wales, much more than three times local average income—and the closure of local facilities all lead to the migration of young, energetic and talented people. In that situation, sub-post offices are vital. Each is an indicator of the vitality of its local community and one of its chief supporters. People who need and can only afford basic financial services and those who cannot travel to larger population centres need their services.

The members of the Welsh Affairs Committee were concerned about the lack of understanding of the geography of rural Wales. One of the banks giving evidence said that it was closing a branch but that it had another only four miles away. However, that was as the crow flies. On the ground, it was up and down several mountains and valleys—the journey would, apparently, have taken all day. When the Post Office was asked about its system of measuring distances between sub-post offices, it confirmed that that, too, was as the crow flies. Crows are crows and people are people, and people cannot fly. Sub-post offices need the certainty of a secure and prosperous future. They need to become one-stop shops for many services including, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said, the universal bank.

Some sub-post offices in rural Wales are community co-operatives. Some of them do well enough, but they do so thanks to the intense support and effort of the local community. Others are small businesses run by hard-working couples. They are finding it difficult. There are particular circumstances in Wales, and those circumstances are best addressed in Wales. In a debate on sub-post offices in the National Assembly for Wales on 24 May 2000, Peter Law, then the Labour Local Government Secretary, said, rather despairingly:

> "Policy for Post offices is not a devolved function and the Assembly has no power to prevent closures."

In Plaid Cymru, we believe that it is high time that the National Assembly for Wales had such powers.

11.28 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): This is an important matter and I congratulate the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on securing the debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) on his contribution. I was interested in what he said about the Post Office's guidance on closures and the fact that it measures distance as the crow flies. I thought that perhaps there was to be a back-door reintroduction of the pigeon post. However, crows are crows, pigeons are pigeons and people are people.

I have been a Member of Parliament since 1992 and have participated in a number of debates on the Post Office. There were closures soon after I was elected. I remember the chorus from the then Labour Opposition, saying that that was despicable, that post

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offices were vital, particularly for rural areas, and that it was the policy of the then Government to close post offices and merely to look at the numbers. We foolishly thought that if there were a change of Government, there would be a change of fortune for the Post Office. That has not been the case, which is sad. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome told us how many post offices have closed since the Labour party came to government. I worry that the number of post office closures is accelerating. In 2000, the number jumped to 382, according to Library statistics. The number for 2001 is expected to climb to more than 500. Those are enormous numbers.

I imagine that the job description would put people off going into the business. It would refer to long or, indeed, very short hours. Irrespective of that, it would offer low pay and enormous responsibility, yet require the ability to risk one's own money in the venture with the possibility of only a small profit at the end. Running a sub-post office, particularly in a rural area, is a vocation more than a job, and some people will do it irrespective of the returns. The challenge for the Government is to make it more attractive so that more people will want to do it. Many post offices are marginal businesses: they run at small rates of profit and would make no money at all but for the fact that they are usually allied to another business of sorts, such as a grocery business. One postmaster told me that the Post Office salary used to subsidise the other business, and it is incredibly worrying that the situation is now the other way round.

There have been post office closures in my constituency, which is very rural. There are more than 30 villages, most of which had post offices. The Post Office said that it would have kept the Stonyhurst post office open, but that no one could be found to run it. That is part of the problem: who would sacrifice their money and time given that job description? People must also invest in the building, and, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon said, the cost in some villages is disproportionate. Any sane person who had worked out the mathematics before interest rates became what they are would have found that they could earn more by investing their money in the bank than by buying a building and operating a business from it.

The suburban Barracks post office in Fulwood recently closed. I was told that it was difficult to find anyone to buy the building and open it as a business, but that people could go—although not quite as the crow flies—to a supermarket nearby. Many elderly people who rely on post offices in their villages and communities do not find it easy to get around. It is easy for those who have a car to go to out-of-town shopping centres or to large shopping centres in towns, but those who do not will have enormous difficulties if public transport is poor, as it tends to be in many rural areas.

Post offices in rural areas are a social service and a lifeline for many elderly people. One postmaster gives out pensions on a certain day, but will knock on the doors of pensioners who do not come to collect theirs to make sure that things are okay. What other business does that? The postmaster and postmistress in many rural post offices are a husband-and-wife team and very much part of their community, which they love. However, that is no reason to take them for granted and not to give them a proper reward for the job that they do.

The presence of the post office means that a village is alive—there is lifeblood and a centre of activity. If it closes, there is the risk of the village dying, as we have seen with the disappearance of village schools and shops. For many reasons, the village post office tends to be the last shop to survive, but it is under threat.

Every year, I make a summer tour of my constituency, visiting every village in a week. I always take the time to go to the post offices and speak to the postmaster and postmistress. They know everything that goes on and can tell me if there are problems and suggest what approach we should be taking in Parliament. I spoke with three such people this morning. They provided three short histories of an aspect of the problem.

A lady called Olga Leach runs the Bolton-by-Bowland post office—and will do until the end of the week. She has been a postmistress for 19 and a half years and is retiring. I suspect that if it were not for the fact that the job is not as attractive as it used to be, Olga would carry on. The village is lovely and she will stay there, but she is getting out of the post office business. She found it difficult to sell the business, but has managed it now. One of her great concerns was that the job was poorly paid. That is certainly the case in some small rural areas, which means that the work is not attractive. Often Olga would pay out more in one social security payment than she received for running the post office that week. I think that in that position I might find my morale was sapped.

Olga also runs a cafe, and, of course, in a rural area, such businesses have been kicked by foot and mouth, because tourism has dried up. That is a double agony for rural post offices that have relied on tourism. She sells groceries and newspapers as well. She has no complaints about the extent to which the villagers use the post office. She is grateful for the support that she gets, but she believes that the Government should re-examine the matter of advertising. An advertising campaign could educate people about the advantages of shopping at the post office where there is other business. That would ensure that the post office was profitable and could survive.

If the post office were to be lost and turned into a house—like, no doubt, many in the past 10 years—people would have to travel, and the elderly would be placed at a disadvantage. Running a post office entails enormous responsibility. I imagine that it is only when the shop door closes that some of the real work begins—the paperwork that is essential to its efficient running.

I spoke next to the postmaster at Chatburn, who has run his post office for six years. He believes that the post office side of the business should be expanded, enabling all post offices, wherever they are, to offer all services, including providing car tax discs. Some rural post offices would like that opportunity.

The postmaster also wanted more advice and support on the business side. I know that the Countryside Agency gives some support. Small sums are involved, but the business in question is supposed to find 50 per cent., and it is difficult for a marginal business that does not make much money to find £5,000. Banks will not lend to a business that is not making a profit, with no

prospect of a return. There is interest in opportunities to upgrade the facilities. People do not want to walk into a dowdy-looking post office, on which no money has been spent for years. The people running them want to get into the 21st century, but cannot do that because they are not making a profit.

The postmaster said that a hole in the wall—or automatic teller machine, as I should probably call it—would be an advantage, and he looks forward to that. There is not one in Chatburn at the moment.

Chipping is another village in my constituency. I spoke to Andrea Cawley today, who, with her husband, has run the post office there for 18 months. They are new to the business and very young. David is about to go on a 460 km bike ride in Vietnam on behalf of MIND. I think that that is typical of people who run post offices: they tend to be enormously charitable with their time. They are community-based people. To do that on behalf of a local charity is superb and I wish him well. Andrea meanwhile will carry on running the post office when he is away—I will not say away enjoying himself. When I asked her what the one thing was that she wanted the Government to do to help her business, she said that she would like a grant to do up the post office and make it more attractive to customers. She mentioned the security aspect too, and said that if she had to upgrade the security in her post office, she was expected to pay. In this day and age, sadly, we must ensure that post offices even in small villages are properly secure and that the people who work in them feel safe.

Will the Minister consider ways in which we can sell post offices more readily? In Pendleton, my own village, the Swan with Two Necks pub acts as the post office and opens in the morning on certain days. Christine, the postmistress, serves the customers with pensions and stamps and is dedicated to the service of the village. If that service were taken away, people would have to travel to Clitheroe, which may not sound a long distance but would be an enormous burden for some elderly people.

Another example is the village of Slaidburn, where the post office closed because it could not make any money, when the postmaster's wife died and he decided that he wanted to retire. It is difficult to find someone to come to a place like Slaidburn to open a post office as a going concern—a traditional post office with a few goods on the side. The village shop was not making much money either, so the two businesses have combined and one hopes that now, with the support of the community, that shop and post office will make a go of it.

Some things became clear from my discussions with postmasters and postmistresses: the long hours that they work, the marginal nature of the shops and the fact that they love their job. In the main, they want to continue doing that job, if they can. The introduction of the odd internet machine in some village post offices will not be the answer, although those post offices that could provide a lottery service might receive a boost.

I will listen with great interest to what the Minister has to say about the universal bank and how he believes it will support village post offices. He has heard several questions from hon. Members about how we might make post offices a more attractive proposition. Soothing words cannot be banked—he must come up with more, because the Government will be judged not on what he says but on how many post offices close between now and the next general election.

11.42 am

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on securing the debate.

Post offices, as previous speakers have said, are an integral part of our rural communities. I echo the comment made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) about how long it takes for a letter posted in a remote rural village to get to a house in the same village. It may take several days to arrive. We need to go back to the days of the GPO, when the delivery and collection part of the business and the counters part were integrated. I do not see why a letter posted in a remote village for delivery in the same village or in another village a few miles up the road must be taken hundreds of miles to a big city to be sorted and sent back. Why cannot mail posted on an island, for example, be taken to a local sub-post office on the island and sorted into two batches—one for delivery on the island and the other for the mainland? The mail posted on the island for delivery on the island could be delivered the next day instead of in three or four days, as at present.

I give an example from Ross of Mull, a part of the country that the Minister knows well. If a letter is posted in Fionnphort with a first-class stamp to go to Bunessan, which is only a few miles up the road, the letter is put in the post office van and driven through Bunessan, possibly past the very house to which it is to be delivered. It is taken to the ferry at Craignure and crosses to Oban, whence it is carried 100 or so miles to Glasgow where it is sorted before it does the return journey to be delivered in Bunessan. Even with a first-class stamp, that takes three days. Many local businesses have important business to be transacted and legal requirements for mail to be delivered the next day. Why cannot the mail posted in Fionnphort be taken to the local sub-post office and sorted, and that which has been mailed for elsewhere on Mull collected separately and delivered the next day on Mull?

11.44 am

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on securing an important debate. He observed that it might be the first time that we had debated the subject since the election, which is slightly alarming, as is the complete lack of any interest from Labour Members. None of them has sought to speak in the debate. They must either think that the problem has been sorted—if so we wait for the Minister to tell us what he has told them—or be too scared to try to defend the situation.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) was generous and graceful enough to concede that post offices had been a mess for some time, and that the problem had not happened since 1997. The uncertainty and worries about the future of post offices have not been resolved in the past four and a half years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome made an important reference to the rally 18 months ago, which demonstrated not only the strength

[Mr. Michael Moore]

of feeling but the concerns of many people from across the United Kingdom. The Government were quick to respond with the promise of a performance and innovation unit report, which duly came. There was a sense that a serious attempt was being made to tackle the problem, yet people still do not know what their future holds. Now they ask whether all that Government activity after the rally was simply clever politics, not good government.

Many businesses feel extremely insecure. The balance has swung from people using their income from the post office side of the business to subsidise the rest of it to the other way round. People may have diversified into other businesses—gifts and cards, for example—but tourism has declined seriously during the past couple of years. I will not blame the Government for that, but it adds extra stresses and strains to those businesses. It means not only that continuing business security is unknown, but that the retirement of many who work in such post offices is blighted. Many who expected to have a business that they could sell on, and who live literally above the shop, now do not know whether they have a business asset or a wasting asset that they will not be able to pass on.

In July, the Minister was kind enough to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and me to discuss some of our concerns. My hon. Friend was briefly in the Chamber, but has had to attend to other business. He recently received a letter from Mervyn Jones, a gentleman who is a constituent of mine but whose business is in my hon. Friend's constituency. He is the local organiser for the National Federation of SubPostmasters. His letter states that

"we seem to inch our way ever closer to a decision, but the progress remains painfully slow. Many more Post Offices have closed while this uncertainty has continued. The situation is now most urgent".

When the Minister met us, he was keen to highlight many important initiatives that have been touched on this morning, such as the universal bank and the pilots in Leicestershire. I hope that he will use the debate as a good opportunity to try to allay some of the fears that the initiatives have been kicked into the long grass or, to mix my metaphors, have somewhat run into the sand. People do not yet understand the danger. The Government are not sending them the signals to convince them that they have a proper commercial future.

We are talking not about the world's greediest entrepreneurs, but about people who want to make a decent return on their business and to be able to continue to provide the social services that are informally expected of them. Examples have already been given. In my home town, Innerleithen, Douglas and Ann Coulter, the local sub-postmaster and his wife, are experts in helping old people, and anyone else who comes in, to fill out difficult Government forms. They do not get paid for that, and do not expect to, but they provide a vital additional service that no one else in a rural area can.

I understand that the contractual deadline for the universal bank is the end of this year. Perhaps the Minister can update us on that, and focus on the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome about whether a capped amount will be provided to the Post Office to pay for that initiative. If it is capped and there are incentives for the Post Office to get many people on to something different, the initiative will not do what has been promised, or tackle the serious problems of the move from existing benefit books to a new system. The chances for confusion and commercial insecurity are great.

The situation must be sorted out, and we need clear signposts about what is going on. The Government cannot suggest that they have not been repeatedly warned. Earlier this year, Postcom carried out a useful survey, to which I and my hon. Friends contributed, about the nature of sub-post offices around the country. Postcom paid its first visit to Scotland when it came to my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire.

Postcom's report makes it clear that the worries expressed in our part of south-east Scotland were repeated up and down the country. Time is running out. The times are desperate for sub-post offices. Sub-postmasters are not naturally demonstrative and the rally 18 months ago was a very big event for them. They do not want to have to get on to coaches and trains again and return to London, but if the Minister is unable to remove uncertainty for them, I fear that that will happen.

11.51 am

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on giving profile to this matter. I share the concern of some of my colleagues that the Government got through their first Parliament in the normal way: being seen to be active, but not yet delivering. If they do not deliver in this Parliament, they will create much cynicism and disappointment in rural areas and areas where sub-post offices are getting desperate.

I will sit down soon so that the Minister will have longer to wind up the debate, but I press him to comment on the progress that has been made on the grants scheme introduced in the summer, and how much of that money has already been allocated. Some of us are worried that the scheme is reaching its limit and needs more money to achieve its goals, as it deals with problems such as start-up costs.

I reinforce a point about which the Scotland Office showed complete complacency during yesterday's Scottish questions. I hope that that was an aberration that does not reflect collective Government responsibility, and that this Minister still has serious concerns. Ministers' reassurances, which sound great, that people will still be able to use their sub-post office to collect their benefit will be meaningless if their sub-post office is closed.

11.53 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I echo the congratulations that have been offered to my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and add to his my appreciation of the Minister's predecessor, now the Minister for Employment and the Regions. He always gave the

impression that he was doing things and was unfailingly courteous when we brought problems to him. I hope that his successor will react similarly.

It will be useful to reflect on the basic statistics on closures. I tabled a parliamentary question to the Minister a couple of weeks ago and he has helpfully provided the up-to-date position on the number of closures, which have steadily increased in the past five years. There were 175 in the mid-1990s, 163 in the financial year ending March 1997, when the Government took office, and 547 in the financial year ending March 2001. That is much larger than the figure recorded for any other financial year. The only figure that approaches it is 473 during the 1991-92 recession.

Why has the rate of closures accelerated? Post offices close for many reasons, including personal circumstances of the owners, such as ageing. They may want to convert their businesses to domestic use and so on. We must find the reason for the trend and why it is so heavily upward. In the early 1990s, the explanation could have been the recession and falling demand, but in the past few years the economy has been doing relatively well. The only possible explanation is the loss of confidence in the post office network resulting from the expectation that income would fall drastically in 2003 and thereafter. I can think of no other explanation, but if the Minister has one, it would be useful to know it.

The comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) prompted the thought that the problems for rural areas will not be limited to those of the post office network. Anyone who follows closely the debate on Consignia finances knows that it is in deep financial trouble. Its senior executives are openly touting the idea that they may have to cut back on the universal service obligation. If that happens, rural communities will lose not only their local sub-post offices, but access to the national service of post distribution. That would be a major crisis for rural areas, but is a subject for another debate.

I want to focus specifically on the financing of the post office network. The basic sums are that the post office network will lose around £430 million of income when ACT is introduced, plus the footfall income from that, and we must focus on how that loss will be compensated, if it is. There are three elements to the story. The first is the specific provisions that the Government proposed to help post offices on the margin that are faced with closure. I understand that a very small fund has been set aside for that purpose—I believe that it is £2 million a year. Will that be increased when the system comes into operation in 2003, or is it a fixed annual sum? What will be the scale of operation of the subsidy? Can the Minister give us clearer guidelines on how it will operate? Members of Parliament will be part of the system, so it will be useful to know exactly how it will work. However, we are talking about small amounts of money.

In addition, the Government are putting approximately £15 million into inner-city refurbishment over three years, which, again, is useful but small. What will happen to those sub-post offices—they are the majority—in neither inner cities nor rural areas? For most of us who live elsewhere, sub-post offices are a critical part of the community. The message that I receive from Post Office Counters is that there will be large-scale consolidation of many suburban and urban post offices. They will be grouped in the same way that hospitals were amalgamated and there will be major loss of welfare if that happens. Those sub-post offices are not covered in the subsidy or support arrangements and it would useful to know exactly what is happening on that front.

Potential subsidisation of the network is one component. The second is new business and there have been some imaginative and positive developments. There have been pilot schemes for Government services for general practitioners, the internet and so on. Those are valuable and innovative and I have no criticism, except to question how much additional income they will bring in. I understand that current estimates are £35 million over three years or just over £10 million a year. There is vast disparity between the £430 million that the post office network will lose and the £10 million to £15 million a year that it will receive from the two additional sources of funding.

The third and most important component is the universal bank, about which there are many unanswered questions. Whenever I ask parliamentary questions, I receive answers that are full of references to commercial confidentiality—in other words, we cannot be told what is going on. That is understandable to some degree, but means that there is virtually no accountability in the process.

There are two aspects of the universal bank. First, there are basic bank accounts. I do not understand how they will work and I should be grateful if the Minister would explain that. Secondly, there are brand accounts, about which there has been controversy. Will it be possible for a Barclays bank account-holder in a market town to open a Barclays account at the local post office? If someone wants to open a Barclays basic account in a local village and has not previously had a bank account, will it be able to be used in the Barclays network, or will it be more circumscribed? What functions will it have? Will direct billing be available through this network because it will be crucial to obtain discounts from utilities?

What are the banks putting into this? The banks have said that they are contributing £180 million over five years, which sounds like a lot of money. However, there is a lot at stake. As the Government know, the banks are negotiating hard on the terms of their regulation under the new Paycom system, and £180 million would be a small price to pay for an easier regulatory regime. Some of us are suspicious of how much the banks are doing.

Mr. Evans: Will pensioners be able to access money free of charge through automated teller machines? There has been a recent culture of banks trying to charge as much as they possibly can for the withdrawal of money, and pensioners on limited incomes will find those charges disproportionate.

Dr. Cable: That matter is shrouded in a fog of obscurity, but I believe that the basic bank accounts will not have charges. There will also be no charge to use the Post Office card account, which I shall discuss in a moment. It would be helpful if the Minister put everyone out of their misery by confirming that there will be no charges.

The Post Office card account is a key driver, and the Government control it, which is why my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome was right to press the

[Dr. Cable]

Minister. There are two important issues relating to the card account. First, to what extent are direct debits permissible with such an account? Secondly, the scale of the operation is crucial to the issue of financial exclusion. Almost 10 million people have no current account. Certainly, 5 million people have no financial services provision. The rumour that we have heard is that the number of people who will be allowed or encouraged—it is not clear which—to have a card account will be no more than 2 million. If the figure is at that end of the scale, it will hopelessly fail to meet the Government's financial exclusion objectives. Is there a notional number? Where does it come from? Is there a minimum or maximum figure? What scale of operation are we discussing, and who will determine that scale?

The scale of the operation is important to its funding. The assumption on which some of us have been working is that the Government will put £100 million into the system, which would be welcome new income for the post office network. However, that figure is predicated on the assumption of 2 million card accounts. If the Government put in three or four times that amount, it would fully compensate the network for the loss of its automated credit transfer income. The scale is crucial, and I hope that the Minister will explain it precisely. We could be discussing a minimal, token gesture or a fully fledged, highly comprehensive and extremely valuable replacement for ACT. It is unclear where we are on that spectrum.

The post office network has been dealt a deep wound to which there have been various attempts to apply tourniquets and Elastoplast over the past few months. We must know whether the flow of blood will be stemmed by the various initiatives that the Government are proposing.

12.2 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): It gives me great pleasure to welcome a fellow Essex Member of Parliament to the Chair, Mr. Amess.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on securing this debate, which provides a valuable opportunity to question the Minister on an issue that is of considerable concern to many of us. He mentioned his surprise that this is the first time that the issue has been debated in this Parliament. All of us would stress that that should not be taken to indicate any lessening in the concern about the future of the sub-post office network. He also mentioned that the issue was raised regularly throughout the previous Parliament following the Government's announcement about ACT in May 1999. About 18 months ago, we had a rally in Methodist Central Hall of about 2,000 sub-postmasters, who came here to demonstrate how important they felt the matter to be. On that occasion, we devoted our Opposition day debate on the Floor of the House to the future of post offices. During that debate, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, now Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, in response to concerns raised by Members on both sides of the House stated:

"Post office closures have nothing to do with the move to ACT in 2003."—[*Official Report*, 12 April 2000; Vol. 348, c. 378.]

He went on to say that closures were bound to happen because that was part of normal commercial life—businesses would always open and close—and that there was no real reason for concern.

Even then, many hon. Members were shocked by that staggering complacency, but in the 18 months that have followed, the rate of sub-post office closures has accelerated severely. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) cited the figure for the number of closures to the year ending March 2001—547—which was far higher than in any previous year. We have even more up-to-date figures. Six days ago, the Minister gave an answer to a question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), revealing that another 119 post offices closed in April to June 2001—the first quarter of this financial year. There is no sign of the trend being reversed.

Why does it matter? Obviously, it is sad to lose any business, but sub-post offices are absolutely vital. The 17,500 that exist are roughly divided between the rural and the urban, although, as the hon. Member for Twickenham said, several fall somewhere in between. Each one plays a vital part in its local community, and its loss would substantially deprive that community of vital services.

Like most hon. Members who have spoken, I represent a rural community, so I am familiar with the enormously important central role that is played by village post offices in remote rural areas. My constituency contains a large area consisting of remote, scattered villages with poor public transport facilities. In villages such as Bradwell and Tillingham—I am not going to take hon. Members on a tour of my constituency, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) did, although I feel much better informed about it as a result—the loss of the post office often removes the life of the village, because it represents not only a place of business where people go to deal with mail or receive benefits, but the centre of village life. It may provide a meeting place for elderly people who cannot get out of the village, or its postmistress may supply advice. It is such a crucial part of life that many villages struggle to survive its loss.

Eighteen months ago, I was given the opportunity to open a village sub-post office—a replacement for one that had closed three years previously—in Great Totham in my constituency. Businesses are still opening, which is welcome, but the net loss each year is leading to a gradual decline in the overall number. Even if the Government create new opportunities for sub-post offices, too many may already have been lost to take advantage of them.

The hon. Member for Twickenham mentioned the survey published yesterday by the Countryside Agency, which stated that as a result of the closures nearly 400,000 people in the countryside live more than one and a half miles from a sub-post office. That will create particular problems for elderly people, who will find it difficult to access their benefit payments.

The reasons why sub-post offices are closing have already been touched on. It is partly because they are experiencing the pressures that all small business now face. They are businesses like any other, and must cope with red tape, regulations and various other burdens, but the major reason for closures is the switch to ACT

from 2003. The Minister who spoke in the debate to which I referred said that that cannot be the reason, because ACT has yet to be put in place, but the mere announcement of the switch has blighted the prospects for many sub-post offices. Those who want to sell their business on reaching retirement age are often unable to do so.

I was delighted to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley that his constituent, who is about to retire, has found someone to take over the business, but in many cases that proves impossible. In my own constituency, for example, a sub-post office closed but no one was willing to take it on. To some extent, the problem is caused by banks advising that such businesses are no longer viable. Given the uncertainty about the future, banks are reluctant to lend money to those who want to take on sub-post offices. That creates huge problems for those who are currently running them, many of whom may have invested their life savings in the business.

Mr. Heath: It is worth stressing that point: it is difficult to establish the business case for investing in a sub-post office while such uncertainty remains. However, does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that the banks that are turning down loan applications are the very banks that are supposedly committed to the principle of the universal bank—the alleged saviour of such businesses? There seems to be a dichotomy in the thinking of clearing banks.

Mr. Whittingdale: That is a good point. Although high street clearing banks have now signed up to the concept of the universal bank, they have shown a lack of enthusiasm for it ever since it was mooted. As the hon. Gentleman suggests, they appear not to be giving the concept the 100 per cent. support that it needs if it is to succeed.

On retirement, many of those who have devoted their lives to their sub-post offices will be unable to realise the value of the asset into which they have put all their money throughout their working lives.

I want to touch briefly on the very good report commissioned by the PIU, which outlined a number of opportunities for sub-post offices, such as the potential for e-commerce and internet sites. All such suggestions are welcome and I hope that they will be developed.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): I apologise for not being here sooner, Mr. Amess. The explanation, in part, is that I am acting as host to Miss Alex Lawrence, who is here from Somerset as part of a "teenager at work" day.

The debate is not just about inclusivity in a village context. Although Taunton is a very rural constituency, the town itself is also suffering through the closure of sub-post offices. Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem affects not only rural but urban areas, and—more importantly—that young children and teenagers will also find it difficult to access the services if the sub-post offices no longer exist?

Mr. Whittingdale: I entirely agree. The problem afflicts all communities—rural and urban—and will afflict all sections of the population.

I do not want to speak for too long, as I am anxious to give the Minister the maximum opportunity to respond to the questions raised so far. However, I want briefly to discuss new opportunities for sub-post offices to win business—a matter touched on earlier. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley mentioned road tax licences. I asked at my local sub-post office what the Government could do to make life easier and was immediately told that every week several people who came in to renew their road tax had to be turned away. That is a specific suggestion.

The Government must address questions about the future of the universal bank, which could offer salvation to sub-post offices. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said that everything had gone quiet since the election. That is not entirely true: comment in the newspapers has, if anything, increased our concern. About six weeks ago, *The Sunday Telegraph* ran a piece headed "Universal Bank in doubt". It said:

> "The Government is considering scrapping plans for a Universal Bank, which would provide basic accounts".

We learned a couple of weeks ago that responsibility for the universal bank had been switched from the Department of Trade and Industry to the Department for Work and Pensions, which gave rise to the headline, "Darling sent in to save plan for Universal Bank".

I hope that the Minister will address these serious questions. Will he give us a guarantee that the universal bank proposal is still on track and will go ahead? When will it be in place? It is important to sort that out. It is not enough to wait until 2003 when the switch to ACT takes place. We need reassurance now, and we must have the arrangement in place as soon as possible.

A concern that has already been mentioned is that a limit may be placed on the number of eligible users of the Post Office card account. Clearly, any restriction of that kind would represent a huge threat to the potential income of sub-postmasters. Can the Minister guarantee that there will be no limit and that all those who are eligible to use the card accounts will be able to do so? Will he also tell us something about the remuneration terms for sub-postmasters who carry out universal bank transactions? I understand that some matters are still under negotiation, but it is not good enough for him to continue to answer by simply saying that all this is commercially confidential. We need information soon.

Can the Minister give us an estimate of how much the overall package will be worth to sub-postmasters? To what extent will it restore the enormous financial loss that the switch to ACT will cause? Finally, if there is a delay in getting the proposals up and running, is he prepared to delay the switch to ACT until the problems have been sorted out? The clock is ticking. Sub-post offices are closing every day. I know that hon. Members want to listen to the Minister, so I hand over to him to reply.

12.17 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): I congratulate the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on securing this debate on the future of sub-post offices. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) on his appointment to the Conservative Front Bench. I will

[Mr. Douglas Alexander]

seek to be as expeditious as possible, given the range of questions put to me. I will seek to answer as many of them as time allows; the clock is indeed ticking.

This is the second Adjournment debate secured by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome to which I have had the pleasure of replying. I wish to place on record my tribute to the work that he does on behalf of his constituents. I thank him for his kind remarks about my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment and the Regions, and join in paying tribute to his endeavours.

I listened carefully to the speeches and welcome the opportunity to respond to as many questions as possible. The concerns of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome centre on the need to maintain the sub-post office network and to ensure a viable, long-term future for it. His comments reflected the concerns of not only his constituents but all those who live in the more rural areas of the United Kingdom, for whom the local post office is a focal point in the community. As all hon. Members are aware, the sub-post office network plays a vital role in every region of the United Kingdom.

I disagree with the substantive point raised by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams). The sub-post office network would not be better dealt with by the devolved Administrations. I think that, if anything, the network argues for the level of integration that is possible in the United Kingdom. There is simply a philosophical divide on that issue between me and Plaid Cymru.

I pay tribute to the work by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). He missed no opportunity to talk about the important work of sub-postmasters in his constituency. I shall make a brief diversion from the substantive issues by also paying tribute to the charitable work of his constituent who is travelling to Vietnam. Having cycled in that country, I simply advise him to ensure that he has a good saddle.

We all agree that sub-post offices have a key role. As hon. Members know, post offices serve 28 million people every week. All those who have spoken, the Government, Post Office Ltd., sub-postmasters and post office customers are committed to the network's survival. Let us be clear that we face substantive challenges but the Government remain as committed as they were in the last Parliament to a sustainable network of post offices throughout the UK.

The network must be able to adapt and take account of the changes that some hon. Members have mentioned, not least changes in lifestyle, customer preferences and new ways of doing business. The traditional business of post offices needs to respond to those changing requirements, changes in society and the challenge of new opportunities as a result of changes in technology.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) spoke about post office closures. It is indeed the case that net closures of sub-post offices in the year to 26 March 2001 totalled 547. Of those, 441 were rural and 106 were urban-based offices, according to the Post Office's revised traditional definition of rural offices as those serving communities with fewer than 10,000 residents. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome referred to the definition of rural post offices. I shall raise that with the management of Post Office Ltd. and write to him.

Some of those closures cannot be avoided, but a significant portion are temporary, as designated by the Post Office. Indeed, 109 offices reopened between April 2000 and March 2001. Of the closures in the year, only four were designated permanent as a result of a Post Office decision. In all other cases, there is scope for reopening should a suitable applicant come forward within 12 to 18 months.

The hon. Members for Somerton and Frome, for Ribble Valley and for Maldon and East Chelmsford spoke about closures more generally. Net closures in the second quarter of the current year were 56, of which 47 were rural and nine urban offices. In the first quarter, there were 119 net closures, comprising 94 rural and 25 urban offices. That is a significant reduction, quarter on quarter. In addition, total net closures of 175 for the half-year are well below those for the corresponding period of last year, when 299 post offices closed. We should not read too much into any quarterly or half-yearly figure alone, but I hope that we can all welcome those reductions.

A range of new initiatives has been introduced, including the £2 million Government fund to support community volunteering initiatives to maintain and reopen post office facilities. I hope to return to that in responding to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith). Other measures include the abolition by the Post Office from 1 April of the introductory payment of 25 per cent. of the first year's remuneration. That makes sub-post offices more attractive to prospective purchasers.

The Government are pressing forward with work to implement all the recommendations of the performance and innovation unit. I agree that the report was extremely worth while and I assure hon. Members that a great deal of expeditious work is being done to implement the recommendations to modernise the post office network. That is happening in close consultation with Consignia, the National Federation of SubPostmasters, the Postal Services Commission, the Consumer Council for Postal Services and other relevant bodies. The new products and services identified and the work that has been set in train provide a basis for reinventing the network and safeguarding its future.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) is new to the House, but has clearly already learned how to grab the attention of the Minister responsible for postal services. I know very well the area that he mentioned. Indeed, I have experience of the postal service in the Ross of Mull, having received both my O-grade and highers results in that locality—that was in the days when highers results turned up. I will raise his concern with the Consignia management with great pleasure and take forward his specific point on postal services on the Isle of Mull.

The first question of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome focused on the respective roles of Departments in advancing the universal bank project, and it may be helpful to give some clarity on programme management. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is responsible for delivery of universal banking services as part of the wider Government programme of benefit payment migration to automated credit transfer and ensuring that benefit payment recipients can continue to receive their cash at post offices. That has been stated before, and it remains the Government's policy. That is a new role for the Department for Work and Pensions, while the Department of Trade and Industry continues to have shareholder responsibility for Consignia and sponsorship of the post office network.

The development shows that we are moving in the correct direction on the universal bank and demonstrates the Government-wide commitment to the universal bank project, which will ensure that benefit claimants can continue to draw their benefits in cash at post offices when benefits are paid into bank accounts. I am happy to reiterate that assertion today. It is positive that DWP has now taken overall project management responsibility, given its locus as a particular client of the project. As Consignia shareholder, the DTI will continue to be responsible and take a keen interest in the project, ensuring that it can be implemented successfully through the network of sub-post offices.

Dr. Cable: To clarify the situation, will it be the Minister or the Department for Work and Pensions that sets the target for the number of Post Office card accounts, and what will that target be?

Mr. Alexander: Those discussions are continuing between Departments, because different bodies are involved. It will interest the hon. Gentleman to know that working relationships are positive and close. I will meet the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions this afternoon, which is merely a reflection of a continuous series of constructive discussions.

It is important to recognise the significance of the universal bank project, particularly to the future of the sub-post office, and I pay tribute to hon. Members who have done so. It is a substantial, multi-strand project that will depend on many interlocking commercial relationships, not least between Post Office Ltd. and the individual banks. I am glad to see that the memorandum of understanding has been signed between DWP and Post Office Ltd., and between Post Office Ltd. and its suppliers of computing and other services.

Mr. Heath: I listened carefully to the Minister's reply, but he ducked the question about the target. Will he answer simply yes or no: will there be a cap to the number of Post Office basic accounts?

Mr. Alexander: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I will come on to that when I address his second question, which related to that specific point.

More generally as a preface, it was inevitable that the performance and innovation unit report would generate significant publicity. However, it would be deeply misguided to see that necessary and diligent work as a change of Government tone or policy. We have worked relentlessly to drive forward the policy, because we share the view that the universal bank has a critical role to play in the network's future.

However, the nature of the commercial relationships involved in the establishment of the universal bank means that many discussions cannot be conducted in public. If negotiations were conducted in public, it would not only imperil the project but delay it when we are determined to work to our target of 2003. I assure hon. Members that those many-faceted negotiations are being driven forward with urgency. Good progress is being made, and the project remains on track for implementation in time for the ACT change of 2003.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome asked about the universal bank's application. Those matters are being considered in the context of an overall migration and marketing strategy, on which much work is under way. It would be wrong to anticipate the outcome of those discussions, but it will remain our policy to encourage benefit recipients to use the accounts that best meet their needs.

On the new post office-based simple bank account and the PAT 14 basic accounts—named for policy action team 14—being developed by the banks, these are designed for everyday transactions, are accessible across post office counters and are free of charge to the user. Without post office access, those basic accounts will not achieve sufficient market penetration by themselves adequately to address the challenge of financial exclusion. The universal bank will provide a range of banking services that will cater for as wide a range of customers as possible. It will bring people currently outwith bank accounts into the financial mainstream by providing easier access to basic bank accounts.

The agreement with the institutions is that it will be possible for applicants to begin opening an account—

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. Time is up.

Human Cloning

12.30 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I congratulate you, Mr. Amess, on your elevation. It has been a long time coming and well deserved. I shall miss you in other places.

Human cloning has raised much heat recently through the media and requires urgent Government consideration. [*Interruption.*]

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. Would those people leaving the Chamber kindly go about their business more quietly? We owe that courtesy to Dr. Gibson.

Dr. Gibson: Thank you, Mr. Amess.

Human cloning includes both so-called therapeutic cloning and reproductive cloning. Although they are based on the same technique—the addition of a nucleus to an enucleate egg cell—they have completely different aims. They involve the production of an embryo, but in therapeutic cloning, tissues or groups of cells are created for the purpose of treating some chronic diseases. In this place we recently discussed issues surrounding therapeutic cloning during the debate on stem cell research. In that case, cloning means transplanting the newly created tissue back to the patient. There is no prospect of the patient having an immune rejection because the tissue is genetically similar. It can also be transferred to other patients with the aid of immune drugs to suppress any response.

Reproductive cloning aims to allow the embryo to develop into an adult and involves the creation—in theory, at least—of an individual who comprises exactly the same genes as another person, alive or dead. We need to appreciate that two individuals with the same genes do not always turn out to be exactly alike. Identical twins have identifiable differences because of the great influence of environmental factors during the transformation from zygote to full adult. Those factors have a great effect on the development of tissues, characteristics and so forth.

It is argued that reproductive cloning might be the only way that some people are able to have a child. We currently have in-vitro fertilisation, which is legal, but there are severe ethical, legal, scientific and political problems with allowing reproductive cloning. Dolly the sheep was produced only after many unsuccessful attempts—270 to produce one poor little sheep. Imagine the trauma if that were to happen with humans. Yes, we have also produced pigs and cows and, indeed, America now has a whole industry dedicated to reproducing a tame pet that might have been run over. One's cat or dog can be recreated for a price. It is, of course, never quite the same as one's pet moggy but, because of the genetic influence, it sort of looks like it.

An industry has been established to fulfil narcissistic ambitions of self-perpetuation—that is precisely what it is. The technology is not state of the art. Many of the animals produced display lethargy, obesity, arthritic conditions and failed sexual prowess. There have been miscarriages, abortions, stillbirths and genetically abnormal offspring, yet we only hear of the one great success.

An Italian scientist, Professor Antinori, is swanning around the conference circuit claiming to be able to judge embryos as fully normal and worthy of implantation in the mother, but many defects emerge only after birth during the development of the organism. In August 2001, an article in *The Guardian* referred to the same "maverick scientist" as promising a human clone by the beginning of 2002 and claiming that by the end of 2002 he will be able to produce an individual baby whom someone has paid him to create.

There is no reason to suppose that the problems that have been created during the development of pigs and cows would not apply to humans. It is not an exact science and we cannot turn back the clock in respect of DNA taken from an adult and put into a new cell nucleus to create a completely new organism. Problems can happen genetically on the way.

No children are born with their total genetic make-up being known in advance. Before birth, there is the mystery of which sex the child will be, the hair colour, the size, the looks and all the matters that make human beings different from each other. It is true that technologies can select embryos that contain certain genes. For example, the gene for a certain type of muscular dystrophy can be spotted. If it is, the individuals involved will be informed and, after discussion and advice, choices will be made. Under British law, we do not condone or allow the positive selection of certain characteristics.

In the first flush of human genetics earlier this century came the discovery of family trees where genes can be traced. The famous geneticist, Herman Muller, with whom I worked in Indiana, received a Nobel prize for discovering that radiation caused gene mutations. His book entitled "The Control of Human Heredity and Evolution" states:

> "For any group of people who have a rational attitude towards matters of reproduction and who also have a genuine sense of their own responsibility to the next and subsequent generations, the means exist right now of achieving a much greater speedier and more significant genetic improvement of the population by the use of selection."

In some ways, that is close to eugenic arguments. I am sure that hon. Members can imagine some of the arguments we had in our coffee breaks about what I thought was Herman Muller's over-enthusiasm for being able to fashion individuals genetically. He referred in his book to a co-worker who argued that cells could be spotted with intelligent genes and non-intelligent genes and that such cells could be transplanted. Science created that excitement, but as hon. Members know, it can sometimes be a few steps too fast for the society in which it is being developed.

Hon. Members will recall that the Government, together with the chief medical officer, the human genetics advisory committee and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, recommended regulations that backed therapeutic cloning and said that legislation was needed to ban reproductive cloning to contain the public's anxieties about the cloning technique as perpetuated by articles in various newspapers and television programmes. All credible British scientists agree that it is essential to prevent charlatans such as Antinori from conducting reckless and dangerous experiments on women and children.

In 1990, when the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act was passed, no one considered cell nuclear replacement, although it had been talked about in the scientific community since the 1960s when people carried out the technology with frogs and other so-called lower organisms. People obviously said that that could happen one day with a human being. That day is here now. In nuclear replacement technology, an egg cell receives its DNA from another cellular source and the egg cell develops into embryonic tissue or, indeed, into an embryo.

The Act, however, defined embryos as being the result of fertilisation—an egg and a sperm fusing together. When it was published, that was the only way in which to produce embryos—something that is now, of course, outdated. The pro-life movement has seized on that and claims that regulations could not be passed about cloning because the Act does not cover the nuclear replacement technique. If that is so, the argument is either that the technique is legal as it is not prohibited under the Act and scientists should be allowed to use it and be granted licences to undertake research and treat patients, or that cloning of any kind is illegal because the Act prohibits the splitting of embryos and other international laws and agreements prohibit cloning. The Government must make a clear decision. A judicial review is under way and a decision is imminent. I look forward to the Minister explaining how the Government will act as a result of the review.

I fear the judgment of lawyers and doubt whether the intentions of the 1990 Act will justify the necessary regulation to cover therapies involving nuclear replacement. Let us hope that pro-life groups do not turn back the clock and make cloning illegal, thus preventing the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority from granting licences for clinical research into diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. We have had those arguments in the House many times during the past year. I hope that the matter does not require primary legislation, that the Minister can confirm that it will be covered by the Act and that we can ban reproductive cloning. As the Government have been positive and supportive of science and medical research, I hope that we shall not lose this opportunity to clear up the dilemma that we face today.

12.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I, too, welcome you to the Chair of Westminster Hall, Mr. Amess. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) for having introduced today's debate. We have always said that it is important to debate such issues in depth and to take an open approach. I know that my hon. Friend fully supports the idea of exploring the issues seriously, as has happened over the past 18 months or so.

Human cloning is a serious matter and we in this country have given it a great deal of attention. In the debate on 17 November last year, my hon. Friend said that cloning is a difficult term to define. We have tried to be clear about the definitions involved in debates.

The creation of an embryo using cell nuclear replacement for research purposes only is commonly called therapeutic cloning. Embryos are not used directly in treatment, but stem cells can be extracted and used for research into potentially life-saving treatments, as in the cases that my hon. Friend mentioned—Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and incurable cancers—which might be tackled in that way. Enabling such research was a key consideration in introducing the regulations.

Cloning a human being, or reproductive cloning—the production of a cloned child—requires the implantation of a cloned embryo in the uterus. That is considered unacceptable throughout the world and will remain illegal in the United Kingdom. That is the Government's policy.

At the end of last year, three full debates on those issues were held in Parliament. The accepted view was that the standard of those debates was extremely high in both Houses, with many learned contributions full of expertise and knowledge and a great deal of energy expended by people who had clearly thought deeply about the complex ethical issues involved. The conclusion of a substantial majority of Members of both Houses was that permitting embryo research into potentially life-saving therapies for serious disease is right, and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Research Purposes) Regulations 2001 came into force on 31 January this year.

The regulations enable the HFEA to issue a licence under the strict conditions imposed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 for the purposes of increasing knowledge about the development of embryos or about serious disease, or enabling any such knowledge to be applied in developing treatments for serious diseases. Since the regulations were passed, the HFEA has received two applications for research under the extended regulations. However, I understand that those applications involve not cloning embryos but using embryos that are already available.

The House of Lords Select Committee on Stem Cell Research has taken evidence and intends to report by the end of the year. There is certainly no lack of interest in the matter, and it is right that it should continue to receive the most careful attention.

The regulations do not allow reproductive cloning, or the creation of a human being using cloning techniques, and the Government are clear that reproductive cloning cannot take place in the United Kingdom. As my hon. Friend said, Professor Antinori said recently that he wants to carry out such treatment here in the UK, but that will not be permitted. I thank my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to state that clearly on the record.

My hon. Friend mentioned the judicial review brought by the ProLife Alliance late last year, which was heard in the High Court last week. The first aspect of the challenge related to the 2001 regulations, but that aspect was not pursued in the case. The regulations remain in force and permit the HFEA to issue licences for embryo research into serious diseases. The HFEA said that it would not take decisions about applications for licences for research that involves cloning techniques until after the judicial review. It would consider applications without making decisions, but no such applications were received so the matter has not arisen.

The second part of the challenge by the ProLife Alliance relates to the definition of an embryo under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. That

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covers embryos created by cell nuclear replacement into an egg, which was the technique that was used to produce Dolly the sheep. The permission for a judicial review was granted on the grounds that there was an arguable case that raised matters of public importance. The judgment on the second limb of the judicial review has been reserved. We do not yet know the outcome, although it is expected in weeks rather than months, so we should know the outcome soon.

The current ban on reproductive cloning has two sources. The 1990 Act itself prohibits cell nuclear replacement into an embryo. If the nuclear replacement is into an egg—as was the case with Dolly the sheep—the Government believe that, given that the procedure will result in the creation of an embryo, it must be licensed by the HFEA. Of course, that is the matter before the court in the judicial review. I understand that some of the legal arguments centred on the legislation's purpose rather than its literal construction. The judge will consider that carefully.

The HFEA made it clear that it will not, as a matter of policy, issue licences for reproductive cloning. However, given the considerable public and parliamentary concern about the matter, the Government have stated their firm commitment to put the reproductive cloning ban on a statutory footing, and intend to introduce a Bill to do that as soon as parliamentary time permits.

It is true that there are different national approaches to embryo and stem cell research. They reflect the differing legal, historic and religious approaches throughout the world. The international bioethics committee of UNESCO reported on the matter earlier this year. It concluded that every society has a right and a duty to debate and decide on ethical matters with which it is confronted, and that embryonic stem cell research is a subject on which national debate is desirable. We have taken forward that approach in the United Kingdom. The round table meeting of science Ministers at UNESCO last month reaffirmed the unanimous commitment to the prohibition of human reproductive cloning. However, given the lack of international agreement on the status of the embryo, the UNESCO bioethics committee did not recommend international regulation of embryonic stem cell research now, but it considered that if such research was considered to be permissible following the national debate, it should take place only in the context of a state-sponsored regulatory system. In our case, that is the HFEA and, therefore, we are fully compliant with the international recommendations.

Later this month, the United Nations will consider proposals for developing a United Nations convention to prohibit human reproductive cloning. Developments are gradually spreading throughout the word and there is abhorrence for human reproductive cloning.

For the past 25 years, the United Kingdom has been at the forefront of assisted conception and related research. However, that does not mean that we are liberal. We have developed a system of strict legal control and licensing that covers all aspects of treatment and research. We have the most comprehensive legal controls of any European country. The regulatory system followed the fullest and most wide-ranging debate and public consultation possible on all the matters in the UK in the early 1980s. Such consultation and discussion has continued for the past 20 years. Clearly, the matters concern the British public, as well as parliamentarians at Westminster. We must continue to have an open, wide-ranging and informed debate with the public.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and to the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) for securing the debate. I concur with what the Minister has said. The Government have indicated that they will swiftly introduce a statutory ban. Does the Minister agree that that will give the United Kingdom a completeness of regulation that will put us at the forefront, particularly in comparison with other European countries? It ill behoves representatives of other countries that, unlike the United Kingdom, have, as yet, made no effort in statute to introduce the regulation, to criticise the steps that we have taken through regulations to ensure that responsible and effective scientific research with limits is conducted in the United Kingdom.

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman has made an important point. It has been suggested that our regulations will encourage reproductive cloning elsewhere. That is incorrect. It is vital to have a transparent, open and acknowledged system of regulation and licensing, so that the important issues that the Committee has been discussing can be addressed within a proper framework. If that system is put in place, the country will know that such issues are dealt with in accordance with our society's views. For instance, we must strike the right balance between research and the important ethical considerations that are relevant to this sensitive and delicate area. The United Kingdom is at the forefront of the development of a robust and rigorous system of licensing, which means that we can continue to make progress.

On research, the Government firmly believe that both embryo and adult stem cell research is necessary if we are to discover how to re-programme cells—which might be taken from any hon. Member present—to treat the very serious illnesses and disorders for which there are currently no effective treatments. The possibility of being able to do that is very exciting and, more significantly, is of fundamental importance to people who are suffering from serious illnesses, and to their families.

Following careful debate and consideration of such issues, both internationally and in the United Kingdom, the Government have introduced regulations that have the potential to make a substantial and positive impact on the treatment of illness and disability. That will greatly benefit the people of our country. The Government have got the balance right.

We have had a mature debate about delicate and sensitive matters, and it is crucial that we keep them under review. We must continue to debate them as the science develops, and we must ensure that we encapsulate our scientific advances within a legal framework that protects the rights and interests of everyone. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North has had the opportunity to raise these issues.

12.52 pm

Sitting suspended.

Zimbabwe

1 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Since 11 September, the world's attention has been, first, on events in America, and, thereafter, on events in the middle east and Afghanistan. That is understandable but it is important that we do not forget the current crisis in Zimbabwe and the descent of that country into virtual anarchy. It has been removed from the front pages; indeed, it has pretty well been removed from the pages of every newspaper. In spite of events elsewhere, we must now look carefully at what is happening in that troubled country, and, above all, at the plight of the Zimbabwean people. Britain has an important and almost unique role to play, and Ministers have to show a great deal of initiative and imagination.

When President Mugabe first won office, Zimbabwe seemed to have everything—an efficient infrastructure, hugely rich mining reserves, a thriving agriculture, a robust and independent judiciary, and a free press. Above all, people of all races and political persuasions had a remarkable determination to make a success of that new nation. To be fair to President Mugabe, he helped to foster the mood of national reconciliation and good will, and his early years were characterised by pragmatism and magnanimity. In many ways, Zimbabwe was rightly held up as an example to the rest of Africa.

However, this is a tragic tale of self-inflicted disaster. Twenty years on, Zimbabwe, which was once the bread basket for Africa, is now a basket case, and many parts of the country face starvation. Having once exported food to many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Zimbabwe is now unable to feed itself. Inflation is at more than 100 per cent., unemployment is at more than 60 per cent., exports have collapsed, foreign investment has dried up, and international lenders such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have, essentially, cut Zimbabwe off. Three quarters of Zimbabwe's population live in abject poverty. It is not Mugabe and his cronies who are suffering—they will always be okay—but the people of the country, who face not only poverty and starvation, but, as they have done for several years, state-sponsored anarchy, human rights abuses and a regular breakdown in the rule of law.

I shall touch briefly on the land question and the issue of farm invasions. I then want to talk about the rule of law and the judiciary, and consider the forthcoming presidential elections.

The Zimbabwean Government understandably regard land reform as an emotive issue. Money was on the table in the early years of Mugabe's presidency to address that issue. However, those farms that were repossessed and compulsorily purchased were not handed to small farmers or black Zimbabweans. Five were handed to Mugabe's cronies, and several others were left derelict.

That was the background to the farm invasions, which began in 2000 and gained momentum in the run-up to the parliamentary elections last year. Those invasions have been well documented, and I shall not go into a great deal of detail now. Much of the press emphasis has been about white farmers and the dispossession of white farms. However, it is the black workers who have suffered most of all. Eight white farmers have been murdered, but thousands of black workers have been evicted, and more than 100 killed. There was overwhelming evidence that the army and police had equipped and directed the war veterans, who, apart from one or two, were not veterans at all, but members of the ZANU-PF militia and youth wing. As in so many documented examples, the police refused time and again to take any action.

We are talking about a human and environmental tragedy, which has been a disaster for the economy. The agriculture sector has been pushed into ruin in many areas, and tourism, which is another important foreign currency earner, has also been demolished.

The other day, I received a moving e-mail dated September from a constituent, Sheila Breen. Her great-niece farms near Bulawayo. She writes:

"Our Government has declared war on her own people—whites, blacks, men and women. Everyone has become a victim. Everyone is suffering and it defies both belief and understanding. Foot and mouth has spread to Beitbridge and there are now a total of 10 infected properties. Despite repeated appeals by veterinary officials and attempts to control the movement of livestock this explosive and highly contagious disease means nothing to the people calling themselves war veterans. War veterans moved cattle from a village onto a cattle ranch nearby and instructed the farmer to remove his 1,000 head of cattle as it was now their farm. This is just one incident of dozens around the country. With this mentality this disease will spread and ravage our country which teeters on the brink of starvation already. It will not only destroy the beef industry but will wipe out beasts which rural subsistence peasants depend on for milk and to till their fields and feed their families."

She goes on to say:

"On a huge ostrich farm nearby the owner and his workers have been evicted, the birds are dying of neglect and there is absolutely nothing that can be done. The police will not attend because it is political. On another property 22 giraffes have died in snares. Last year's tobacco grower of the year in Bulawayo has had his tobacco seed pipes destroyed, hydrants sabotaged and has been ordered to stop his tractors. This man—Zimbabwe's best grower—has been forced to stop production and to lay off his workers. On another farm in Selous, last year's cattle man of the year has been ordered to remove all his cattle from his farm."

The e-mail also states:

"Official estimates are that as many as 70,000 workers and their dependants in this district have been evicted from their homes in the past few months. We know that many have gone off to South Africa and are now being housed in townships round Johannesburg. They have lost their grain, their goats, their chickens, their clothes and belongings. They have had their homes burned to the ground. They have been beaten, kicked and whipped and warned not to speak out."

That moving e-mail sums up the sheer lunacy of what has taken place. President Mugabe will not forgive farmers and their workers for supporting the MDC. His bent and twisted logic demands scapegoats and revenge. Everything is happening because he is desperate to win next year's presidential elections at any cost.

As the Minister well knows, the issue was discussed at the recent conference in Abuja. An agreement was reached there, but, unfortunately, Mugabe has not honoured his pledge. I would like the Minister to talk about that and about Abuja when he replies to the debate.

The farm invasions represent a breakdown in the rule of law, but we must also consider the wider context. Last year's parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe were

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

plagued by intimidation, violence, murder, ballot-rigging and fraud. Even by Africa's pitiful standards, they were far from free and fair. I have seen the July 2001 report by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum, as I am sure the Minister has. That non-governmental organisation is supported by several eminent bodies, including Amnesty International of Zimbabwe, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights.

The report examines in great detail the events running up to the parliamentary elections last year. In the opening paragraph it points out that between February and June 2000 ZANU-PF was engaged in a systematic campaign of intimidation, aimed at crushing support for opposition parties. It has identified 200,000 cases of political violence, 40 murders, and 704 serious assaults, including torture. One example that I found really appalling was that of the infamous late Dr. Chenjarai Hunzvi. It refers to a Patrick Chipunza.

"Chipunza was allegedly dragged off a commuter omnibus and taken to the home of ZANU-PF candidate Hokoyo. He was then taken to Dr. Hunzvi's surgery. He was recaptured after escaping, severely assaulted, tortured, left for dead but police transported him to the local hospital where he later died."

There are other examples of political intimidation and violence, including a petrol bomb in the constituency of Bahera, North, which killed two MDC officials. When that case was considered in court a few weeks later, there was an electoral challenge in that constituency. The High Court Justice James Devittie requested the Attorney-General to arrest the suspected murderers for their role in the petrol bomb attack on the two MDC officials, but he refused to take any action.

It has been obvious for some time that the rule of law has been breaking down and that the independent judiciary has had its independence taken away. I have read the remarks of the former Chief Justice, Anthony Gubbay, who spoke last Monday evening at the John Foster human rights trust lecture. He spoke of his utter frustration as decisions taken by the highest court in the land were ignored by the Government. His court was occupied by so-called veterans. Every time he insisted on police action, all he received was police inaction. He feared for his life. There were threats to his pension and, not surprisingly, he resigned. President Mugabe has replaced him with Godfrey Chidyausiku, who has now appointed two new Mugabe supporters to the Supreme Court. That court has recently overturned an earlier decision on fast-track land seizures.

Any pretence that there was an independent judiciary in Zimbabwe has now been totally undermined. That does not bode well for the presidential elections that must be held by 17 March 2002.

The second report by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum has looked carefully at events in Zimbabwe since last year's elections. It is not an encouraging picture if we are hoping to see free and fair elections. In February 2001, Joe Sikhala, MDC MP for Harare, and his pregnant wife were severely assaulted by army personnel who invaded their home. In May, in Harare, ZANU-PF militias attacked and injured Willias Madzimure, another MDC MP. A few days later, his home was ransacked and looted. Also in May, Roy Bennett, one of the four white MDC MPs, had his farm raided and his house trashed. His food store, where grain was being stored to dispense to local people, was raided and the food was stolen by Government supporters. There are numerous other examples of torture and attacks on party workers. Is it any wonder when President Mugabe has, in speech after speech, incited that type of hatred and violence?

In July 2001, the Zimbabwe Minister of Foreign Affairs, said at a conference attended by trainee teachers:

"As civil servants, you have to be loyal to the Government. You can be killed for supporting the opposition."

We know that there is no longer a free press in Zimbabwe. BBC reporters have been flung out of the country and eminent journalists and editors have been arrested and imprisoned. It is vital that the elections be free and fair next year. We must insist on certain basic minimums, including an up-to-date electronic electoral roll that can be checked. There must be secure ballot boxes, so I urge that metal ballot boxes, which are much easier to secure, replace the existing wooden ones. An independent electoral commission is needed, and it is essential that foreign observers be put in place in good time. There must be impartial policing and free access to the media.

Given Britain's unique position, it is vital that Her Majesty's Government use all possible pressure and influence to persuade Mugabe that those conditions be put in place. He must be told that if he does not agree to them and to free and fair elections, Zimbabwe will be dismissed from the Commonwealth, and there will be a freeze on foreign assets and restrictions on travel.

We know that Mugabe is a bully and a tyrant. He does not understand the language of compromise. I was disappointed—I hope that the Minister was as well—by the supine communiqué issued by the eight-member Commonwealth delegation that recently went to Harare. It is no wonder that it was so lame, as it was a joint communiqué with the Zimbabwean Government. Why could it not have issued its own communiqué stating clearly what it had seen and the evidence that it had collected?

I have great respect for Baroness Amos, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, but she could have been more robust in her remarks. She said that Mugabe was a difficult man and that he must not be pushed into a corner, but he is a bully who understands only tough action and tough language. The time has come to send a special envoy to Zimbabwe to talk to President Mugabe and explain to him clearly that he has a last chance to play fair and to deliver free and fair elections. There are eminently qualified politicians in the United Kingdom whom Mugabe respects, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames). His late father, Lord Soames, was the last governor-general of Zimbabwe—Mugabe attended his funeral six years ago—and his mother Mary Soames is a personal friend of Mugabe.

My hon. Friend was an outstandingly able Minister of State for the Armed Forces in the most recent Conservative Government, and is ideally equipped and suited to go to Zimbabwe as a special Government envoy. The Prime Minister believes in special envoys—

he uses them all the time in the middle east—and there is surely an opportunity to use one in this case to point out to President Mugabe what will happen if he does not allow free and fair elections. The world has moved on, as Pinochet's case showed. Milosevic has been arraigned before the war crimes tribunal in The Hague. Mugabe must be told that, unless he delivers free and fair elections, win or lose, he will be treated as the mass murderer and brutal tyrant that he is and arraigned before a war crimes tribunal at The Hague. His assets will be frozen and restrictions will be placed on his foreign travel. He will never be able to walk in safety again, because the clutches of the world's international legal systems will be after him, but he has a last chance.

We owe it to the people of Zimbabwe to ensure that they have a free and fair election next year. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

1.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) on proposing the debate. We are all aware of his long-standing personal interest in Zimbabwe, and I thank him for giving me the opportunity to update hon. Members on Government policy. His speech was excellent, thoughtful and constructive. He quoted a moving e-mail from one of his constituents, and many of us have had similar worrying e-mails from people in Zimbabwe and their relatives in this country.

All Zimbabwe's friends are deeply saddened by events there. Free speech is imperilled. Democracy is undermined by Government violence. The rule of law is threatened by intimidation and manipulation of the judiciary. There is a growing culture of impunity. Anyone who ever doubted that human rights and fundamental freedoms are essential in a prosperous modern economy need look no further than the crisis that has befallen Zimbabwe in the past few years, where, as the hon. Gentleman said, the economy has continued its dramatic decline. Worse still, Zimbabwe's tragedy threatens to infect all of southern Africa by weakening business and investor confidence in the region.

Britain is, and will remain, committed to helping the people of Zimbabwe. As the hon. Gentleman reminded us, we worked with all shades of opinion at Lancaster house in 1979-80 to end white minority rule by negotiation. We have given Zimbabwe substantial support—£500 million since independence. We will not walk away now. We want to continue working in partnership with the Zimbabwean people towards a just society in which all the people enjoy fair access to opportunity.

By contrast, Zimbabwe's Government seek to limit international scrutiny of what is happening there. They blame the west, and the United Kingdom in particular, for their problems. The reality is simpler and more brutal, and the hon. Gentleman has put his finger on it: a Government facing difficult re-election. That has led to the undermining of Zimbabwe's democratic system; widespread abuse of human rights; the rapid decline of the economy; and severe damage to commercial agriculture, the country's main foreign currency earner.

On top of that, recently introduced price controls can only create shortages in a country already facing a serious shortfall in basic staples by the end of the year. Such a fall from grace is unnecessary. It is wasteful and must be halted and reversed.

Five principles underpin our policy on Zimbabwe. The first is Britain's interest in seeing a stable, prosperous and democratic country. The second is that Zimbabweans deserve and should get the help of the international community which is increasingly concerned at events in Zimbabwe. The European Union signalled its concerns on 29 October, when it invited the Government of Zimbabwe to begin formal and time-limited consultations on human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law under Article 96 of the Cotonou agreement.

Commonwealth Ministers, in an initiative of President Obasanjo of Nigeria already referred to by the hon. Gentleman, brokered an agreement at Abuja on 6 September. Among other things, the Zimbabwe Government committed themselves to respecting the democratic and human rights principles contained in the Harare Commonwealth declaration and the Millbrook action programme. They committed themselves to no further occupation of farms; the removal of illegal occupiers; the restoration of the rule of law to the process of land reform; respect for freedom of expression; and firm action against violence and intimidation.

As the hon. Gentleman said, two months on there is little evidence that the Zimbabwe Government are honouring any of those commitments. My noble Friend Baroness Amos, who has ministerial responsibilities for Africa, saw that at first hand during her visit to Harare between 25 and 27 October. In their communiqué of 27 October, the Commonwealth Ministers called on the Zimbabwean law enforcement authorities to investigate violations of human rights and press freedoms, and called on the Government to implement land reform in accordance with the law and constitution. We look to the Commonwealth to press the Government of Zimbabwe to take the action they agreed.

The hon. Gentleman expressed his disappointment with, as he described it, the weakness of the communiqué, but it did talk about monitoring. It should be remembered that all the opposition parties and civil society in Zimbabwe value the Abuja process and want it to continue.

Our third principle is that Zimbabwe's future prosperity depends on respect for the rule of law and an end to political violence. We will not be deflected from pressing the Zimbabwe Government on their abuses of fundamental rights, many of which the hon. Gentleman has reminded us of, or from drawing international attention to those abuses. We have already taken a number of measures. We have imposed a complete embargo on arms sales to Zimbabwe and cut non-humanitarian aid. These processes cannot be open-ended, but they must be given a chance. The European Union's article 96 process, for example, sets a strict time limit of 75 days.

We also need effectiveness. Further unilateral UK measures would not be effective and, more importantly, they would play directly into the hands of those, including Mr. Mugabe, who wrongly seek to portray

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

Zimbabwe's internal problems as the product of a bilateral dispute with the United Kingdom. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his idea of a special envoy and will consider it. However, we must do what we can to avoid playing into Mugabe's hands, as it helps him for the issue to be seen as an old colonial dispute. A co-ordinated international approach is the best course. It should be enough, for now, to say that the international community is increasingly alive to alternative measures against the Zimbabwe Government.

A further reason for resisting some of the proposals is the reality of the modern Commonwealth. The suspension of Commonwealth members has up to now been confined to a narrow set of circumstances such as coups. We and others are working to broaden the criteria. Although concern is growing in the Commonwealth at Zimbabwe's disregard for the principles of the Harare declaration, no consensus yet exists on suspending it from the organisation.

We are determined to pursue our fourth principle, that Britain will help a democratic Zimbabwe to achieve prosperity through successful land reform. That is central to fair and equitable economic development in Zimbabwe and the righting of any remaining wrongs of the colonial period and white minority rule. As I have noted, since Lancaster house we have provided over £500 million in bilateral aid to Zimbabwe and have already provided around £40 million for land reform. However, let me emphasise that we shall not write blank cheques. The Abuja agreement made it clear that land reform would need to be based on the United Nations development programme proposals of December 2000.

Our final principle is that the future must be left in the hands of the people of Zimbabwe, which will hold a presidential election in a few months' time. We, the EU, the Commonwealth and others will work to ensure that the people of Zimbabwe are given a genuine opportunity to make their voice heard. They showed courage and dignity in parliamentary elections last year, when they voted in large numbers despite systematic intimidation and violence. They have the right to expect that the scenes that disfigured those elections will not be repeated. If President Mugabe truly believes that he enjoys the backing of his people, he need not fear the outcome of a genuine democratic process and should have no difficulty in inviting international election observers in good time. Sadly, however, the omens are not good. The violence and intimidation continue, and the Zimbabwe Government are obstructing efforts to observe at first hand the conduct of the election campaign.

Let me stress one thing for the record. Our policy is not about Britain versus President Mugabe but about helping Zimbabwe against its real enemies: poverty, disease, hunger, oppression and social injustice. I hope that the present Government of Zimbabwe and their successors will one day get back on the side of their own people and respect the rule of law. If they do so, Britain and Zimbabwe's other friends in the international community stand ready to help.

Digital Hearing Aids (NHS Provision)

1.29 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): I am grateful to have secured this debate on universal provision of digital hearing aid technology throughout the national health service. This is something of a departure for me, as I normally focus on quality-of-life issues such as graffiti and abandoned cars, but given the proven benefits that digital technology can bring to many hearing aid users, the need to make that technology available universally amounts to a quality-of-life issue for deaf and hard of hearing people.

My decision to table early-day motion 317 and to apply for this debate was prompted by the many letters and cards that I received—as, I am sure, all other Members of Parliament did—from constituents who are hearing impaired and rightly concerned about the fact that fewer than 5 per cent. of people who need a hearing aid are in a position to take advantage of digital hearing aid technology through the NHS.

I recall the words of the Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), when he was the Minister with responsibility for audiology services. He said that the Government were

"absolutely committed to ensuring that people who need audiology services from the NHS will get a first-class service. Nothing else will do."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1998; Vol. 321, c. 854.]

Those were welcome words indeed. He was responding to a debate initiated by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) the last time the subject of audiology services was debated in the House. The Government's aspiration was a noble one, and it remains equally important that it becomes a reality today, three years later. There are 8.7 million people in the United Kingdom who are deaf or hard of hearing and of those 2 million have a hearing aid. According to the Medical Research Council a further 3 million would benefit from one.

Those statistics are even more striking when one considers that the most common cause of deafness is the wear and tear that come to us all with age, and that three quarters of people with hearing loss are over 60. However, we should not forget that 13 children in every 10,000 are born deaf or become deaf when they are very young. If the mark of a civilised society is how well it treats its very young and very old, providing the best possible audiology service must be a crucial part of that.

I am acutely aware of the huge financial demands on every area of the health service, but I am pleased that, three years after my right hon. Friend made the remarks that I quoted, the Government have made a good start in transforming aspiration into reality in providing digital hearing aids. Under the stewardship of my right hon. Friend and, since the general election, my honourable and good friend the Minister of State, Department of Health, thousands of people now use digital hearing aids—the latest and most beneficial technology for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

In partnership with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, 20 NHS trusts were chosen as first-wave sites at which audiology departments were to be modernised and where cutting-edge digital hearing aids

were to be fitted to patients. Those first-wave sites had funding of £11 million earmarked for 2000-02 and their success was to be evaluated by Professor Adrian Davis of the Medical Research Council's Institute for Hearing Research. I understand that the results so far have been very positive. More than 10,500 aids had been fitted and almost 13,000 people assessed on the NHS by the end of September 2001, 12 months after the project was set up.

Preliminary evaluation results look good with respect to hearing aid use and benefit, compared with analogue aids. People use digital aids more than they used the old type of NHS aids and are finding them much more helpful. Responses from RNID members bear that out. For instance, Sarah Maynard from Hammersmith told the RNID last week that using a digital hearing aid

"had brought tears to my eyes",

so great was the improvement to her hearing. Alex Bevis, from Northwich in Cheshire, who has recently started to use a digital hearing aid, e-mailed the RNID recently to say:

"It's only now that I realise just how isolated and introspective I had become."

Professor Michael Krom, an environmental scientist at the university of Leeds, wrote to RNID:

"I know from first hand how such hearing aids can transform one's existence from essentially a person with a severe disability to one with a problem but one which can be lived with."

The benefits of digital hearing aids cannot be overstated, but the palpable frustration for many people who would dearly love an opportunity to take advantage of the new technology through the NHS is that there are still only 20 sites operating in England. That means that fewer than 5 per cent. of those who will be supplied with an NHS hearing aid this year will have a digital one. The down side of the old analogue aids is thrown into even sharper relief with the advent of digital aids. As the Audit Commission report, "Fully Equipped", of March 2000 puts it:

"Reports suggest that a third of [analogue] hearing aids are infrequently or never used because of the poor quality of aids and the advice given. This is due to a combination of poor technology, rushed fittings, patchy fitting skills and inadequate guidance and support for hearing aid users. This represents a waste of money, as well as excluding deaf or hard-of-hearing people from society."

The report goes on to say that, conversely, digital hearing aids

"deliver superior performance, particularly in eliminating background noise; and can be programmed to meet individuals' specific needs. Clinical trials have found that users with digital aids increase their use of the aid (from an average of 6...to 11 hours per day)".

I speak on behalf of the deaf and hard of hearing people of Mitcham and Morden, and, indeed, their families—including my mum, if that is not an unparliamentary term—when I say that they would welcome a commitment to national roll-out as soon as possible, so that the wonderful progress made in the past 14 months will not be allowed to slip in the light of the other financial imperatives faced by the NHS.

There are four reasons why that commitment should be made. First, the quality of life of 2 million people would be dramatically improved. For a small amount of money per person—the equivalent of less than one night's stay in a hospital or one week's stay in a residential home—the national roll-out of digital hearing aids would offer each person huge benefits. It is difficult to exaggerate just how wasteful the current system is. It is not merely that people are given hearing aids that are inadequate for their needs; often, their current NHS hearing aids are simply not being used. That is a serious waste of public money. It is a false economy in the extreme to provide people with cheap analogue hearing aids if only two thirds are used properly and one third—again, my mother fits into this category—are never used at all. Few, if any, other policies would bring such huge gains to so many at such little cost.

Secondly, with improved hearing people would be able to live fuller lives and would be rescued from the isolation, lack of confidence and reduced communication that deafness can bring. In addition, for those of working age the ability to remain in work would be greatly increased. Although roll-out would involve increased expenditure, in the long run it would lead to savings for the health service and for Government Departments, as everyone knows. As the Audit Commission points out, the introduction of digital aids, which can be programmed and adjusted according to the changing needs of users, offers potential economies by reducing the cost of replacements. Furthermore, deafness and the isolation that follows can be very expensive in terms of the effect on physical and mental well-being. Digital hearing aids extend independent living. The more people can look after themselves, the less of a burden they are likely to be on the public purse.

Thirdly, national roll-out would offer an excellent example of the Government's commitment to modernising the NHS. Audiology services have hardly changed in 30 years. Addressing that long-term neglect and modernising the entire service in the next two years would be an achievement of huge worth, and would show that the NHS can be improved.

Finally, as I have said, the vast majority of deaf and hard of hearing people are elderly. The modernisation of audiology services would be another clear sign of the Government's commitment to pensioners. Indeed, as the Audit Commission says:

"Nowhere is the cost versus quality debate in the provision of equipment for older or disabled people better illustrated than by reference to hearing aids."

Digital hearing aids would help many older workers to hold down their jobs, and would tackle age discrimination in the workplace. Given that job retention for men and women in their late 50s and early 60s is an important objective, there is a clear and obvious benefit. Providing digital hearing aids is the right thing to do and makes sound economic sense.

The alternative would be to allow the NHS to continue to supply analogue aids. As a result, more and more people would be forced to purchase digital aids privately, and even to travel abroad to do so. A privately purchased digital hearing aid can cost up to £2,500, but each digital aid costs the NHS only £150. Indeed, as the largest purchaser of hearing aids in the world, the NHS occupies a strong position. It can secure value for money by legitimately driving prices down: the more aids purchased, the more prices would be reduced.

The Government have already committed an extra £25 million for national roll-out from 2003-04. That is excellent news, but leaves some questions unanswered.

[Siobhain McDonagh]

First, the Minister will be aware of the worrying anomaly in funding arrangements. As things stand, the £11 million for 2000-02 will run out in five months, but the £25 million will not come on stream until April 2003. There is, therefore, a 12-month gap in the funding of the first-wave sites. Can the Minister clarify and address that situation? At the very least, can she tell us that a further 12 months' funding for the first-wave sites is guaranteed? Given that we are only five months away from the money drying up, an announcement on that would be helpful.

The Government surely do not want to see the 20 first-wave sites taking several steps backwards, and returning to supplying the old analogue aids. Aside from the demoralising effect on staff in audiology departments, the Minister can imagine the sense of powerless desperation that would be felt by patients who have been waiting for such a long time, or by those who have so far been provided with the best possible after care and would not get the same standard after next April.

Secondly, we have had no indication of the detailed timetable for national roll-out. I should be delighted if the Minister could tell us when an announcement was likely. Thirdly, can she confirm that, if national roll-out goes ahead, a full £25 million will be spent and not something up to that amount? Can she also explain how the figure of £25 million was originally estimated and whether she believes that it will cover the cost of the universal roll-out across England?

Will the Minister elaborate on the extent of the private sector's possible involvement in national roll-out, a subject she has mentioned in recent replies to constituents and in her speech to the Royal National Institute for Deaf People last month?

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. On the private sector, may I draw to her attention the fact that my high street optician offers free hearing tests? There may be scope for the Minister to look into whether high street opticians could provide hearing expertise so that people can kill two birds with one stone—getting their eyes and hearing tested at the same time.

Siobhain McDonagh: As always, my hon. Friend has an eminently modern and fresh way of looking at things.

A recent leaked letter from the head of an audiology department reveals that such departments are under a lot of pressure. The letter urges colleagues who refer people to his service to play down the benefits of digital hearing aids, to cope with high demand. No one would deny that the Government have made significant strides in the provision of digital hearing aids on the NHS, or that it would be a tragedy for all concerned if that were unable to continue. It is still in the Government's gift to provide a first-class audiology service. For the millions of people whose disability means that they must rely on hearing aids, nothing but a first-class audiology service will do.

13.43 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on raising this subject. I know that she takes a keen interest in it, and has ably lobbied on behalf of her constituents and, as she has made clear today, deaf and hard of hearing people across the country. I am pleased that the debate provides me with an opportunity to tell the House about progress in providing digital hearing aids on the NHS to people with hearing impairments, and to mention some of the challenges that future developments will pose.

Like my hon. Friend, the Government recognise the importance of providing modern, good-quality and readily accessible services to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Providing digital hearing aids is one part of a wide range of cross-Government initiatives to improve the quality of life of such people—for example, through employment projects as part of the new deal for disabled people, increased access to television via the provision of subtitling, sign language and audio description services and the extra £105 million that is being provided to improve NHS community equipment services by 2004. Those are just a few examples of the wide cross-Government agenda for improving services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

My hon. Friend is keen to pursue the issue of digital hearing aids. As she said, leading-edge digital hearing aids are now available on the NHS for the first time. Equally importantly, they are being provided as part of a modernised service that puts people with hearing impairment at the centre of the service offered by the NHS. We are providing 21st century technology as part of a 21st century service. Just over a year ago, my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), announced the modernising hearing aids services project. Currently, 20 NHS trusts routinely fit digital hearing aids as part of a pilot project. By the end of October, 13,270 aids had been fitted and 16,178 people had been assessed. By the end of March, we expect that more than 18,000 will have digital aids on the NHS.

As my hon. Friend rightly pointed out in her criticism of the more traditional approach to hearing aid provision, what is important is not only the hearing aid itself, but the proper fitting and assessment that goes with it. The patient, not the hearing aid, is at the heart of the fitting process. That is why the modernising hearing aids services project focuses on improving the rehabilitation that is provided as well as introducing new technology hearing aids.

The modernised patient journey—I apologise for the jargon—includes the formal assessment of the patient's hearing, hearing needs and lifestyle. At the initial assessment visit, a profile is used to assess their individual hearing needs and to discover the situations in which it is important for them to hear well. Another questionnaire assesses their attitude, motivation and expectations in relation to the aid. At the fitting, the aid is programmed using a portable computer with the patient's details and aid settings stored on it. The outcome is then evaluated both acoustically, using a probe tube measuring the response in the ear, and subjectively.

Fine tuning of the aid's settings may be performed about two weeks after the fitting, and about three months later the audiologist completes the profile by asking the patient, for each of the named situations, how much they use the aid, how much they benefit, how satisfied they are and how much difficulty they still have.

That allows the audiologist to pick up on any problems and to identify if more help needs to be provided. The process helps to ensure that hearing aids benefit patients and are used to improve their lives, and that we get the very best out of the technology that we provide.

To support the modernisation project, my Department has provided an additional £11 million, put in place value-for-money purchasing contracts for digital hearing aids, introduced new patient pathways designed around patients' needs and provided the necessary computer equipment. We have negotiated keen purchasing contracts for the supply of digital hearing aids. NHS organisations can purchase them for about £150, which represents a substantial reduction on the commercially available price. I want to make it clear that all NHS trusts, not only the pilot sites, can take advantage of those contracts, provided that staff have the training and experience needed to fit them safely and effectively. Given what I have just said, the important point is that we ensure that people benefit from access to digital hearing aids within the context of the whole process.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): If it is true that digital hearing aids are readily available, why are so many people travelling to Denmark to acquire them at half the British price?

Jacqui Smith: As I have pointed out, we want to provide the best process on the NHS, as well as the best product, to ensure that those hearing aids are used effectively, and that people get the high-quality staff that they expect and deserve.

The aim of the modernisation project, which, as my hon. Friend said, is being taken forward in partnership with the RNID, is to test the benefits of providing digital hearing aids on the NHS as part of a modernised service. I should like to join my hon. Friend in commending the excellent work that the RNID is doing managing the project and applying its experience and expertise. Having heard news of progress, I am aware that hon. Members will want to know—indeed, some have already asked me—when digital hearing aids will be more widely available. I appreciate that people want digital aids to be available everywhere so that everyone with hearing impairment can benefit. However, for the reasons I have outlined, we must ensure that we make the right hearing aids available. We must have the infrastructure in place to deliver not only hearing aids, but structures that will ensure that those who receive them can obtain the maximum benefit. That is why, as my hon. Friend outlined, we are evaluating the project.

In July 2000, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence issued guidance on hearing aid technology. It said that insufficient evidence was available to properly judge the benefits of digital hearing aids. NICE will be revisiting its guidance in the light of the evaluation of the modernisation project, which is being conducted by the Institute of Hearing Research. We need information about the most effective aids for NHS patients, the best ways to supply hearing aids and how a modern hearing aid service can be delivered to NHS patients. Those are all important points that will inform decisions about the benefits of making these changes more widely available and how best to introduce them. It is important that we get this right.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, researchers tell us that, based on small samples, people with digital hearing aids report improvements in hearing, and that they are wearing their aids more often, which means that fewer hearing aids are ending up languishing in kitchen drawers. That is encouraging, but the research is based on limited data. Subject to favourable evaluation, we shall make decisions about how best to spread the modernised service throughout the NHS. We have earmarked funds to begin that roll out, and we have said that up to £25 million will be invested by 2003-04, which answers the question raised by my hon. Friend about whether there is a gap in funding. We are considering the detail of spending allocations over the next year and beyond in light of the many competing and important priorities in the NHS, and the evaluation of the project. That will ensure that as we make the service more widely available, we do it in the most effective way for NHS patients.

We are not only putting more money into audiology, we are supporting NHS capacity to deliver change on the ground by boosting the number of skilled audiology staff that we need. We are working in innovative ways to keep waiting lists down. We are working with members of the profession to develop new streamlined degree courses in audiology. We expect, together with modernisation, that that will make audiology a more attractive career option. We are ensuring that existing audiology training courses are maintained, and looking at ways in which additional trainees can come on stream more quickly. The NHS plan sets out an agenda to increase the number of NHS staff in many specialties and professional groups. In the shorter term, we are working creatively on a range of measures to boost capacity, including the action on ENT programme, which is a project to spread good practice, reduce waiting lists and support better and smarter ways of working. We have invested £75 million in the project in 2001-02.

We must also examine, as does the project, the innovative use of skill mixing in audiology departments to make the best use of skills and expertise. I was pleased and interested to hear the comment about the high street from my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). I cannot comment on the ability of opticians to provide hearing tests, but I assure my hon. Friend that we are testing the pros and cons of involving high street hearing aid dispensers in the provision of NHS services.

Caroline Flint: I was not suggesting that an optician would be qualified to test someone's hearing. I was talking about modern access to services. There are common areas in improving people's sight and hearing and the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the RNID might consider how to bring audiology expertise to high street shops so as to provide people with a service for both sight and hearing.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the modernisation of the whole process and the need to consider new ways of delivery so that benefits are spread as broadly as possible. We are considering ways of involving high street hearing aid dispensers in providing NHS services.

[Jacqui Smith]

In my recent speech to the RNID national conference, I announced that we would test ways of involving the private sector in support of NHS audiology departments and boosting NHS capacity to deliver benefits as quickly as possible to as many people as possible.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): In her research, will my hon. Friend consider the fact that analogue hearing aids are a problem in many Government buildings that were erected during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. They are the worst buildings for those with hearing aids because the majority are of metallic construction, which causes a resonance of background noise. Perhaps the research that my hon. Friend is commissioning could pay particular attention to the problems of hearing aid users if the Government do not proceed rapidly on the use of digital hearing aids.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point and I promise to draw it to the attention of the researchers. However, I cannot promise that we shall be able to examine Government buildings in depth.

Tim Loughton: Before we get back to blaming Labour Governments for the buildings of the 1960s and 1970s, will the Minister return to the questions asked by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden? If the pilot schemes in the 20 areas, including Redditch, the Minister's constituency, are as successful as they appear to be from anecdotal evidence, will she proceed, without delay, to recommend a full roll-out for the 95 per cent. of the population to whom this important technological aid is not available?

Jacqui Smith: I have made it clear that the issue involves not just money, but capacity in the NHS and ensuring that we provide the necessary processes. It was this Government who introduced the process for modernisation. We have been responsible for the progress that has been made so far and we are committed to ensuring that, subject to the evaluation, we make available the best possible services to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

To return to the private sector pilot, I want to make it clear that we are not talking about privatising the NHS hearing aid service. People with hearing difficulties will continue to be able to obtain hearing aids free on the NHS and we are not devaluing the role of NHS audiologists. They are the key to the delivery of modernised services and that is why we are committed to boosting their number and capacity to provide special skills and expertise. To succeed, we must be willing to explore a range of ways in which we can provide people with hearing difficulties with high-tech hearing aids as part of a modernised service. We are fully committed to achieving that aim.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to give the House a clear demonstration of how the NHS is being modernised. It provides leading-edge digital technology, supported by modernised patient pathways resulting in big improvements for people with hearing difficulties. That is part of what we are pledged to deliver and, subject to the evaluation, we are pledged to continue doing so.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 8 November 2001

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Higher Education

[Relevant documents: Sixth Special Report from the Education and Employment Committee of 2000-01, HC 384—Government's response to the Fourth Report from the Committee, Session 2000-01, on Higher Education: Access; Seventh Special Report from the Education and Employment Committee of 2000-01, HC 385—Responses from the Government and Higher Education Funding Council for England to the Sixth Report from the Committee, Session 2000-01, on Higher Education: Student Retention; Minutes of Evidence taken before the Education Sub-Committee on 14th March 2001, HC 329.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It gives me great pleasure to introduce the debate on the two reports on higher education conducted by the former Education and Employment Committee and the Education Sub-Committee. There had not been a full inquiry into higher education for about 20 years and it seemed appropriate for us to look at it at a time when, some would say, the dust had settled on both the Dearing report and the Government's rapid response to it after the 1997 election—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) says that it was too rapid. I shall come to that in a moment.

I will try to keep my remarks reasonably short. In one sense it was an invigorating and pleasurable experience to chair the Committee during those two inquiries. First, we had not looked at higher education before. Secondly, we were trying some new methods of obtaining good evidence for the Committee. We tried a range of seminars. We took the Committee to universities both in the United Kingdom and the United States. We looked at good examples everywhere. We also took a great deal of oral and written evidence. We also had excellent special advisers, and I want to pay tribute to all five of them now because they took such a lead role in making our report as good as it could be.

Committee Chairs do not often say this, but our inquiry was a failure in one sense. The terms of reference were set during the period between the old Chair moving on to pastures new and the new one taking over. I think that members of the Committee will agree that they were set very broadly. When I became Chairman, I realised that we could spend another Parliament pursuing them. We thought through the process and decided to concentrate on two aspects of the report that could make some impact in the run-up to the general election.

I am told by all Select Committee Chairmen on the Liaison Committee that it is slightly different chairing a Select Committee in the year running up to a general election than it is for most of the rest of the time. Some of our interesting discussions on one or two points stemmed from that quite understandable, slightly heightened political tension. Select Committees do not wish their recommendations to be ignored and we decided to look at access to higher education and then move on to student retention: how to get them in and keep them in. Looking at those two aspects seemed to be a manageable task.

We started from the base that we all know about. We have now moved to a system not of elite but mass higher education. By 1997, more than 30 per cent. of the relevant population were going off to higher education, and that percentage is steadily rising. The Prime Minister's aspiration is for it to reach 50 per cent. However, moving to a system of mass education, produces interesting problems. Only last week, we were taking evidence on a further education inquiry. It was pointed out that there are now far more people taking higher education in the further education sector than there were students in the whole higher education sector at the time of the Robins report into higher education in the 1960s. That is a measure of the change, and shows how many people are coming into higher education.

The dilemma, which was recognised by the Government and by the previous Conservative Administration, is that whatever the system, it is extremely difficult to get children from lower socio-economic income backgrounds into higher education. That was the case before the changes made by the Labour Government in 1997. It was extremely difficult to encourage children from, to put it bluntly, working class backgrounds to stay in the system and enter higher education. It was an acknowledged problem before students had to pay fees and take loans, and has remained a problem.

That thread ran through our deliberations. When taking evidence, we wanted to find out what Governments of all persuasions had done well and badly, and why they had not succeeded. That was the thrust of our inquiry. Why had we not succeeded? Even when there were full maintenance grants, why did so few young people from working class backgrounds enter higher education? We examined the change in the system after 1997 and asked why it did not work. There were warnings that it might be worse than the one that it replaced. What recommendations could we make to Government to ensure a much broader spread of participation?

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Before the hon. Gentleman continues, will he explain the staggering refusal of the Select Committee, on any occasion and particularly in its conclusions, to recognise that debt aversion and student poverty are fundamental causes of the Government's failure to expand the university entrance of students from lower socio-economic groups?

Mr. Sheerman: I have a lot of respect for the hon. Gentleman. He is the Liberal Democrat spokesman and is knowledgeable about many aspects of education. However, on the Committee—the inquiry took place before he joined—examined those aspects and took a great deal of evidence. Indeed, I remember one day at Manchester university when we consulted all the universities in the area. We invited particularly groups of students, members of staff and those associated with

[Mr. Sheerman]

universities, such as chaplains, who are not paid by the universities but have an independent voice. They gave evidence about whether and to what extent debt aversion was a problem, and we asked the Government to be aware of that.

The hon. Gentleman's question also relates to student retention: why are students not retained in the higher education system? We must remember that we have the world's second best retention rates after Japan. The drop-out rate is only 17 per cent., of which two thirds drop out in the first year of university. We did not refuse to discuss the question. The evidence that came back to us clearly showed that debt and debt aversion were a problem, but we were not sure about the extent of the problem as we did not have the data or the statistics.

We took evidence from Professor Callender, who had written a report. She was not confident that the data that she used were sufficiently relevant to show that debt and debt aversion were a significant problem, and she planned to use new data. Let us remember that we published the report some time ago. Since then, more evidence has been produced that debt is a problem.

I must put that evidence into perspective, however. The Committee found that debt and debt aversion were a problem, but not of the first order. In the report on retention, we found that the overriding reason why students did not complete their courses was that they had been given the wrong advice and were enrolled on the wrong course. A university department that wants to make up its numbers may take a marginal student who is unlikely to complete the course. In addition, after going through clearing, a student may end up on a course that is not their first choice and in a city to which they never expected to go. That was the number one link found by the Committee.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I enjoyed serving on the Select Committee under the chairmanship of the hon. Gentleman. He mentioned DFEE-funded research from South Bank university. In fact, page 16 of the executive summary of that research stated that

"61 per cent. of full-time students agreed with the statement that 'Changes to student funding have deterred some of my friends from coming to university'. The proportion of students agreeing with the statement was highest among students from social classes IV and V...black students...and women aged 25...the very focus of widening participation strategies."

We heard that evidence, but the report failed to reflect it in its recommendations.

Mr. Sheerman: That is true. The report on access was a divided report, and today's debate will reflect that. The hon. Gentleman refers to a poll, not facts or hard data, and other polls suggested that students were still spending at the same level as their peers who were not studying but in work. There was a great deal of evidence, and we had to make a judgment. As we went down that road, there were indications that student debt might be a problem and might be getting worse.

The hon. Gentleman may remember that the Committee strongly recommended that the Government keep a close eye on the situation. Callender's new figures were coming in, and the Higher Education Funding Council was gathering new evidence. We recommended that the Government should act quickly if there were real evidence that the new system that they introduced after the 1997 general election was not having the right impact.

Let us not detract from the Committee's suggestions. We proposed a range of possibilities and ways in which students from poorer backgrounds could be attracted to and retained in higher education. I am sure that my colleagues on the Committee will remember our being told that vice-chancellors and senior people in universities were good at following the money. We strongly recommended, therefore, that the premium received by universities for taking a student from a poorer social or academic postcode should be increased from 5 per cent. Some evidence suggested that the premium should be increased to 10 per cent.; some suggested quadrupling it from 5 to 20 per cent.—serious money. The Committee examined the problem and how the Government could remedy it.

I reiterate that we looked back at the position pre-1997—before the changes were introduced—and we saw that there were already difficulties getting through to this group of potential students. As the report shows clearly, much of the evidence—both written and oral—revealed that the real problem was not the level of grant or the system of financing one's way through university, but what happened to children early in their careers. We conducted an early-years inquiry, which showed that many children's potential lifetime of learning was stunted between nought and eight, or even before they have entered the education system.

We took evidence from sure start. As Harold Wilson said, a week is a long time in politics and we cannot wait for a 15-year perspective, but we found considerable evidence that young people switch off their aspirations to carry on with education between the ages of 13 and 16. The other evening we debated the 30 per cent. who are difficult to draw into education or who, if drawn in, find it difficult to maintain their interest and progress into further and higher education or lifelong learning.

One of our strongest recommendations was that the roll-out of education maintenance allowance is a highly significant factor. Not all members of the Committee agreed so strongly, but we showed that the 14-to-16 age group was crucial and urged the Government to examine it closely.

We strongly criticised universities with not such a good record on the breadth of the social and economic background of their student intake. Some stand out with a great disparity from the average. HEFC has come up with a range of figures that suggest that there are low and high performers. I acknowledge the strong criticisms—particularly from one university, but from others, too—of the basis of the HEFC statistics. Where some institutions were less good at attracting a broader range of students from diverse backgrounds, we agreed that they should do better. We wanted the Government to police the system, as it were, and to provide incentives—a carrot-and-stick approach to under-performing institutions.

There can be no doubt that some institutions are under-performing—including, I must confess, the London School of Economics, of which I am a governor. My hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong

Learning is a former governor of that institution. I said expressly to the court of governors that the school is under-performing. I understand the reason for that—it takes a broader spread of students from diverse social and economic backgrounds.

We clearly encouraged under-performers to examine the position carefully. We did not want to use abusive language. We encouraged a dialogue about problems. We wanted under-performing institutions to recognise problems and find ways of dealing with them. Whenever I met vice-chancellors or other senior people in universities, I encouraged them to use good management, to look down the supply chain and examine linkages with feeder schools.

When we visited the United States, we examined some of the most elite universities in the country—Princeton, Berkeley and Stanford—which had a sophisticated way of saying that they did not receive many students from poorer social backgrounds in their part of the US. They wanted to know what they were doing wrong; they wanted to send out emissaries; they wanted to send out their full-time staff and their alumni to try to build the right relationships. We did some good work and made some good suggestions. We saw good practice that could be emulated in this country without Government interference.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): When the hon. Gentleman and his Committee were in the United States, did they find that the universities' endowment foundations, which are independent of the day-to-day or year-to-year inflow of funds for students, gave those universities a greater ability to take a profound look at the base from which they encourage students and at the substance of the institutions?

Mr. Sheerman: We all certainly picked up on that; the hon. Gentleman makes a good point. In fact, some of us have become sick of hearing excuses from higher education institutions in this country, such as "America is a different culture, the alumni give to universities, they have had hundreds of years to establish funds."

I am sure that my colleagues will remember our visit to New York university. Twenty years ago, that university received few alumni donations and had few residences—most students commuted. It recognised the problem, decided to become a residential university, set up a new foundation and bought and rented buildings. We were told that none of the bankers said no when the university approached them and said that it wanted to buy a building, fill it for 52 weeks of the year and set the rent.

That is an example to Leeds, Bristol and so many universities in towns where accommodation is a problem. Many universities should have done something about that a long time ago. We saw many exemplars in the United States: not only did universities start from scratch to build up that kind of base but they did so rapidly.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Will my hon. Friend comment on the importance of graduate schools in the universities that he is discussing? From my experience of working and teaching in the United States, graduate students do much of the undergraduate teaching and are paid for it. Graduate students also do much of the research work. Thus, students are attracted to certain universities because of the increased teaching and support for teaching by people of the same age group.

Mr. Sheerman: That is a good point, too, but I am somewhat embarrassed by it. We skirted around the issue of using postgraduates in teaching, although we visited UMIST and saw some examples there. I will be honest and admit that, under our terms of reference, we did not pursue that; the Select Committee should return to it.

The Select Committee model has been that a report into higher education, early years or whatever was produced, the experience was cathartic and the report was put on a shelf to gather dust. I believe that most hon. Members are aware that, under my chairmanship, we regularly take down such reports and review them. The Government are re-evaluating student finance and want to make an impact, so we are dusting off the higher education reports and taking new evidence. I say clearly to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) that we will make different representations this time, because there is now more evidence about student poverty.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman protests too much about the lack of response in December—in fact, there was significant evidence—and let the cat out of the bag when he said that there was a general election coming up. Clearly, the report is about the general election rather than about the issues.

In the United States, the Select Committee looked at a system of university structuring and funding that has a totally different foundation. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) is right to refer to endowments but, clearly, the endowment system in the United States is different from what we have even at Oxbridge. Why would the Chairman of the Select Committee steadfastly refuse to take on board the evidence of the Cubie commission, which had completed a most detailed examination of student aversion to debt in Scotland? Andrew Cubie gave evidence to the Committee—all the evidence was current—yet the report made virtually no reference to it; it is as if it did not exist, as if Scotland were some faraway planet rather than a part of the United Kingdom. What is the explanation?

Mr. Sheerman: The explanation is that we took an enormous amount of evidence. It was at my instigation that Cubie and his colleagues were invited to give evidence at the outset. We set a precedent: the Minister for Education in the Scottish Parliament came to give evidence to the Select Committee too.

We listened to the evidence. It is the Select Committee's job to sift and evaluate the evidence and then to strike a balance, which some people will not like. However, we believe that we got the balance right. We published one report, on access, on 30 January 2001 and the other on 13 March 2001; it is early days in terms of hard statistics.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I recall that there was a

[Mr. Stephen O'Brien]

long discussion in the Committee about the relevance of Scotland to the outcome of the report. In considering Cubie and the Scottish experience, we viewed Scotland as a helpful comparator; it represented an experience learning curve for the Committee, as did our trip to the United States. However, the focus was on England and Wales as a function of the Government's devolution responsibilities. The Committee was constrained in considering how much it could and should look to the Scottish experience as directly applicable rather than comparative. I do not know whether the Chairman of the Committee recollects that.

Mr. Sheerman: I recollect that but I also recollect the fact—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough is murmuring and whingeing and carrying on. The evidence that he has cannot have come from the majority of members of the Committee. If the hon. Gentleman had been on the Committee he would know what happened. We had dinner with Andrew Cubie, and talked to him formally and informally; he was an unhappy man because his recommendations had not been accepted by the Scottish Executive—the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party—and he was unhappy about the compromise. I understand that people in Scotland were as unhappy about it as many had been about the Government's reaction to the Dearing report.

We should not think that Cubie came from on high and made recommendations that were accepted and implemented in Scotland. When we took evidence it was very close to the event. A Select Committee should not be swept along by fashion and instantaneous evidence. It must consider things over time, as we did. The Scottish changes had just occurred; there was no evidence of what would happen. However, we now have evidence of how many children are going to Scotland to study; the figures are worrying because there is an increase in the number of students going to Scottish universities this year compared with other British universities. That marked diversity was shown in material published two weeks ago in the Scottish and the UK press.

Dr. Evan Harris: Further to the intervention by the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), I want to say that even if one does not accept that the Cubie recommendations are relevant to this country, his evidence should inform our discussions. There is nothing in the water in Scotland that makes people there more debt-averse than poor students here. Indeed, the Cubie report clearly stated that he proposed the introduction of non-repayable bursaries for some full-time higher education students to counter loan aversion and facilitate greater access, as

"only in this way will the universities and colleges help attract students from under-represented groups."

Whether from Cubie-full or the Scottish Executive, the message rings out from the evidence.

Mr. Sheerman: At certain times, when the hon. Gentleman was passionate about it, his voice rang out about certain aspects of the matter, but I do not remember his being so passionate about Cubie. He is both a member of the Select Committee and the Front Bench spokesman on higher education. In the run-up to the election, his party ran a successful campaign on student debt up and down the country, on university campuses and so on. That is not a criticism. I know where the hon. Gentleman is coming from and I applaud his political energy.

As I have taken many interventions, I shall continue for a couple of minutes over my time. The first report was very controversial and caused a lot of division and unhappiness. So far, no one has mentioned a particular piece of evidence in it—*[Interruption.]* I did not hear that name and I am not about to mention it. The first report was fair enough but the second one was agreed and had a very different tone. It would be wrong not to ask for those reports to be read and re-read. They were an honest evaluation of what we thought were the problems at the time.

A clear message that came to me as Chairman of the Select Cttee, as is written into the evidence, was that universities are the key to our future. Everyone knows that I share that view strongly, because I express it strongly whenever I talk about higher education. Most people in the House and the country do not understand just how vital universities will be in regenerating our economy. I know the criticism that people sometimes level at us, that some of us who believe in economic regeneration do not believe in individual fulfilment. Of course we all believe in individual fulfilment—but we also believe that a fulfilled individual can help us to create a successful, creative, imaginative and innovative economy. That is what we desperately need. I always challenge people to imagine taking universities out of any town or city. If we took them out of Leeds, Manchester, London and Huddersfield there would be devastation—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends want a commercial. The same would be true of Edinburgh, Bristol or anywhere. The importance of universities to the future of our regions, cities and towns cannot be underestimated.

What should we do? The evidence in the two reports highlighted several issues that the Government—and future Governments—must address to fulfil the potential of higher education. First, we must pay university teachers decent pay that attracts and retains talent. We are pretty close to the margin in keeping the talented people we need in higher education. I am still a vestigial member of the Association of University Teachers; I do not have much connection with it now but I passionately believe that university teachers must be paid decent wages. Many of those employed in universities do not earn what teachers earn. Last night I was talking to an Oxford professor; his son is also a professor, and earns less than a nursery head. People might say, "So what?", but the Government must consider the issue of salaries for research and teaching in universities.

Mr. Willis: Where is the money coming from?

Mr. Sheerman: We will come to that. It is a very good question, like all the hon. Gentleman's questions.

Secondly, we cannot just splurge on research for three years and then let it lapse. Money must constantly be poured into research if universities are to be taken

seriously as world-class research institutions. The Government have put significant amounts of money into research over the past three or four years, but they have to realise that the funding must continue. Higher salaries, research and the regeneration role must be maintained with real resources. The evidence given to the Select Committee showed that we were spending about the same percentage of gross domestic product per capita on higher education as most of our major competitors. It was not as much as the highest spend, but somewhere in the middle band.

Let us examine more closely our higher education spend. About 40 to 45 per cent. of it was allocated to student support, which was double the spend of our competitors. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough was right to ask where the money would come from. If we returned to the old system of maintenance grants for all students that we had until three years ago, where would the money come from? Let us consider our priorities. The majority of members of the Select Committee agreed that we must help poorer students who are finding it difficult to stay at university. However, for the average student, the principles of Dearing were right. Students should pay something towards the cost of their education because they are receiving a great benefit that will repay them throughout their lifetime. If they can afford to, parents should pay something towards their children's higher education. The present sum of £1,000 a year is a small proportion of the cost.

Mr. Willis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: Not at the moment. I shall be finishing in a couple of minutes. If we want such expansion, where will the money come from? We should never return to the time when we spent an enormous amount of money on student support, but it is important to get the balance right at the margins. There is now a much stronger case for protecting marginal and poorer students and introducing a new form of financial support for them. We may have to go beyond that, but we cannot afford to move much further the balance of HE spend on student support. Perhaps the money will come from parents. Many hon. Members have benefited from a higher education, so why should we not pay something extra towards it?

Mr. Willis: How about the penny on income tax?

Mr. Sheerman: I knew that the hon. Gentleman would say that and he makes a fair point. A balance should be struck so that those who benefit from higher education make a contribution to it.

There have been many interventions in my speech so at times I have been slightly off track. We had an interesting time compiling the two reports. I am sure that most members of the Select Committee enjoyed that process. We learned a lot and that is shown in the reports. That there was some slight disagreement was shown in the first report, but the second report was agreed unanimously and it sets out some helpful conclusions.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister does not think that I am not in agreement with the Government, but they must take higher education more seriously. I accept that my hon. Friend is new in the job. She will be scrutinised by the Select Committee soon, as will all the members of the education team, and she will face some tough questions. I know that she is committed to higher education, but it is no good people being committed if they let others kick them around. I have known my hon. Friend for a long time and I know that people do not usually kick her around and get away with it. Surprise, surprise, perhaps the Prime Minister became worried about what was happening in the election campaign and said that student finance and higher education had to be revalued. If such a message came from No. 10, so be it. I hope that the Department is resolute to ensure that the inquiry produces a proposal that works positively for higher education and gets the balance right. It would be criminal to get the balance wrong.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough will not like this, but senior people in the university system—some speaking over dinner or a cup of tea rather than in front of the Select Committee—said that the change in the basis of student finance was one of the toughest but bravest measures that the Labour Government introduced. Hon. Members may not like it, but, that is the opinion of many people in higher education. If priorities for higher education are to be changed, tough decisions must be made. Decisions may be tough, but they must be right in order for the correct developments in higher education to happen over the next 20 to 30 years and that is important.

I crave your indulgence, Mr. Pike, for a longer speech than I intended. However, many hon. Members shared the time .

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), it will be noticed that many hon. Members wish to speak in this important debate. I can call everybody only if hon. Members co-operate. I urge that to be taken into account. I do not have the power to curtail speeches, but courtesy should be shown to others who wish to speak.

3.11 pm

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Thank you, Mr. Pike. I will do my best to comply with your encouragement to be brief by highlighting a few of the aspects that arise from the reports and the Government's subsequent responses, rather than rehearsing the Committee's experience during the prolonged and thorough inquiry on higher education.

It was a privilege to serve on the Select Committee on Education and Employment, although I am no longer a member of an Education Select Committee. All hon. Members agree that nothing is more important than our responsibility, as a generation of politicians, to influence the chances in life that are given to the generation of people who are coming through the education system. The Committee seriously considered that and, above all, how to give the correct context and encouragement to professionals who provide the service. The Committee was hard working. I echo the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Skills—as it is now called—in congratulating and praising the raft of expert advisers who helped the Committee and who were committed and frequently available. They were exceptionally helpful.

[Mr. Stephen O'Brien]

I pay tribute to the hard work and leadership given to the Committee by my colleague Mr. Nicholas St. Aubyn, the former hon. Member for Guildford, who, with a clear set of views and an open mind to the advice that was received, always engaged in the debate on higher education with deep passion and commitment, which continues during his temporary sabbatical outside this place. I am pleased that the Chairman acknowledges that.

The Chairman was correct to show that there was a balance between the positive and the less attractive side of the way in which the Committee interpreted the evidence. While there were differences of emphasis and, at times, vigorous arguments about student retention, the report was unanimous because although compromises were made during discussions, the thrust was correct. The Chairman fairly identified the matters on which we look to the Government to show commitment and practical application equal to that demonstrated across all parties during the report's production.

I wish to pick up on a point that was made by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). It is important to state that debt aversion was accorded a lower priority in the report than would now be considered appropriate. However, at the time, the evidence was embryonic. Evidence was offered by Southampton university, but it was not corroborated, and there was not a large enough body of experience to show that it was conclusive, or the primary issue.

As we lacked conclusive evidence, it was difficult to reflect in the report the instinct that was shared by Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members that debt aversion is a high-priority issue. However, I wish to place it on record that there was a discussion about that, although the report is less explicit on the issue than it should have been.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Why did the hon. Gentleman take that evidence if he was then going to ignore it on the grounds that it was too new?

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman's question answers itself. A judgment needed to be made, and a Select Committee's function, in terms of the way the House as a whole conducts its business, is to make collective judgments. With regard to the access report, the collective principle was not applied because there was a serious diversion of views—as well as of motivation concerning what was going on. However, with regard to the reports under discussion, judgments were reached in a more collective manner, and some compromises were made to try to maintain unanimity and to create an impact—I hope that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that, at times, the process of the House is intended to provide a context that will carry impact. This debate is being extended so that the point that he and I are making is on the record. That will help to show where we stood at the time that the report went to print. I hope that that will be of assistance to him.

With regard to the overall context, Governments of every political persuasion take seriously their obligations in respect of education—and higher education in particular, because higher education qualifications are the most obvious and demonstrable measure of a successful education system. They also make the biggest impact on the nation's economy and social life.

In 1979, when I left university, one in eight of our young people were entering higher education. In 1997—and I have, of course, chosen that date at random—that statistic had fallen to just under one in three. That step change in terms of student access—and all hon. Members hope that there has also been a step change in terms of quality of education—was achieved under the previous Conservative Governments. I am glad to note, however, that the present Government are determined to deliver on their aspiration that up to one in two people will have the opportunity of a higher education by the time they reach the age of 30.

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I endorse the point that the hon. Gentleman has made about that broadening process. Does he agree that much, if not all, of that increase was due to the conversion of polytechnics into universities, and that, because of that, all political parties, regardless of whether or not they are in government, have a responsibility to show concern for the resources of those new universities, and the investment in them?

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman has made a broader point, which I accept. Redefining polytechnics as universities inevitably made a huge measurable change. The right interpretation is that, during that period, there was a welcome recognition that all those engaging in higher education, whether of a very academic nature or of a more vocational nature, were being placed on a more equal footing. That must be the right approach. The issue that he raises, into which I shall not stray, as it goes down another path, is that of the Government's aspiration of one in two people receiving higher education. If that is achieved, employers and society may question the value of those academic and vocational qualifications, in their various guises and subjects, and whether they allow people to make the huge step forward to which the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who is Chairman of the Select Committee, referred. That balance needs to be struck, but it is a debate for another time, and one that I would welcome.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To pursue the point about the extension of participation in the 1980s, does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the main reason for that was the increased supply of young people with the necessary qualifications to go to university, which was entirely as a result of the extension of comprehensive education by Labour Governments in the 1960s and 1970s?

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for Eddisbury, I want to make it clear that I am not Mr. Deputy Speaker but Mr. Pike.

Mr. O'Brien: Thank you, Mr. Pike. I hope that I shall remember that.

I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's point. A combination of factors was responsible. The broadening of educational opportunity was no doubt a contributory

factor, but that should not diminish, for instance, the role played by those systems of education that retained grammar schools, those that chose to become grant-maintained and assisted places scheme—much lamented by me and my party—and the independent sector. It is therefore wrong to identify one source of advantage.

In terms of trying to ensure that students are retained once they have had the opportunity to go into higher education, some of the points in the student retention report should be highlighted, especially in relation to the question of non-completion. Although the report should be read in terms of statistics, issues of portability, time spent and the accreditation given to students whose circumstances can be exceptionally varied individually and geographically can impact on the funding of those students. The issue of portability needs to be addressed, and I hope that the Government will tell us their thinking on that.

A point that did not appear in the main body of the report, partly because, sadly, it was in the excised version of the powerful minority report, and which was a passion of my former colleague Nicholas St. Aubyn, was that we should give much more attention to the year out, which fosters greater maturity and acceptance of the obligations and opportunities that are provided by higher education. Sometimes, it is best to take that year out in the middle of a course, so the arguments about portability also apply in that regard.

Dr. Evan Harris: For the record, I urge the hon. Gentleman to remember, in the course of his fascinating and enjoyable speech, that there were two minority reports. The report to which he refers was the one that he and his colleague produced.

Mr. O'Brien: That is almost strictly true. However, the hon. Gentleman will recall that on one extraordinarily exciting occasion we managed to agree with him on part of his minority report, and he managed to agree with us on part of our minority report. It is a shame that we were not able to develop that wonderful marriage of thought further.

Moving onwards very swiftly from what is becoming extremely dangerous ground, it is important to emphasise, as the report says and as is accepted by the Government, that social class is not completely straightforward in terms of defining many of the issues that surfaced during our inquiry. Although the Government have given relatively comprehensive and helpful responses on the student retention report, their response to the access report has been poor by comparison. That is partly a matter of presentation, because in the case of the student retention report they helpfully responded recommendation by recommendation. They responded to the access report, however, with a broad-brush letter. I am ashamed to have to expose the Government deliberately trying to avoid answering certain of the recommendations in the access report because the issues that it dealt with were more awkward.

We cannot have this debate without having an honest and robust discussion about funding not only of students, but of staff and research. That point was made earlier. Often, in science and technology subjects, teachers are able to secure some external supplement to their income. Perhaps that should be encouraged as part of the marriage of the scientific community with the real world. However, it is much more difficult for those teaching in the arts and the less-developed subjects to secure such a supplement. Although best practice should be followed, such as the Cambridge science park, there is a lot more work to be done. We need to consider the true nature of the marketplace.

On student funding, it was welcome that the Government signed up to the strong argument put forward by my former colleague Nicholas St. Aubyn for the raising of the threshold to £20,000. That is important, not least for when students come to repay the money that they must contribute to their education de post facto. However, it is important mainly because the £10,000 threshold was catching those who wished to work in the charity sector and in public service, for example. Their salaries were just a little bit north of £10,000 but they were not really in a position to pay much until they were earning £20,000.

It is important, for the record, to talk about the access report. It will be recalled that while the terms of reference unquestionably were broad to start with, we expanded them to include access. That resulted in paragraph 11 of the majority report dealing with what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said at a conference on 25 May 2000, when he referred by name—he introduced her into the public domain—to Laura Spence, whose case has been much publicised since. It is said that she is now having a very successful time at Harvard university and I am delighted by that. The Committee was seriously divided on that issue. One has only to examine the series of reports on the divisions within the Committee and the particular wording that was tabled by Mr. St. Aubyn and by me. It was felt that the Chancellor should not have made those remarks, but we ended up with an exceptionally unfortunate phrase in the majority report, which states:

"We decided not to examine in detail the individual case of the young woman cited in the Chancellor's remarks. We welcomed the opportunity for public debate".

That left out, after the phrase "the Chancellor's remarks", the following phrase:

"although we suspect it was not the most apposite example which he could have chosen."

The majority report goes on to state:

"The most recent evidence from Oxford University indicates that the number of applications made from state schools increased after the Chancellor's speech, and the number of offers made by the university to state school pupils also increased, dispelling any notion that the Chancellor's remarks were unhelpful."

That is where the Committee was exceptionally unhelpful in its majority report. I will defer to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), whose seat includes Oxford university and who will have the latest information, but I understand that the opposite is the case and that things have been difficult as a result of publicity that the Chancellor inadvisedly gave.

That episode caused much unhappiness on the Committee, not least because it threw into question the motivations of some members, who we felt had more of an eye on the general election than on making the process helpful to the House, and to students and teachers. I wish to place that on the record because it is important to ensure that those points are drawn out.

3.29 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I shall try to keep my remarks brief because I know that many hon. Members, including those on the Select Committee, want to contribute.

I want to try to put the Select Committee's work into the context of my constituency experience, and to urge the Minister to study the Committee's recommendations and act on them to make a real difference to levels of participation in higher education. All too often, Select Committee reports gather dust. It is critical that recommendations are closely examined and that the Minister makes detailed proposals for implementing them.

I want to deal with several aspects of higher education, but of particular importance are the way in which students pay for their education, the Government contribution to maintenance and to grants or loans, and the funding of higher education establishments. It is important that the Government get those things right and do not enter into hasty arrangements that might make matters worse. I hope that the Minister will attend to what the report says about getting the balance right. My constituency badly needs more people to go into higher education, and for many people from families in which no one has done so before the prospect of debt is not an encouragement. We need a cultural change, so that people feel better about higher education.

It is important that we should use joined-up thinking in considering what is to happen next and the process by which the report will be absorbed and configured within Government policy. Sure start and the excellence in cities initiative have been mentioned, and I am happy to report, first-hand, a huge difference in my constituency as a result of such work. Education maintenance awards are relevant in this context. In Stoke-on-Trent there has been a great increase in the number of people continuing into the sixth form and taking A-levels, and, as a result, being able to consider higher education.

I do not know whether other hon. Members do as I do, but whenever I attend a school awards evening I ask a very pertinent question of the parents who are gathered proudly in the hall to see their children accept their awards: how many of those parents were in higher education? The report makes an important recommendation about the need for us to establish an infrastructure that allows for family history and encourages first-generation students into higher education. We must make it possible for the culture to change. Education maintenance awards can achieve that.

Stoke-on-Trent, like other pilot areas, has now been told that there will be a one-year extension for current year 11 students. We greatly welcome that, but the education maintenance awards were for a three-year pilot process, and it is critical that the analysis is completed as soon as possible. I want to be able to tell my constituents that the extension will not be just for a year. Instead, I want the programme to be rolled out in Stoke-on-Trent and, before too long, nationally. This is exactly the time of the parliamentary year when the Chancellor is considering future spending plans. Whatever long-term decisions are to be made about education maintenance awards, they must be an integral part of the agenda of not only the Department for Education and Skills, but the Treasury. I want a decision as quickly as possible, because I want to be able to tell people that the awards will continue in Stoke-on-Trent and be extended to other parts of Staffordshire, where people are often in college side by side with students from Stoke-on-Trent. They cannot understand why someone who lives virtually across the road from them has an education maintenance award, but they do not.

In case the Minister is in any doubt on the subject, I can tell her that GCSE results are improving significantly in Stoke-on-Trent. The number of people staying on in school has increased from about 54 per cent. to 64 per cent., which I attribute to the difference made by education maintenance awards. I have been to every high school in my constituency and encouraged people to take up the awards. I have helped to make information available to parents, and I hope that the Government will make the awards a standard part of educational policy and closely consider the evidence and discussion about that in the Select Committee report.

The education debate is relevant to the agenda of the regional development agencies, which are to improve our local economy. I was pleased to see the report flag up the role of learning and skills councils and the way in which it is envisaged that they will work locally with the ConneXions agency and regional development agencies. We could give them greater impetus to bring about more of a cultural change in access to higher education, not only for students in school, but for mature students.

It is unfortunate that north Staffordshire has had a huge number of job losses in manufacturing, some of them in your constituency, Mr. Pike. Many men, often in their early or late 50s, who are highly skilled in engineering, have lost their jobs at the Michelin company. Some who are my constituents have told me that they would like access to higher education, and perhaps to go on to train as teachers and make their expertise of a lifetime in industry available to young people. However, they feel that the finance system means that they cannot contemplate higher education at that stage in their lives. Will the Minister consider ways in which learning and skills councils, with their new responsibilities, could do more to promote the entrance into higher education of more mature students as well? That could launch people who had unfortunately lost their jobs due to the problems in manufacturing into a new career, even at a late stage in their lives.

I must flag up another issue, although I know that time is short. We are pleased that Stoke-on-Trent is an excellence in cities area. The award is working well and its results have been transforming. It has encouraged our young people to think seriously about higher education. However, I must tell the Minister that the opportunity bursaries are something of a discrepancy in the higher education work undertaken through the excellence in cities awards.

I should give hon. Members a little geography lesson. Stoke-on-Trent and the borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme, which is not in my constituency, lie side by side. Someone who did not know the area would probably not know where the boundaries were. My constituents who go to college to do A-levels in their sixth form mainly attend the college of further education in Newcastle-under-Lyme. Like the colleges in Stoke-on-

Trent, it is an excellent educational establishment. About 415 of my constituents attend it, all of whom live in the excellence in cities area. When they are ready for higher education and want to attend Staffordshire university—where much work has been done to widen participation in education—or to Manchester Metropolitan university, they are told that, because of the way in which the regulations are applied, they are ineligible for opportunity bursaries.

I know, for example, of a young girl who lived in Tunstall and went to a local school. She attended the college at Newcastle and wanted to go on to Manchester Metropolitan university to study sport. However, she was not eligible for a bursary, not because of where she lived, but because of the college that she had attended. Newcastle college is not yet in an excellence in cities area—I hope that it soon will be, although that is not up to me—and it is only an observer college in Stoke-on-Trent's excellence in cities partnership. Its 415 students from my constituency are, therefore, ineligible for bursaries unless the universities that they choose are prepared to consider them for hardship awards.

Staffordshire university has made huge strides. It now allocates the joint fifth highest number of bursaries in the higher education sector; reflecting its successful record of allowing access to and widening participation by under-represented groups. It has had far too much demand for bursaries and simply cannot offer any more. If we are serious about getting more people into higher education, we must look at such obstacles in more detail and find ways of overcoming them.

Finally, I welcome the Select Committee's recommendation that something similar to the excellence in cities partnerships should be available to higher education establishments, allowing them the opportunity to access extra funding. I can envisage a new pilot area, linked to north Staffordshire, which would take on board the new medical university that is to be at Keele university. It could, perhaps, include Staffordshire, Keele and Manchester Metropolitan universities, and could attract people from the wider urban area, where there have been so many manufacturing job losses and where north Staffordshire partnership is so keen to promote access for all to higher education.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: On the point made by the hon. Lady before she turned to bursaries, would she agree that it would be helpful if the Government were to initiate and to report on an audit of the number of university teachers and other teaching professionals who are now members of either regional governmental bodies or learning and skills councils? The Government talk of partnership, but those bodies do not make many appointments that would help to advance the hon. Lady's arguments. That would be a good area in which to make progress.

Ms Walley: I said at the outset that I wanted a joined-up agenda and links between the Department and the wider economy. The membership of bodies such as those mentioned by the hon. Gentleman is critical if they are to have the necessary vision and to deliver the policies that will give people improved access to higher education so that they can then contribute to the area's economic success. I believe that I have taken up more time than was allocated to me. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes), may I say that Front-Bench Members are co-operating well and have indicated that they will catch my eye at 5 pm? That will assist hon. Members in working out—we are talking about higher education, after all—how much time is available.

3.44 pm

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield): Since my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) issued his minority report, and since the general election, the Government have accepted that they have got it wrong on student debt, access and retention. In a different area, they have admitted that they botched the rushed introduction of AS-levels, which will also have adverse effects on access to higher education, although those effects may only be short term.

With the funding of students and further and higher education back in the melting pot, it is vital that the Government go back to the two reports. The evidence in them clearly shows that student debt and fear of debt are preventing full access by all social groups to higher education at undergraduate and postgraduate level and causing retention problems. That evidence has been further reinforced by the Cubie report in Scotland, and its implementation, and by the publishing of the Rees report on student finance in Wales. [*Interruption.*]

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): I shall suspend the sitting for 15 minutes. We will be back at four o'clock, which means that the timetable that I announced moves back by 15 minutes. I was tempting fate.

3.45 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): For everyone's guidance, I should make it clear that the vote in the House will add 15 minutes to our sitting.

Paul Holmes: Labour Back Benchers may well tell us that the problems of student debt, access and retention are exaggerated, that only 50 per cent. of students pay fees because of means-testing and that loans are cheap and easy to repay. That would be pre-emptive spin from Treasury Ministers which, like the Prime Minister, must have been told by plenty of voters during the recent election campaign that debt and fear of debt are major problems. I was certainly told that on the council estates of Chesterfield.

Let me give some personal examples. In 1975, I was the first member of my family to go to university. When I was offered a place, my father was unemployed and my mother was a part-time home help. I doubt that I would have gone to university if I had thought that I would leave with a debt of between £10,000 and £14,000, which is the average range of debt now.

[Paul Holmes]

Twenty years later, I became a secondary school teacher and, for my last 12 years in teaching, I was a head of sixth form, or years 12 and 13. That involved guiding sixth form students through their higher education and job choices. The school at which I worked for the last 10 years took quite a number of children who were the first generation of their families to enter post-16 education, let alone higher education. It was difficult to persuade some to take that step. Some said that they had to go to work to contribute to the family budget. Some children of single parents said that they had to work to help with younger brothers and sisters. Other children and young adults had experienced family breakdown and could not rely on parental contributions, even if Government means-testing showed that their parents should contribute. For many reasons, people were put off higher education, and there was a noticeable increase in their numbers after the introduction of the 1997 regulations on paying fees and abolishing maintenance grants.

The Government must review the overwhelming body of evidence on the issue. If students are to be asked to pay for the benefits of higher education, they must pay post-graduation, while they are earning, and not up front, while they are studying. The Government could consider a system of taxation that has been tried and tested, for which the bureaucracy already exists and which is fair and related to ability to pay. A graduate who became a low-paid nurse, social worker or teacher would not then be required to pay back the same amount as a graduate who became a highly paid lawyer, accountant or company director. I have heard it rumoured that such a system exists—it is called income tax.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify a point of policy for me? The Liberal Democrats have made great play of proposing a small increase in income tax to deal with those problems. Are the penny on income tax and the financial structure that was put together during the general election designed to cater only for the current level of students, which is approximately 33 per cent. of the population? Would it also provide the financial capability to cater for a figure of 50 per cent., which is the Government target? If it is the former, do the Liberal Democrats share the Government's ambition, and how would they pay for it?

Paul Holmes: The costings that we set out in the election manifesto were given a clean bill of health by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, unlike those of the other two main parties. The figures made it crystal clear that the penny on income tax and the increase in income tax on high earners who earned more than £100,000 a year would pay for the proposals in our manifesto. If the Government undertake a review of the system—as they say they will—and there is a further increase, the way forward would have to be considered. However, it would have to be a genuine review.

Chris Grayling: What about the 50 per cent. target?

Paul Holmes: The 50 per cent. target is long-established, but I question how it will be funded. I also wonder how other aspects of the expansion of universities, such as teaching resources, will be funded.

As well as considering undergraduate education, and why people want to go to university or are put off from going, the Government must also consider postgraduate education. Universities are suffering shortages and crises. They are having difficulty recruiting university teachers because there are not enough postgraduate students, particularly in the sciences, and they are having problems with postgraduate access.

Earlier this week, I talked to students from the university of London. They told me that student friends of theirs had been denied further funding or loans because they were so much in debt with their previous student loans and tuition fees. Many people said that the problem would begin to bite in the next few years as the level of student debt rose from the average figure of between £10,000 and £14,000. Indeed, one or two such cases have been highlighted by the press during the past few months. If universities are suffering major problems in the recruitment and retention of postgraduate students as well as of undergraduates, the Government need to take action.

The Government need also to consider other aspects of higher education expansion. It must be funded properly if the present 33 per cent. level is to be maintained, let alone increased to 50 per cent. It cannot be done by robbing one side to pay the other. One cannot rob the students to fund higher education, and one cannot rob higher education to pay the students; if one tries, neither will be done satisfactorily. The past few years have seen a 36 per cent. drop in the funding per student. There are more students in the system, and less is being spent on their education.

The Taylor report showed that £900 million a year more is needed to provide adequate teaching resources. A crisis in staffing for universities and further education is imminent; unless the Government take action in advance rather than waiting until the crisis hits them, it will match the crisis that already exists in schools.

I shall now comment on some aspects of university education for disabled students. The last school where I taught was very good on social inclusion, and over the past 10 or 12 years I have taught a wide range of children with various disabilities in mainstream classes. The youngest of those children is now a second-year student at university. She is registered blind as a result of three astigmatisms. When she came to look for a university place, she found that many seemed to offer good facilities for disabled students. However, on visiting them she found that the facilities often fell short, although not, I hasten to add, at the university where she now studies. I know that organisations involved with various disabilities are very concerned about some aspects of that problem. Amendments to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which come into force next September will tackle quite a few of those problems, but still leave some pockets untouched which need to be tackled by appropriate legislation.

Finance for disabled students also needs to be considered. They face the same rules on finance as other students, but they face extra difficulties. For example, the present system assumes that, these days, students will work their way through university. Disabled students find that much harder, although it depends on their disability. Some will not be able to get part-time work as easily as able-bodied students. Other disabilities, such as ME or multiple sclerosis, cause

problems with fatigue; such students cannot work many hours, and if they are working on their degree and supposedly working to pay their way through university, they will face a double bind.

Some of the rules on benefits and disability student allowances may cause problems for disabled students on part-time courses. Compared with able-bodied students, they may have difficulty moving in and out of the benefits system as they move between work and full-time education. It takes too long for the system to catch up with their movements. Many who receive the disabled student allowance find that the money paid to provide for extra facilities and transport requirements comes on stream only several months after their course has started, which creates major problems. A number of problems that specifically affect disabled students need separate attention, even though many of them are closely linked to the general issue of student finance.

4.9 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I am glad to be able to contribute to the debate. I think that the report produced by the Committee, at a time when I was not a member of it, is excellent, dealing with almost all the issues that need consideration.

Access to university, especially for young people and mature students from working-class backgrounds, is one of the issues about which, of all my other preoccupations as a Member of Parliament, I feel most strongly. I worked on it for the best part of 15 years before entering the House. My concern about the limitations of the United Kingdom's higher education system arose from my experience working in the United States in the late 1970s and observing how it had moved to mass participation in the university system, which in those days was unthinkable in the United Kingdom.

I welcome today's debate. It is interesting that it is the third debate in eight days on higher education. There is a temptation to repeat arguments that were well rehearsed last week, but I will avoid it and concentrate on one or two specifics. I do, however, want to return to the big issue of student finance before I finish.

I welcome the Government's achievements through the reform of student finance in their first term, and the prospect of further improvements to that. I welcome also the significant improvements in student achievement at GCSE and the prospect of greater achievement at A-level, as the years go by, with the reform introduced by curriculum 2000. I welcome too the prospect of the wider curriculum reform for 14 to 19-year-olds flagged up in the recent White Paper on schools and its consultative document. The direction of Government policy is absolutely right, forming the essential foundation to enhance participation and achieve the target of getting 50 per cent. of young people into university or higher education by 2010.

The expansion of higher education between 1979 and 1997 was possible only because of the increased supply of young people with the necessary qualifications, brought about by the extension of comprehensive education in the 1960s and 1970s. That is an indisputable fact, and the Conservative party is in a state of denial if it continues to pretend that that was not a factor.

I turn to some specific points. I think that the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) pointed out the distinction between the Government's responses to the two reports. That concerns me, too. The Government's response to the report on access is far sketchier than their response to the report on student retention, a fact that must be registered. The response to the report on retention was extremely detailed and helpful, but there was a tendency in both reports to exploit the division of responsibility for higher education between the Department, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and individual institutions, and perhaps to abdicate some responsibility from time to time. In the Government's response to the report on retention, there were numerous places—I counted six—where a particular recommendation was dismissed as a matter for individual institutions or for the HEFC.

I shall dwell on one point, although it is a tiny detail. In the report on retention, the Government responded to the issue of outreach activities and pastoral care to support participation by recommending that HEFC and individual institutions look carefully at the matter. HEFC's response in the same report says that that is a matter largely for individual institutions. In the response to the report on access, however, the Government accept that they are taking an initiative. The difficulty of having two reports to respond to has led to a slightly contradictory response by the Government. In general, the temptation must be resisted to say that something is not a matter for Government but the responsibility of the individual institutions or the HEFC. I would like to see a stronger and more interventionist role by the Government in setting firmer parameters and a clearer direction for the HEFC.

Having distinguished between the two reports, I should like briefly to dwell on some specifics. I welcome the introduction of both the new curriculum 2000 and the new Universities and Colleges Admissions Service tariff. I am concerned that some universities have dismissed curriculum 2000 and do not seem to have adjusted their admissions procedures. The report refers to officials in the Department working closely with individual institutions, but it would be helpful if the Minister, either today or in due course, were to make a brief statement. It is unacceptable that universities can ignore a major curriculum reform with its associated implications for the UCAS tariff system. The universities that are most dismissive of the new curriculum and tariff system are precisely those that are least concerned about widening their participation and social base.

Paul Holmes: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman has said. Universities are slow to accept new qualification systems such as the general national vocational qualification. However, does he accept that during the past 18 months it has been difficult for universities to accept qualifications such as AS-levels? Universities, like the teachers—among whom I include myself—who had to introduce those qualifications, did not know the system until the course had been taught for six months.

Mr. Chaytor: I do not accept that. I speak as the parent of a child who is at university and of another who is currently applying. My observation of their

[Mr. Chaytor]

experience of the AS-level system does not conform to the sense of crisis and chaos that the hon. Gentleman wants to create. However, I take the point that with such a major innovation in the curriculum there will be teething problems, which is something that the Government recognised earlier this year. The report on AS-levels issued in June was sensible, and there will be a further report in December to make more substantial recommendations to ease the implementation of curriculum 2000.

Turning to the question of the school year, it is a ludicrous anomaly that we have a university admissions system based on predicted, rather than achieved, grades. That is unsustainable, and I welcome the debate on that matter. There is a weight of evidence in favour of switching to a different structure for the school year that would allow students to get their grades and then apply, rather than applying in anticipation. That would be better for students and it would be more efficient in terms of administrative processes and costs. It would also be less time-consuming for individual universities to consider applications only from students with grades broadly in line with those required. The report refers to the Local Government Association consulting on changes to the school year to facilitate a new admissions system based on actual results, but the report does not say how long that will take. It would be helpful if the Minister were to comment on that matter.

I endorse the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on education maintenance allowances. It grieves my constituents that they are not eligible for EMAs. There is a significant increase in participation in EMA pilot areas, and I add my voice to those calling for an early decision on their extension. I hope that there will be an indication of that later this month in the pre-Budget report. I am not sure that any Government could afford or would be wise to make EMAs universal without dealing with the associated issue of child benefit. Until recently I was able to go to the post office every Monday and claim £27.75 on behalf of my two children who are over-18 and in full-time education. The woman in the queue next to me, whose children left school at 16, was unable to claim child benefit, which is a disgraceful anomaly. The question of the taxation of child benefit must be part of the equation in extending the principle of student support to all over-16 students.

The report refers to the postcode premium. I know that the chairman and members of the University Grants Committee felt strongly that that should be enhanced. The HEFC is evaluating the postcode premium's impact. However, it has not said how long the evaluation will take, and it would be helpful if the Minister could say something about that. It appears to be an effective way to widen participation, but as yet no firm conclusion has been drawn.

Reference is made to the importance of higher education institutions linking with further education colleges and working more closely with the newly formed local learning and skills councils and RDAs. Where that happens, it would be useful if the Government could publicise best practice. In my experience, the gaps between universities and local colleges and sixth forms are sometimes immense. In contrast with their American counterparts, British universities have been very slow in building links with the potential suppliers of their students. Such links can be established at a much faster rate only if we have well-documented examples of the clustering of universities, colleges and schools.

On staffing, I endorse completely the comments of the Select Committee Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), on the crucial importance of doing something about the salaries of university teachers. It is true that some university teachers are able to supplement their basic salary with significant earnings from various forms of consultancy work, but many are not. We need a major investigation into that, and it is not good enough for the Government to abdicate responsibility by saying that salary levels are a matter for individual institutions. We must have some commonality in the salary structure of those teaching in primary and secondary schools, in further education colleges and in universities, along with agreed differentials to reflect the nature of the work.

The access report touches rather briefly on the Oxbridge admissions systems. I do not want to rehearse the story of Laura Spence. On the way to vote in the House, I discussed the matter briefly with the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), and it seems that our views differ slightly. I think that the Chancellor was absolutely right to put the matter at the top of the public agenda, and I welcome the report's conclusion that it is not sufficient for the Oxbridge universities merely to publicise the proportion of applicants from the state and independent sectors who are offered places. What we need is a breakdown of those figures college by college, and a clear statement on what the Oxbridge universities are going to do to improve those ratios.

Chris Grayling: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Chancellor's unfortunate intervention in the Laura Spence affair resulted in a 2 per cent. fall in applications to Oxford from state schools? In light of that, does he think that it was a constructive intervention?

Mr. Ch[illegible]: I am sorry, but that does not relate to figures on entries to Oxford and Cambridge between 1999 and 2000 which I was given in response to a parliamentary question of 5 March 2001. I urge the hon. Gentleman to check the latest statistics if he wishes to justify his prejudices further.

There has been huge progress in opening up the Oxbridge admissions system to students from state schools, and many people at Oxford and Cambridge are working very hard on this issue. The record of some colleges is hugely impressive.

However, in places offered to state school students, there is a 100 per cent. differential between the best and worst performing Cambridge university colleges, which have figures of 84 per cent. and 42 per cent. respectively. That is unacceptable. I shall resist the temptation to name and shame the worst performing college, but I endorse the following point from the access report:

> "HEFC has noted that for any given total of A-level points, students from comprehensive schools obtain higher classes of degree than those from independent schools."

The admissions tutor of every Oxford and Cambridge college ought to consider that comment extremely carefully.

The Government need to take a more interventionist role. The information that Oxford and Cambridge now produce, which was put in the public domain for the first time in response to my parliamentary question of 3 April, is not in a standardised format and there is no requirement on Oxford and Cambridge to produce it. I hope that the Government will have further discussions with those two excellent universities to ensure that the information appears in a standardised format every year so that parents, students and Parliament can judge the progress that they are making.

Dr. Evan Harris: I hope to say more about the over-performance of comprehensive school students if I am lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Pike.

Does the hon. Gentleman think that the number of offers made by various colleges at Cambridge has anything to do with the number of applications received by each college? If fewer people apply to certain colleges, it is hard for them to award places.

Mr. Chaytor: That has always been the standard excuse of people in the Oxbridge establishment who wish to deny the reality of the situation. I completely agree that students from state schools must be given greater encouragement to apply, but I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's argument as a justification for the appalling differentials that exist and the continuing inertia of many Oxbridge colleges in that regard.

I want to turn to a matter that is not covered in the report on access, and I would be interested to hear the Minister's comments on it. In his excellent introduction, my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield said that many young people between the ages of 13 and 16 lose interest in education, which was cited as one of the key problems in enhancing access. That applies in the eight excellent comprehensive schools in my constituency of Bury, North, which have some of the best results to be found in any equivalent catchment area anywhere in the country. If it applies there, must it not apply to a far greater degree in those parts of the country that still do not have comprehensive education? What happens to youngsters in secondary modern schools in Kent, Buckinghamshire, Lincolnshire and the other 12 local authority areas that still remain fully selective? What possible chance is there for the 11-year-olds who fail this arbitrary test on a wet Wednesday some time in December to aspire to a university place when the system has deemed that they are to be rejected?

Chris Grayling: I offer the hon. Gentleman the example of the comparison between the secondary schools in the London borough of Merton, where I was shadow education spokesman, and the London boroughs of Kingston upon Thames and Sutton, which both have a grammar school education system. When one compares the non-grammar schools in Kingston and Sutton and the comprehensive high schools in the London borough of Merton, Merton comes off rather worse than the non-grammar schools in the selective areas.

Mr. Chaytor: I cannot comment in detail on Merton and Kingston. However, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the research that was published last week by the National Foundation for Educational Research, which compares the performance of selective and comprehensive systems, and to the research published this June by Professor Jesson from the university of York, which compares the overall performance of the two systems. I think that he will find there the evidence to challenge his traditional prejudices.

I turn to funding. It is the third time in eight days that we have had the opportunity to discuss this. To those who want an end to tuition fees—I can see how it could be hugely attractive to simply end them and roll them into the overall package of student support—we must say that if they are abolished for full-time undergraduates, why should all other post-18 students still have to pay those fees?

An earlier reference to research from South Bank university suggested that there were complaints about debt from students from working-class backgrounds. The argument must be that they are the very students who do not pay tuition fees, so such fees cannot be a contributory factor to their perception of debt.

It is extremely important that we maintain a balanced and objective view of the role of tuition fees. It is fact, not spin, that almost 50 per cent. of people do not pay tuition fees. The means test that exists is crude, rough and ready, and tripartite in nature. A criticism of it might be that it stops at £33,000; we have no means test that is sensitive to higher earnings. However, for those who have been happy paying for their child's education from five to 18, at £15,000 a year for the most prestigious private schools or £5,000 for a bog standard one, paying £1,075 to continue that education is a bargain. That is an important point, and any proposals for reform of the student finance system, which the Government might produce in the next few weeks, should consider a more sensitive and extensive means test. Rather like the argument about council tax bands, the problem is not the bands, but the fact that the banding system stops at too low an income. A parent on £35,000 is paying the same fee for their 18-year-old as a parent on £350,000, and that is not necessarily right.

The question of loans has also arisen. The Liberal Democrats are slightly confused about that because they want to create the impression of crisis and chaos, and suggest that massive student debt is deterring students from going to university, but they are not really opposed to students paying a proportion of the cost of higher education through the loan. Questions must be asked. For most of the half century following the second world war, a system provided 100 per cent. grants—non-repayable bursaries—and the proportion of young people from working-class backgrounds going to university hardly increased. That must be explained to the Liberal Democrats in particular: consider the relationship between cause and effect. The key issue about extending participation in higher education, increasing access and improving retention is not financial.

I draw the attention of hon. Members to the excellent article written by my hon. Friend the Minister—I think that it was in Tuesday's *Guardian*—where she not only provided an effective criticism of the absurd comments by the vice-chancellor of London university, but quoted figures on the estimated enhanced earnings of graduates during a lifetime. As I recall, the figure was £400,000. It will vary from person to person, but if graduates earn £400,000 extra during their lifetime, most people would

[Mr. Chaytor]

not think that a contribution of £12,000 to £15,000 to the cost of the university education that gave them the opportunity for enhanced earnings was unrealistic. Many hon. Members would agree if they thought about that seriously.

To extend participation, it is essential to increase the supply of young people with the necessary qualifications. That is the direction in which the Government are going, and I am delighted that the Select Committee report makes an important contribution to the debate on that policy.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. Five hon. Members are standing, so they have about eight minutes each if everyone is to be called.

4.34 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I start by commending the Select Committee for the amount of work that has gone into this report. Whatever the divisions that manifest themselves, a huge amount of time, effort and commitment goes into the creation of such detailed reports. The Committee has pointed out some important facts. It makes the point that retention in this country is good, but it offers some valuable thoughts about improving both access and retention within our universities. It also makes the important point that the income threshold for the repayment of student loans in England and Wales is too low and needs to be increased, particularly as so many of our public services lack the recruits that they need to perform in the future.

On reading the conclusions of the report, I feel that two issues are a little short changed. They are the funding infrastructure that surrounds higher education and the nature of higher education itself, as the Government look to push participation up from one third to around half of our young people. Some stresses are already apparent at the level of 33 per cent., as we widen participation. Those universities that exceed the Higher Education Funding Council targets for participation measures are at or near the bottom of university league tables. Where we manage to broaden participation we must ensure that it feeds up through the range of institutions.

The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) referred to the amount of money earned by graduates during their lifetimes. However, as we open up access to higher education, that differential is becoming smaller and smaller. It is far from clear that the undoubtedly significant salary premiums for those of 40, 50 and beyond, who are in the later stages of their careers, will be on offer for the much larger generation of graduates to follow.

It is important to recognise that the reasons for students pulling out of universities are not solely financial. Listening to the Liberal Democrats there is a tendency to believe that retention is just about money. I merely quote from Bernard Longden of Liverpool Hope university who said recently:

"Most students will tick the financial problems box, but when I talk to them this is often not the real reason. On closer questioning, students frequently admitted that they made a bad course decision. Getting into debt may simply compound an existing academic problem."

The financial infrastructure that surrounds our higher education is a crucial factor that needs to be at the heart of the debate about how we continue to expand access to higher education. My colleagues on the Select Committee rightly highlighted their belief that the Government are trying to play down the impact of their student finance policy on access and retention, and one of the reasons for their decision to produce a minority report was that they thought that the Committee had not got close enough to the heart of that problem.

I reiterate a point that I have made before. It cannot be right to saddle today's students with the extremely high levels of debt that they carry through into their professional lives, particularly given the challenges that many of them face in the early years of their careers as more and more graduates enter the job market. Those who have suffered from the new student funding regime are often not in the core group of 18 to 21-year-old students who leave school and go straight to university. Dennis Smith of the university of Ulster pointed out that higher education institutions in Northern Ireland have traditionally had a much higher proportion of applicants who are either mature or from previously under-represented groups. He added:

"These are the very types of applicants who have been most discouraged by the end of maintenance grants and the introduction of loans."

There is no doubt that the current structure has been a disincentive to many students. It must be addressed as part of the Government's forthcoming review of the whole structure of student financing. It is enormously important that the threshold issue is addressed as part of that structure. I hope that the Minister can reassure us that that will be the case.

The Select Committee report highlights the fact that the consequence of students' funding difficulties—not with student tuition fees, but with the enormously high maintenance costs incurred during a three-year course—is that many work in part-time jobs to make ends meet. Two fifths of full-time undergraduates have term-time jobs for an average of 13 hours per week. The report wanted that figure to drop, so that the number of students who had to work to make ends meet and the number of hours that they had to work were reduced. However, how can that be done within the existing funding framework?

As the number of students expands towards the Government's goal of 50 per cent., we must address also how the institutions will deal financially with those growing numbers. Hon. Members have mentioned that pay for higher education teachers and lecturers is less than it should be, which makes it harder to attract the right calibre of teachers into our universities. That has an inevitable knock-on effect on the quality of education. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) mentioned the endowments that are available in universities in the United States. If we can create an environment in which our universities have their own financial strength, it will be easier to attract high quality research and, by definition, high quality teaching. If we want to expand our institutions, we must give them the financial strength that takes them beyond the simple year-in, year-out begging bowl to the HEFC and, ultimately, the public purse.

We must examine also the nature of the skills that we provide to young people in our universities. Year by year, we push more people into the jobs market with

conventional, degree-based educational skills. The consequence is that, in too many areas, we see graduate unemployment, while some graduates are employed in professional areas that are not ideally suited to their degree-level achievement. For example, media studies has seen the biggest increase in student applicants—up 21 per cent. However, unemployment rates for media studies graduates are second only to those of would-be designers.

There is a danger that if we push the number of students in higher education up to 50 per cent. without thinking through the nature of that education, we will end up with too many students doing particular courses. It is not that we do not want them in universities, but if we expand the numbers to that degree, we must consider carefully the nature of the education. What skills are we trying to deliver to our students, and how do we best ensure that our graduates have a wide enough range of skills to appeal to the employers of the future? If we do not answer those questions, the arguments about graduate tax and repayment of debt after university will become academic. Unless graduates can command a salary structure in professional life that reflects their skills, they will not be able to make the repayments or deal with their debt burden.

As we move towards that 50 per cent. target, we must be clear about the financial implications. We must be clear also about the higher education that our students will receive. We all share the aspiration of giving students from all walks of life the opportunity to benefit from higher education. There is no doubt about that. As we heard, the Governments led by the Conservatives for 18 years presided over a significant increase in student numbers. This Government are committed to increasing that number still further, so there has been cross-party consensus over a long period.

After reading its report, my message to the Select Committee, and to the Minister, is that we cannot just dive into this without understanding what having 50 per cent. of our young people in higher education will mean. What kind of skills will we deliver? What are the needs of the job market and the financial implications? I hope that the Select Committee will, in future reports, examine those aspects as well. Good work was undoubtedly done, but I still found myself searching the report for more evidence that those key issues had been taken into account. I look forward to hearing what the Select Committee has to say in future and what the Minister has to say about these issues today.

4.45 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I will be brief.

I congratulate the Government on taking up the report's recommendation to review student funding. Students in Bristol are certainly looking for something simpler and more focused on low-income families. They are not asking for a return to a full grants system. Let me tell the Liberal Democrats that they are not too impressed with the graduate levy in Scotland, the burden of which has not yet been experienced.

The Government are not examining funding alone. I congratulate them on the expansion, on removing the cap imposed by the former Tory Government and on recognising—as the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) did not—that the anticipated need for higher education skills over the next decade is for 1.7 million people. This country has an enormous need to make economic progress, which benefits everyone. So higher education is not just about the fulfilment of individuals or meeting the Government's target, but works for the economic benefit of the whole country.

I also congratulate the Government on their announcement last Tuesday of the excellence fellowship awards—a different way of helping young people. These will be awards for teachers in schools and further education operating within the excellence in cities and education action zones to allow them to take time out so that they will better understand the links to help their students into higher education. These awards are innovative, different and not focused solely on funding. Funding is important, but I echo other hon. Members in acknowledging that, under the full grant system, the percentage of students going into higher education from low-income backgrounds was extremely low. As the total numbers entering higher education—under whatever system of funding—increased, the percentage of students from low-income families remained well below 20 per cent.

I want to focus on the university of Bristol, whose intake of students from low-income backgrounds is low. Not having made the headway that it anticipated, the university is responding to the challenge and now has a strategy for widening participation. The university's new vice-chancellor, Eric Thomas, wants to ensure greater involvement with the educational life of the city and its surrounding areas. The university wants to bring in more young people from the state sector. It has a whole tranche of ideas and experience.

I particularly congratulate the students union for sending students into local secondary schools to act as mentors and establish groups to involve pupils in sport, art, music and so forth. The pupils are brought on to the campus at a much earlier age than years 11 and 12. Even 12 and 13-year-olds are gaining an understanding of how their city's university forms part of the total educational experience in which they and their families can take part.

Summer schools have proved remarkably popular in the last few years. In fact, they were oversubscribed last year by 10:1. The Government and the Sutton trust have rightly encouraged them, and we shall continue working together. There are also summer work programmes for students before they start their first year. There is provision for disabled students. Taking up an earlier theme, we need to make special provision for those with a disability. In Bristol, there is particular provision for those with a hearing impairment.

Perhaps most important, the university is considering much more carefully students' backgrounds. Admissions tutors now consider schools and their average A-level results. Then they look for students who have achieved more than that. If two A passes and a B is the standard result, tutors might look for the student who not only achieves three A passes but does more extra-curricular activities.

It is important that Bristol, too, reflects the experience described by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor). Those who come from state sector schools with lower than average attainment on entry do equally well if not better than those with higher academic achievements.

[Valerie Davey]

As we have heard, the Select Committee went to America. One university that we visited was Northeastern university in Boston. Indeed, I was able to link its admissions tutors with those of Bristol, which they then visited. The university in Boston is interesting. It could be described as the workers education university, because it started when people had to work and study; there was no way that students could be full-time. That has been turned into a virtuous circle: the links with working in the city of Boston have proved so beneficial that, even though there is more financial backing for students now, that tradition has been maintained.

Perhaps the Select Committee should have considered South Africa—I am not putting in a bid for it to go there now, but I may do so later. Earlier this week, *The Guardian* drew my attention to the university of the Witwatersrand—hon. Members must forgive my pronunciation—in Johannesburg. I think that it is generally known as Wits university. Let us consider the change that has taken place there. The university tried to break down barriers. In the 1990s, only 14 per cent. of its students were black; now, 65 per cent. are black. That change is thanks largely to the former vice-chancellor, Colin Bundy. Indeed, I recommend that the Department contacts him. He is only down the road now, as the new head of the London university School of Oriental and African Studies. Had the Select Committee known about Mr. Bundy, we would certainly have asked him to give evidence. I trust that the Government will make use of his undoubted experience. Among other things, the university admitted students whose attainment was too low in the first instance for them to go to university in the normal way. They followed a two-year foundation course and then moved to year two of their degree.

There is experience and examples of best practice throughout the world that we should consider. I shall finish, because I know that other students want to speak—[*Interruption.*] I apologise, Mr. Pike. I was back in teacher or university mode.

Brenda Gourley, the vice-chancellor designate of the Open university, has challenged us all to think about the purpose of university. In a recent article, she quoted the UNESCO declaration for higher education, which is particularly relevant. She said that higher education is

"for citizenship and active participation in society, with a worldwide vision, for endogenous capacity building, for the consolidation of human rights, sustainable development, democracy and peace, in a context of justice."

I trust that in all our development of higher education we shall seek to ensure that that is writ large in the hearts and minds not only of vice-chancellors but of all students who go to our universities.

4.54 pm

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): I agree that retention was well covered in the report, which makes useful suggestions. The problem of students dropping out because of debt is a real one, but the report does not adequately cover the issue of standards.

The number of people entering higher education has increased dramatically over the past 20 years. I recognise the Government's intention to increase the number of students, but having more people in higher education will not in itself support Britain's manufacturing and service industries. If students are ill suited to their courses, more students doing courses will not necessarily benefit students. In some other countries, only highly qualified school leavers are accepted as students and they are heavily tested at the end of their first year—in effect a reverse retention policy. We, on the other hand, push ahead with trying to get more students who, once they are enrolled, remain where they are, whether or not the course is suited to their needs. The college will want them to stay for funding reasons and may have offered them a second-choice place on the basis of what it, rather than the student, wants. How do the Government propose to deal with those concerns?

The reports also have good ideas on encouraging access outreach schemes. A review of professional management practices is important. It is easy to blame a lack of access on demographic divisions and so on, but it is important that that is done only after the Government are confident that access for poorer and ethnic minority students is properly managed from the university's point of view. I was pleased by the acknowledgement of quotas as inappropriate because they all too often encourage discrimination.

The view that access is often just as much a problem in rural areas as in inner cities is correct. In cities, universities are probably more closely situated to potential students, and if they have crèche facilities, access for mothers is greatly enhanced. However, in rural areas—particularly those such as my constituency, which has no university and where significant distances must be covered to reach higher education institutions—access can be a real problem. In my constituency, many mature students, particularly mothers, tend to do the first year of their degree at the Huntingdon regional college and then go on to university. I would like our FE colleges to be increasingly recognised, particularly in terms of funding, which normally falls well behind that of schools.

A further concern is about the needs of businesses. Many feel that our education system does not cater adequately for them. Many bright but non-academic young people would be better served by a decent apprenticeship system. Many manufacturing companies in my constituency have said that they are unable to recruit 16-year-olds for high-level apprenticeships and, importantly, that they are blocked from getting into local schools to talk about these opportunities. The vocational A-level is generally seen as not much use and is poorly recognised by businesses. How will the Government improve access in a way that helps our business sector rather than hinders it further?

There should always be a role for academic excellence, but we need to break down the barriers for young people who want to go into vocational higher education. I speak from experience because I undertook a modular degree at a polytechnic and was impressed by how it could be moulded to individual time and career requirements. Will the Government get our business and higher education working together in a better way?

4.59 pm

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I was proud to be a member of the Select Committee that produced the two reports. As the Chairman indicated, we presented ourselves with an enormous task: to get not a quart but two gallons into a pint pot. Thus, it was right that we should focus in the way that we did.

I came to the Select Committee with views from both ends of the telescope, one might say, having spent 12 years as the editor of a magazine—when I had close contacts with a range of academics—and nearly 20 years as a part-time tutor with the Open university. I will not hide the fact that those experiences colour my contribution to the Select Committee and what I want to say today.

In the context of part-time students, another strong influence has been my experience in further education, which is an increasingly important means of delivering higher education. In my constituency, which does not have a university—a sad decision was made in the 1960s not to take that up—the Blackpool and Fylde college, which is a beacon further education college of excellence, has close links with Lancaster university and the university of Central Lancashire, which is key to developing a higher education strategy.

I shall be brief and concentrate on some of the key issues that have been mentioned: student finance and access. A great deal of ink—and a certain amount of blood—has been used in writing about Oxbridge interviews and some of the other issues that have been well ventilated today. I have an increasing sense of frustration, which I know is shared by former students of mine who have contacted me and by Members of the House, that the debate is not and should not be about Oxbridge only. Hundreds of thousands of students are not having their education delivered by the Oxbridge system, and it is to them that I want to address what I say today.

The Government response to the report's recommendations about access was encouraging. I was particularly pleased that the Government took up our point about higher education action zones. What my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) said about the latest initiative is true. Access is not just about interviews or even about getting grades. What was said about the UCAS tariffs was absolutely right. There are universities that take an ostrich-like attitude towards the tariff regime. They must be encouraged to be more positive about it, and we could all learn from the debate on A and AS-levels about the value of other qualifications, such as the international baccalaureate.

I am convinced that we must have an integrated strategy. We heard today about the value of educational maintenance allowances, but we must think about how we carry that through into opportunity bursaries. We need an integrated approach, so that a 16 or 17-year-old from a single-parent family or a Blackpool council estate who has an education maintenance allowance and is encouraged by that to go into higher education will have the opportunity to do so by way of a bursary or further funding. I will discuss later some ways in which we might be able to do that.

There has been much discussion about portability, which is an essential aspect of higher education. There is a need for lifelong learning: part-time and mature students, because of their work or the conditions in which they find themselves, want and need to be able to drop in and out of education. The Select Committee was concerned that universities should take that point on board. I wish to give a plug for my previous employer, the Open university. It has shown the way by incorporating previous qualifications—from further education, for example—as part of the credit for a university course and by demonstrating flexibility. That is particularly important for part-timers.

I entirely agree with what was said about access for disabled students. It is not just a matter of wheelchair access; there is a range of related issues. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) and I attended the European access network conference in Santiago de Compostela 18 months ago. We heard a fascinating presentation from the universities of Plymouth and of Central Lancashire, which is on my doorstep, about how awareness is being raised in those universities and access is an issue for all staff, not just for disability officers.

I want to say something about the poor bloody infantry: the teachers and lecturers in universities. All the time in the world can be spent getting the access process right, but if students go into educational institutions where staff are de-motivated, the emphasis on teaching is not strong enough, there is no proper salary progression and there are demographic problems, we will do them no service whatever. I am glad that things are moving in the right direction, by means of the Government initiatives that have been mentioned. However, it is important that we do more.

We must reassess the balance between teaching and research and the research assessment exercise. The witnesses who gave evidence to the Select Committee had some harsh things to say about the way that the RAE works. The HEFC should seriously consider incorporating a teaching quality assessment exercise in the RAE exercise. If HEFC cannot or is not prepared to do that, I hope that the Minister will not be shy about taking up the challenge herself, because it is a crucial part of the process. The self-righteous and self-regarding views of those in the research institutions of some of the Russell group universities are deeply unhelpful and discouraging.

As to funding, I agree with Opposition Members who said that the issue concerns not just student funding but university funding. We need to ensure that direct Govt settlements for the academic sector are augmented by other means. The Select Committee found some good examples in the United States, such as a system of corporate and individual tax breaks and a form of bond structure for universities. As the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) rightly said, universities in this country need to be more entrepreneurial in building up their alumni funding.

I come inevitably to the issue of student finance. The Government are carrying out a student review. What is almost more important than having a wide system of maintenance grants or loans is that the level at which either payment of full grant or the repayment of loans is set must not deter people from non-traditional

[Mr. Gordon Marsden]

backgrounds from applying. It may come as a surprise to some hon. Members, but I do not think that the graduate tax will solve everything and be a universal panacea. With the greater labour market mobility, graduate income levels falling and people increasingly becoming self-employed, we need to be careful that the Government do not get into the same mess as the Child Support Agency when trying to collect money from self-employed people.

If we are to go for the expansion of funding in higher and further education, we need to consider other sources of funding. We do not necessarily need to follow the Liberal Democrats' loaves-and-fishes policy, with a penny on income tax providing for all eventual circumstances, but core funding needs to be examined. We should also consider other ways of funding. If the Minister would care to cast her eye over *The Times Educational Supplement* for last Friday, she would see that I have returned to a proposal to which I referred on a couple of other occasions, for a leisure technology levy, which I estimate would raise up to £200 million. If that money were applied tomorrow to the opportunity bursaries system, it would increase the number of opportunity bursaries by, I estimate, about 500 per cent.

Before the Minister endorses the scheme, she needs to discuss with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer the principles of hypothecation and keeping money in the system. A more general point is involved whether we opt for that or anything else. Whatever its source, we do not want funding raised for higher education in the 21st century to suffer the same fate as road tax suffered in the 20th century. If we believe in lifelong learning and being a friend to access from non-traditional areas, which as a Government we should, we must accept the principles behind that. If we will the ends, we must also will the means.

I am proud to have been part of the team that produced the two reports. I believe that they will bear revisiting and are entirely relevant. We should consider higher education in terms not only of the economic importance that we all know that it possesses for our future as a nation, but of the sense of awareness, connection and cultivation of the humane and liberal civilised values that we all share, to which E. M. Forster referred. The events of 11 September have shown us the value of higher education and access to it, which I believe everyone in the Chamber shares as an objective.

5.12 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I certainly enjoyed my time on the Committee producing the report and, as I was often in a minority of one, I thank fellow Committee members for their patience. It was enjoyable partly because I enjoy an argument, and we heard some interesting thoughts. In the event of disagreements and strong arguments, a huge load falls on the Clerks to the Committee, as is evident from the extensive amount of Roman numerals in the report, which is a good way to judge how many divisions were involved. I pay tribute to them, and, like the Chairman, to the specialist advisers, who had to steer a careful course.

I issued a minority report to the access report, parts of which were, I accept, supported by the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) and Mr. Nick St. Aubyn. I did so not because I disagreed with the contents of the report, apart from paragraph 109. I agreed with everything that was in the report and, indeed, worked hard to make it what it was. However, a significant omission on the question of student funding was the problem. We were greatly aided in the matter by many expert witnesses, but I mention one in particular, Professor Maggie Woodrow, who, sadly, recently died. She was a leading expert, perhaps the leading expert, on access to universities, as head of the European Access Network. Both she as a personality and her expertise will be greatly missed, and I pay tribute to her.

Because of the time, I cannot go through the details of my minority report, but I commend to hon. Members page 1 of the report, which deals with the maintenance grant aspect. I have already drawn attention to the South Bank university research, which showed the significant problem caused by the abolition of maintenance grants, and I cited evidence that the Cubie committee collected on the matter.

Dr. John Brennan, director of further education development at the Association of Colleges, told the Sub-Committee:

> "If we are interested in getting many more young people into higher education ... we are seeking to draw into the group those for whom debt aversion is a serious issue, and ... you need a system which has an element of loan and an element of grant in it, and grants specifically targeted upon those who are coming from the poorest backgrounds and face the biggest difficulties."

He argued in favour of a change from the current smaller system of opportunity bursaries. The conclusion that I put to the Committee was that the report should state:

> "We are convinced of the Government's determination and sincerity in tackling the under-representation of the low-income groups in Higher Education, but the balance of evidence suggests that the abolition of maintenance grants, in the context of the current objective of expanding Higher Education and increasing participation, has had a deleterious effect on access and will continue to do so. We welcome the fact that the Government appears to have recognised this by the introduction of a relatively small number of Opportunity Bursaries and additional provisions for mature students. However, restoration of the maintenance grants would appear to be a significant part of the overall solution to under-participation and we urge the Government to take this step."

The Government have effectively endorsed that. Indeed, the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) might have supported it if he believed that the success of education maintenance allowances could be reproduced by maintenance grants. It was an achievement of a Select Committee to be less critical of the Government than the Government were of themselves.

I should like to turn briefly to the Oxbridge issue, as I represent Oxford, West and Abingdon. I can report that there is still enduring bitterness about the unfair way in which people felt they were attacked. People such as Dr Ajit Lalvani, a fellow of Magdalen college and one of the world experts on tuberculosis, still cannot believe that he was accused of "old school tie" practices. Professor John Bell, the Nuffield professor of medicine, and Dr. John Stein, who is an expert in finding new techniques to treat autistic children, were appalled at the suggestion of an old boys network. A huge amount of

evidence shows that the attack by the Chancellor of the Exchequer was misplaced, and it can be found in the minutes of the deliberations. We heard no evidence whatever, except assertions by the Minister, that there was any substance in the attack by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Indeed, the report states:

"Figures released by Oxford University and quoted in *The Guardian* on 30th January 2001, showed that while the great majority of all entrants gained three A grades at A-level, 23 per cent. of comprehensive pupils were admitted with slightly lower grades, compared to only 17.2 per cent. from independent schools.

For every 100 places Oxford colleges typically make 120 offers, expecting 80 applicants to achieve their grades. It was in the 20 per cent. of places from candidates who narrowly missed three As or 2 As and a B that Oxford has been giving comprehensive students the benefit of the doubt.

So, in fact, rather than discriminating in favour of independent school pupils, the evidence suggests that at Oxford, if anything, the bias is the other way."

It would have been reasonable for the Committee to have accepted that the Chancellor's remarks may have been true in previous years, when the success rate—offer compared with application—was lower for comprehensive students than other students. While that may have been true then, there is no evidence to suggest, as success rates are now higher for comprehensive students than independent school students, that that is the case now.

There is a huge amount in the reports that one can support. It was a pity that the Government did not feel able to give a detailed response to the recommendations of the access report. Indeed, in terms of post-qualification application and the increased use of post code premiums as a way of drawing people into higher education and encouraging universities to do so to a greater extent, the Government merely note such activity. It is time for the Government to lead in policy terms on those issues. I hope that the Minister will shortly give us cause for comfort in that regard.

5.18 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): This has been an interesting debate, and it is good to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) as most of us can see that his minority report got it right from the start. In his opening remarks, the Select Committee Chairman had the good grace to make it clear that much of the evidence that has appeared since the minority report was produced has backed up what my hon. Friend said at the time, and has told more firmly in favour of the policy of abolishing tuition fees and restoring grants.

Sadly, I was able to attend only part of the Conservative Opposition day debate on Tuesday because of a hearing of the Select Committee on Procedure, in which I was involved at the same time. However, my hon. Friends have drawn my attention to a rather intriguing comment made by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education during that debate, while discussing the evidence that the Committee had heard. He said:

"Most of the evidence showed that there was a percentage of students from very poor backgrounds who were put off by the fear of debt and by the incomprehensibility of the system, which meant that they had to go to five different pots of money."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 144.]

That is precisely the point that the Liberal Democrats made since changes following the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998. It is precisely the point that we made and won in the Scottish Parliament. It is precisely the point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon when he served on the Committee. It is precisely the point made in the Rees report, which was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly, and it is precisely the point that I made during our Opposition Day debate on student finance two weeks ago. I said:

"It does not matter whether the fear of debt is soundly based; it is the fear itself that produces the disincentive."—[*Official Report*, 25 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 429.]

That answers the earlier point made by the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor).

It is interesting that when the Committee took evidence from a group—only one group gave evidence on this matter—who had decided not to go to university and from their parents, rather than dons or existing students, the group said that the fear of debt was the greatest factor that put them off university. It is no surprise that the Chairman of the Committee admits that most of the evidence heard by the Committee shows that debt aversion—whether valid or not—is a real problem. Fear of debt is most likely to deter the people who need the greatest encouragement. Why on earth did the two reports, particularly the access report, not reflect that adequately? Why did my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon have to produce his own minority report that raised the problem of fear of debt?

When the Committee should have acted like a lion and savaged the Government's policies, it acted like a lamb. As it produced the reports just before a general election, one must wonder whether that was the significant factor. The job of Select Committees—I differ from the Chairman on this point—even in the year before an election is to hold the Government to account, not to wimp out in the face of the voters.

The Government can also be criticised. Why did we have to wait until the Government

"got the collywobbles...after a successful campaign by the Liberal Democrats during the election"—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 144.]

before they took any action on the matter? In case any hon. Members think that it is only the Liberal Democrats that claim credit for the Government's change of mind, that quote comes directly from the speech of the Chairman of the Select Committee last Tuesday. He admitted that the Government had the collywobbles. The Liberal Democrats' campaign caused that, and forced the change of mind.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the Government's review. It is better late than never. However, the review is secretive and internal, and it would be more democratic and more likely to lead to the correct changes if it were more open, transparent and inclusive. I ask the Minister to give us further details of the review.

Further matters have arisen since the publication of the report. There has been a change of Secretary of State. Initially, that looked to be a way of introducing top-up fees. After all, the previous Secretary of State famously said, "There will be no top-up fees while I am Secretary of State, but I will not be Secretary of State for

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ever." He was right about that. His parting shot was to ensure that his Ministers publicly ruled out any changes during the next Parliament, and I welcome that. However, instead of a pledge on just top-up fees, I ask the Minister to go further and confirm that whatever comes out of the review, all tuition fees will be abolished. That is, after all, the benchmark by which the review will be judged. If tuition fees are left in place following the review, people throughout the country will think that the review has failed.

The second occurrence since the publication of the Select Committee reports is the release of the Rees report on student finance, which was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly. I congratulate my colleagues in the Assembly on ensuring that the review occurred, and I welcome many of the recommendations. Not the least of its recommendations is that tuition fees should be abolished throughout the United Kingdom, and that simplified maintenance grants should be reinstated. It is notable that the Rees report approaches student support in further and higher education as a single issue, rather than as two mutually exclusive matters. Can the Committee investigate ways in which student support in further and higher education might be more effectively integrated?

Finally, I wish briefly to return to the most important change that has taken place since the publication of the two reports, which is the announcement of the Government's review. That is good news, but there will be disillusionment with the Government among a large and influential section of the population if the review fails to lead to substantial changes to the present system.

The Select Committee should take the earliest opportunity to fill the glaring gap in the reports by recommending that the Government make the changes that are so clearly supported by the evidence that it has heard. I hope that, on this occasion, the Government will listen to those recommendations.

5.25 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I, too, enjoyed reading the deliberations of the Committee. I thank everyone who has played a role, including the people who guide the Committee and the witnesses who appear before it. Its deliberations were thorough and detailed, and 10 minutes is not long enough to pay proper justice to them.

I share the disappointment that has been expressed that, although the Government's response with regard to the issue of retention was straightforward, their response with regard to the matter of access was not. When those responses are compared, a great contrast is apparent. I hope that the Government will take steps not to make that mistake again.

I also hope that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) has taken on board the criticism that the Committee, which he chaired, was not sufficiently robust in hounding the Government. However, in the debate, he did bite the ankles of the Minister when he reminded her that she should conduct her own review of student finance, rather than accept the Treasury review. That point was made by several hon. Members of my party, and perhaps more will be said about it.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) in praising the contribution that was made to the Committee by Mr. Nick St. Aubyn, the former Member for Guildford. I hope that he will be able to read the Committee's deliberations, so that he can learn that his brave report and its proposals were welcomed. I wish to highlight two of his achievements: first, he brought to the Committee's attention the importance of the gap year and emphasised how it can be of benefit to a young person who is planning to enter higher education; and secondly, he took up the Laura Spence issue in a laudable manner. With regard to that issue, I agree with the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) that serious and unfair damage was done to people who were trying hard to broaden access. It is an issue that readily leads to old prejudices and chips on the shoulder coming to the fore. If education is to make progress in the British political system in the current century, some of those prejudices must be rejected—and hon. Members should set an example by rejecting them immediately. However, the hon. Gentleman was too generous to the Chancellor of the Exchequer: he knew what he was doing when he raised the issue.

A number of important subjects have been raised, and I agree with the sentiments expressed in the deliberations of the Committee in hoping that they will be taken forward, and that the Government will focus on them. Portability is one such subject: it should be examined because it is important to assist students who wish to transfer to a different course.

Further education is another important subject, and I am pleased that attention has been paid to it by several hon. Members during the deliberations of the Committee, and in this debate. It is essential that, by focussing on the important subject of higher education, further education does not get squeezed. My hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) made that point, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), who emphasised how important it is that students choose the right course. I will refer to that matter when I address the subject of access.

I also agree with the remarks of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), and I am eager to find out how the introduction of education maintenance awards proceeds. That is an exciting development. The majority of hon. Members understand that the key issue in British education is not access at the top. The key project is to help the youngsters who currently have few inspirations, little aspiration and not enough hope. Although tremendous work is being done in that area, more needs to be done, and anything that can be done to ensure that such youngsters have higher aspirations is good news. I am pleased that efforts are being made to encourage teachers to retain that connection with their own higher education institution, because teachers may be the only people in a community with experience of higher education who are able to communicate that to their pupils.

I share the concerns of the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) and others in terms of staffing. We must be careful that higher education institutions that are student-rich but research-poor do not suffer because of that. A number of hon. Members have made reference to that. It is a difficult balance to

achieve, but we must ensure that we value staff and that they have the resources to do the job—particularly in pastoral and outreach care, if they are to look after those who may be most vulnerable to the changes that higher education brings to them.

On access, the Government have announced their target, which is that 50 per cent. of those aged 18 to 30 should enter higher education by the end of this decade. Our aim is more ambitious and widely drawn. We expanded higher education markedly when we were last in office, from a system designed for an elite of one in eight of the population to a more open system where one in three could expect to benefit both for themselves and for the country. As I said recently on the Floor of the House—no quota, no fuss, just progress.

Higher education should be open and accessible to all so that everybody can benefit from it. Quality need not drop with expansion, but it is essential that quality remains high because access to higher education is not the only issue facing universities in the UK. Higher education is not the only option for those with talent and ability. At present, too many of them are being failed long before they even have the chance to consider what they should do with their lives. The target for higher education should not act as a smokescreen to disguise the real scandal of our education system, which is the ultimate denial of access to many of our children almost from the first day they walk into a classroom.

On leaving school, a child should have full knowledge of what courses are available in both HE and FE and an understanding of what is likely to be best for them in terms of their career choice. They should know where each qualification might lead, the path from one level of qualification to the next and where the workplace fits in if part-time study is a sensible option. They should know what financial options are available and how they intend to cope with the new demands that will be made upon them. They should know how future employers honestly regard each qualification, because they do not regard them all in the same light. If they have not made up their mind what they want to do, they should know that education purely for its own sake has value, as they consider what they want to do with the years that lie ahead.

Based on that, school-leavers will choose what is best for them, not what somebody else may want them to do in order either to fulfil a quota or to ensure that an institution gets funds simply because a place is filled. Further education will not risk being downgraded, as that sector may be the right one for those with talents and abilities. We must not let our aspirations for higher education risk blunting the developing edge of vibrant further education courses. We must make it clear that people can move from sector to sector and that age is no barrier to subsequent movement. We must recognise that the nature of students has changed during the past 20 years. Above all, we must make it clear that there is true parity of esteem between the vocational and the academic and that student finance will be, as far as possible, a help and not a hindrance.

As the Minister might expect, I shall end on student finance. As someone who has read the reports rather than was part of the Committee, it is clear that there was already evidence emerging that the financial arrangements for students have a key part to play in both access and retention. Evidence that has emerged since the publication of the reports makes that even more stark. I mentioned some of that evidence in the recent debate. The Government cannot possibly deny the importance of student finance in relation to debt and students' working hours outside their studies.

The complexity of the system makes a difference to whether people apply in the first place.The system is complex. To illustrate the Minister's difficulties, there are widely differing opinions of it to be considered. Is it complex, but not too difficult to understand once people get on top of it, as Baroness Blackstone described it, or is it a nightmare, which is how Baroness Ashton described it recently in the House of Lords? Which is it? There is plenty of evidence, quoted several times, of the difficulties that the financial arrangements have caused and for that reason I, too, challenge the Minister to open up the internal review that she has already started.

Will the Minister publicly seek the comments of at least Universities UK, the Association of Colleges, the National Union of Students, the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, the Association of University Teachers, the Standing Conference of Principals, the Student Loans Company and Skill, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, before the results of her review are published, so that they can comment before proposals come forward? Will she place their submissions in the Library? Will she put in the Library the submissions that she has already received from her colleagues in Government as part of the internal review so that we, and the public, can see the standards by which the review is being judged? Will she publish the terms of the inquiry towards which she is working? Finally, will she take the chance to clear up a mystery, namely, what is her Department's definition of higher education? I hope that she will be able to do so. Yesterday, Baroness Ashton gave us some hope when she said that she would consult. I hope that the hon. Lady will take the opportunity to tell us the same thing now.

5.35 pm

The Minister of State for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): First, I congratulate the Chairman and all members of the Committee. The two reports and the debate that we have had today demonstrate the best of Select Committee processes. It has been an informed debate if, perhaps, a little vigorous. Nevertheless, it has given us an opportunity to debate something that is of key importance to the Government and to all of us who represent the members of our community.

I agree with what the Chairman said about the importance of university in our lives, not only for economic reasons, but also for the purposes of social inclusion. That is at the heart of the Government's commitment to widening participation. We wish to widen participation and we shall maintain quality. I am incredibly fed up with the constant attacks on the grounds that widening participation will reduce quality. It will not, and we shall ensure, through all our quality assurance mechanisms, that quality is maintained. It is crucial, for economic and social reasons, to widen opportunity. Part of the productivity problem in this country is due to the skills gap. America has a much higher participation rate in university than we do in the United Kingdom—although it does also have a much higher drop-out rate. Of the new jobs that will be created

[Margaret Hodge]

in the next decade, 1.7 million, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) said, will require the sort of skills that can be acquired only through higher education.

I should like to respond to some of the issues that have been raised, rather than make a statement of Government policy. A number of people have spoken about prior attainment levels. Those have been mentioned in every debate in recent weeks as being crucial to extending participation in higher education. My hon. Friends the Members for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) talked about educational maintenance allowances. They are successful and are increasing participation by 5 per cent. We must now consider, in the context of the comprehensive spending review, whether they are the best-targeted way of achieving that 5 per cent. increase. They are the most effective instrument that we have found to increase participation.

Equally important is our agenda for those aged 14 to 19. That includes our approach to vocational qualifications, which a number of speakers mentioned, the Connexions service, which was alluded to, and the excellence challenge programme.

The hon. Members for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), and for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) and my hon. Friends the Members for Bury, North, for Huddersfield, and for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden)—with apologies if I have left anyone out—talked about the importance of funding the universities. I agree with them. We have to discuss the balance between our investment in the university infrastructure and that in student funding.

We have not done badly with an 18 per cent., £1.7 billion increase in spending and investment in higher education. I would say to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) that this year, for the first time in a decade, we have increased the unit of resourcing, and therefore reversed the year by year decline that happened under the previous Government.

We have also put an additional £300 million into teaching over the three-year period. That is very important in order to address a number of the issues that have been mentioned. I agree with the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell that it is underfunded, but I hope that he will accept that that is due to the underfunding by the previous Government. We got expansion at the expense of funding, but that was no way to go forward.

I am delighted that so many hon. Members have welcomed the excellence fellowship awards that were announced yesterday. They represent a mechanism through which we can build links between schools and universities. There are sufficient jobs; we should not worry, as the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell has suggested, that the increased number of people who go through higher education will not have opportunities to work.

I can reassure the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) that we are ensuring that the qualifications offered in our higher education sector are relevant to the world of work. The foundation degrees, which we launched this year, have been extremely well received, with 85 per cent. take-up of places in the first cohort that we have examined. They were designed by business in collaboration with the higher education institutions to meet the needs of the business community. Much of what we offer may not be at degree level, but at sub-degree level, and take the form of HNDs and HNCs. I hope that all hon. Members will welcome that.

Several hon. Members expressed concerns about retention, with which we shall need to deal more as we go along. As we extend participation, the cohort of students will change. It will become all-important to deal with retention and to ensure that people do the right courses, are properly supported and have the skills to develop. However, we have the best record on graduation and the second-best record on retention among OECD countries.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Margaret Hodge: No, I shall carry on because I have only five minutes left.

I want to talk a little about social class and access. We acknowledge that higher education expanded under the previous Conservative Government, but I hope that the Opposition will acknowledge that they did not manage to break the inability of people from lower socio-economic groups to access higher education. That is the much tougher challenge that we face and want to takeup.

On Oxbridge, I hope that all hon. Members will accept that there is an issue. Some 52 per cent. of Oxbridge entrants have three A passes at A-level, but the figure for entrants with three A passes at A-level across the university sector is 65 per cent. There is a disparity, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer properly raised the issue. We want to ensure that more people from state schools have access to universities. The issue is perhaps partly about whether they apply. The aspiration funding that we have put in place will tackle that, but we need to deal with a range of issues to ensure equality of access to some of our best institutions, and the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) is naive if he thinks otherwise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North talked about the UCAS tariff scheme. We are doing a lot of work on that, and I shall write to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South about what we are doing to ensure that universities consider the issue seriously.

The hon. Member for Chesterfield and my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, West and for Blackpool, South mentioned disability. Some hon. Members will know that I was previously Minister for Disabled People, and I like to think that the Government moved the agenda forward with allowances for part-time disabled students and postgraduates and through legislation. I will be happy for the hon. Member for Chesterfield to write to me about where he thinks the gap in the legislation is.

Higher and further education is vital, and there are 150,000 HE students in FE. It is crucial that we create strategic partnerships between the FE and HE sectors and tackle the funding of the FE sector.

The hon. Member for Eddisbury mentioned the portability issue, and I have a lot of sympathy in that

regard. We are currently considering the matter. He also mentioned the year out, about which Nick St Aubyn, with whom I worked on the issue, was concerned when he was a Member of Parliament. Again, I like to think that we have made progress. Students have spent time outside the UK under the Erasmus and Socrates programmes, and that has made an important contribution to their higher education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North mentioned the postcode premium, which is important. We are considering it again to see whether we can focus it better to ensure that young people from under-represented groups come into higher education.

I have not mentioned student funding because we talked about it last time. [*Interruption.*] Time does not permit. We are undertaking a review about balancing the contributions of students, parents and the state. The Liberal Democrats have nothing to bring to the debate and are incredibly naive. The review is about phasing the payment. We will consult all the groups that the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) mentioned, and we will put an animal on the table. Any sensible consultation must take place in that way. We are responding to evidence as it emerges.

Congratulations to the Select Committee—

It being fifteen minutes to Six o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 13 November 2001

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Tourism

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Fitzpatrick.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I am particularly pleased this morning to be debating the future of tourism in the United Kingdom. It is an appropriate time for such a debate, given that the World Travel Market, the main event in the global travel industry—it is now in its 22nd year—is taking place in Earls Court this week.

My concern is for tourism throughout Britain. I am aware that some aspects of tourism and travel have been devolved to other assemblies, including the Scottish Parliament and the Greater London Authority. Nevertheless, I am particularly happy that the British Tourist Authority, which has a crucial role, is working in partnership with the national tourist boards of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. I congratulate the Scottish Parliament on its wisdom in accepting the logic of the BTA's argument that it should project tourism abroad for the whole of Britain, including Scotland: we can already see the benefits.

Tourism and hospitality is a big industry, with the potential for enormous growth. Tourism and travel drive the UK economy. Last year, the industry was worth £64 billion, and tourism accounts for about 4 per cent. of Britain's gross domestic product. In 2000, the industry employed 1.8 million people. That is 7 per cent. of the UK work force and five times as many people as are employed by the car industry. In 2000, 25.2 million overseas visitors came to Britain, spending £12.8 billion. Our top five overseas markets last year were, first, the United States of America, followed by France, Germany, the Irish Republic and the Netherlands. At the start of last year, we had every reason to feel confident and optimistic, and the industry's hopes were high.

That confidence should be set against the backdrop of the publication in 1999 of "Tomorrow's Tourism: a growth industry for the new Millennium" by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. That important document presented a strategy for the industry, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), the former Secretary of State, and my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson), the former Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting, on the heavyweight contributions that they made to that document. I hope that I, too, was able to make some contribution to it.

Hopes were high until we were struck with foot and mouth disease, which was followed by the terrible events of 11 September. Before the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, spending by overseas visitors was expected to rise by 2 per cent. to about £13 billion. The presentation overseas, night after night, of television scenes of the outbreak had a severe impact on inbound tourism, and not only in contaminated and restricted areas. The BTA estimates that losses for 2001 attributable to foot and mouth disease represent 10 per cent. or £1.5 billion fall. It welcomes the £14 million that is being given in addition to existing Government grant in aid to implement an intensive marketing strategy to encourage overseas visitors to come to Britain.

Passengers' fears of air travel following the terrorist attacks in the United States have also had a serious impact. On 26 September, the BTA announced that Britain's inbound tourism industry stood to lose about £2.5 billion because of the combination of foot and mouth disease and terrorism. Spending by overseas visitors is likely to drop by about 20 per cent., which will be a big blow to the industry. In September, the number of overseas visitors decreased by 11 per cent. and spending decreased by 16 per cent. compared with the same period last year. The BTA said:

"This is deeply worrying for the tourism industry—the critical months for inbound tourism are from July to September when a third of all visitors come to Britain."

In common with my right hon. and hon. Friends, I sincerely thank everyone in the industry for applying themselves positively and with dedication to an extremely difficult challenge that could not have been predicted. We also thank the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the BTA, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the regional tourist authorities and the local authorities, which have not had an easy time.

I recently visited Cumbria—I have a soft spot for that beautiful part of Britain—and I saw evidence of that dedication, particularly in the Lake district. I congratulate those who serve the Cumbria tourist board, including its chief executive, Chris Collier. I also congratulate Vicky Robinson and Graham Lamont, the joint chairmen of Theatre by the Lake, which they kept packed almost every night even as they were surrounded by the problems that I have described. I saw Zeffirelli's cinema, which serves two cultures in Ambleside, in the heart of Wordsworth country. That is important to me and many others and represents something very attractive for Cumbria.

I was reminded again this week of the fact that those associated with the Cumbria tourist board do not rest on their laurels. They reminded me of the importance even today of opening all footpaths, including the coast-to-coast footpath, which they have been told might not open until Easter. The path is important to them, and I hope that things will be cleared up long before then.

I want to base my remarks about Scotland on a comprehensive letter that I received from Jim Torrance, the Scottish policy convenor of the Federation of Small Businesses—we must remember the huge number of small businesses involved in tourism. For the most part, the letter was upbeat, which is consistent with the situation in Scotland. Tourism is our fourth largest industry and employs 7.9 per cent. of those in employment. Let me give a flavour of the letter. Among other things, the federation said:

"There is strong—but anecdotal—evidence (official statistics are not yet available) that tourism is doing relatively well in many areas of Scotland ... Argyll for example had had its best tourist season since 1997. The main widely expressed concern was about finding adequate staff."

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

On a less positive note, perhaps, the letter continued with the important point that

"Businesses experiencing a bad season have cited the strength of sterling"—

I would describe it as the weakness of other currencies—

"fuel prices, staff problems, competition, foot and mouth, the effects of the 11th September and inadequacies at Area Tourist Board and visitscotland/STB."

I do not necessarily share that view of the last of those perceived problems, but it is fair to put it in context. The letter stated:

"The individual impact of these differing variables has not been assessed."

I would not do justice to the letter or the views of the people of Scotland if I did not repeat its main point, as I want to underline the plea made by the Federation of Small Businesses. It reminded us of the delicate decision still to be taken about the need for the ferry link between Rosyth and Zeebrugge. It welcomes, as I do, the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has given his stamp of approval for it, as well as funding. The FSB also knows that what is happening in Europe is important to that decision. The link is vital not only to tourism in Fife, but the rest of Scotland, and we would all welcome its spin-off effects on other industries.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and my hon. Friend the Minister my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport set up the Tourism Alliance, an umbrella body designed to deal with the fragmentation that my right hon. Friend said was taking place in the industry. I would like to hear from my hon. Friend how that matter is progressing.

My hon. Friend would be extremely surprised if I did not mention the document published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport last month. "Tourism—The Hidden Giant—and Foot and Mouth" as the Government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I hope that the debate will give my hon. Friend the opportunity to respond further to three important points that it raises.

Page 3 of the document tells us that the Select Committee took the view that

"the English Tourism Council had been designed more...to the needs of the Government than...the customer".

Page 4 states that the spread of funding was uneven geographically, according to the Committee, and that the Committee talked of

"under-investment by the public sector in tourism".

Page 7 refers to claims of slow response by not only the Government, but other public bodies, on the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. I look forward to what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say about those points, as I seek to understand the complex issues.

I want to be much more positive now, and have every reason to be so. Much in the 1999 review offered great practical and welcome encouragement to the many people who contributed to its conclusions. Its recommendations were based on making the most of the talents of all our people in the tourism and hospitality industry. During my short time as a Minister, the issue that seemed to dominate every discussion was the minimum wage. We do not hear much about it now. It seems to have settled down to offer fulfilment to those in the industry, which is important to them. The evidence that I have seen suggests that staff turnover is falling. I welcome that, as I do the new deal, which has substantially contributed to jobs in the industry.

Transport is important to tourism. The terrible events of 11 September hit London tourism hard, as my hon. Friend will know from his meetings with industry representatives. However, he will also know of opportunities for the public to visit local attractions and to take time to enjoy a vast array of theatre performances and concerts in cities, including London. As transport is of the essence for successful tourism, will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the excellent initiative of the Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted express air-rail links, which allows the public to buy a return ticket on any of the three express routes into central London for only £10, having parked their cars without extra cost at any one of the three south-east airports? That is good for families, it is good value for money, and it is a good way to keep cars away from busy London roads.

In addition to that achievement I shall cite others in my constituency. I hope that the Summerlee heritage park in Coatbridge will serve as a model of how to attract tourists and visitors to see the best industrial archaeology. Yesterday I took part in discussions with representatives of North Lanarkshire and East Dumbartonshire councils. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons) will welcome the reassurance that they are highly aware of the importance that we accord to attractions such as the Antonine wall and the Roman fort. Perhaps those responsible at the heritage lottery fund are following our discussions; I assure them that the two councils are paying great attention to the opportunities that are no doubt on offer.

Among the very welcome action points in the strategy document are the development of several creative industries, including film and sports, in relation to tourism. I congratulate the BTA on the various film maps that it has produced. I understand that, for example, it and other tourist boards plan promotions such as a Harry Potter map of Britain.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I remind my right hon. Friend of the importance of film in developing tourism. I know that he recently suggested that the film "The Full Monty" had created a lot of potential for Sheffield and that he was criticised by Mr. Johnson and others for that. However, there are good examples—such as, in Scotland, "Braveheart"—of films helping to increase tourism.

Mr. Clarke: I was a little amused by Mr. Frank Johnson's sketch when the matter was raised in the House last week. He is entitled to laugh at his own jokes, but sometimes he must feel a bit lonely. It is rather distressing that he does not seem to read his own newspaper. *The Daily Telegraph* perceives the link between film and tourism. It stated that researchers had recently concluded that a tourism location featured in a successful film can expect the number of visitors to

increase by 54 per cent. over four years. My hon. Friend was right about Scottish films. "Rob Roy", "Braveheart" and "Loch Ness" together produced an extra £7 million to £15 million in tourism revenue. Any sensible person would welcome that.

The strategy for tourism covered the importance of marketing and of quality control and the need for development of skills and training. It called for more integrated promotion of our wonderful cultural heritage and countryside attractions. It welcomed, as I do, the regeneration of our traditional resorts. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) is to initiate a debate on that subject later this week. The English tourist board tells us that about 900,000 people—almost 1 million potential holidaymakers—have changed their plans between now and the end of September and will now holiday at home instead of abroad.

It is important to make the most of the outstanding regeneration of our cities and what is happening in the resorts. I have seen the regeneration of Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff, Glasgow, Belfast and London, with huge improvements to the dockyards here. That represents a welcome invitation to domestic and international tourists. There is a plea in the document for more central Government support for the regions. That debate will, rightly, continue. The Minister will want to comment on the annual tourism summit, bringing together industry and Government, which is also very welcome. The new technology of the internet and computerised booking services is important as we seek to serve a growing public.

I would like to conclude by wishing the industry well. The people serving the industry—in restaurants, hotels, castles and theme parks, as well as those working in transport to bring people to every region of the country—matter. They represent the best of Britain and we wish them and their industry the very best of British.

9.51 am

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): First, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing this important debate. I agree with almost everything he said, except that I think that the Scottish, English and Welsh tourism products are quite different. I believe that it is better to advertise them separately, not for political reasons but because they are distinct and should be marketed distinctly.

I was born and brought up in Betws-y-Coed, which is probably the most famous tourist village in Wales and probably one of the first tourist areas in Wales, so I am well aware of the benefits of good, sustainable tourism to the local economy. Gwynedd council has had a film site officer for the past 10 years, so it agrees with the right hon. Gentleman about the importance of film to tourism. Tourism is obviously an important component in the British economy. In the Welsh economy it brings in about £2 billion per annum, which is approximately 7 per cent. of Welsh GDP. In many coastal areas, and some rural areas as well, the relative contribution of tourism is even higher.

Several external factors, however, have had an impact on the performance of the tourist industry during the past 12 to 18 months. Even before the outbreak of foot and mouth disease there was the question of the strength of the sterling against the euro, which has already been referred to. Recent research demonstrates that there is a direct link between the value of sterling and international tourism receipts. Every 1 per cent. rise in the external value of the pound leads to a decline in UK international tourism receipts of about 1.3 per cent. The relative strength of the pound has an effect, as the right hon. Gentleman said.

A second factor is the relatively high price of petrol and the unfortunate publicity surrounding the petrol blockades in the UK. Those were brakes on growth for some key international markets. Added to that there are, unfortunately, signs that the US economy is slowing down, and growth in consumer spending throughout Europe remains sluggish. Despite these constraining external factors, the British Tourist Authority was forecasting before the outbreak of foot and mouth disease that spending by overseas visitors in Britain would rise by about 2 per cent. in 2001—In other words, that it would rise from £12.8 billion to slightly more than £13 billion, which is a huge sum. By the end of May, that figure had to be revised down by between 10 and 20 per cent. to take into account the consequences of foot and mouth disease. Even after that revision, the market is still significant.

Foot and mouth has hit many parts of the United Kingdom, and not uniformly. It has hit harder in some areas than others. Areas such as my constituency where, fortunately, an outbreak did not occur, were constrained by the closing of footpaths. The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston said that they should be opened, and of course they should. I am sure that the time is right for that to be done. Those constraints had a heavy impact on Snowdonia, for example, which is part of my constituency. I understand that the Minister climbed Snowdon on Saturday morning, so he is doing his bit for tourism and for my constituency.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): The café was closed.

Mr. Llwyd: Perhaps that was not the greatest loss, but I will not pursue that red herring.

Some businesses record a downturn of about 75 per cent. in their receipts. We know about that because there have been several debates on the subject in the Chamber and elsewhere. Turnover fell by 22 per cent. in the Easter period, and more than two thirds of businesses said that the bookings for the rest of 2001 have declined by about 60 per cent. on average. That is a huge drop. On the basis of previous experience, the UK domestic market is likely to recover first. That is good news for Wales because at least 80 per cent. of spending from overnight visitors derives from the core UK market. I hope that there will soon be an urgent recovery.

In summary, the Welsh tourist board estimates that tourism spending in Wales during the first six months of the year declined by 15 per cent., which is equivalent to £182 million. As a direct result of the impact of foot and mouth disease and the awful events of 11 September, the board estimates that further losses of at least another £100 million will be incurred by the end of the year. That

[Mr. Llwyd]

amounts to a loss of some £280 million in the year. Such an impact could place 10,000 jobs at risk in Wales. The multiplier effect from tourism means that the total number of jobs affected could be as high as 15,000.

However, we must not dwell on all this doom and gloom. The right hon. Gentleman finished on a high note and he is right to talk up the tourist industry. One positive outcome of the foot and mouth outbreak—if there can be such a thing—is that it has shown the business community and the public the important contribution made by tourism to local economies. That does not happen merely in rural areas but in cities such as York and London. People have now realised that it is a poor industry that needs nurturing and that benefits will accrue to all businesses as a spin-off from a healthy tourism industry.

In Wales, the industry supports around 100,000 jobs which is about 10 per cent. of the work force. It is Wales' largest industry. It is estimated that it supports around 25,000 jobs directly in rural Wales, and others indirectly. Farm-based tourism is a growth area that needs developing, especially with the forthcoming changes to the common agricultural policy. Green tourism needs to be considered and diversification should be introduced when possible. Of course, all farmers will not be able to diversify—that is common sense. However, diversification will be possible in many areas, and we should work to assist the process in those areas.

The future of the £2 billion tourism industry in Wales depends on nurturing a highly skilled work force to provide the high quality holiday experience that is expected by an increasing number of discerning visitors. The tourism training forum, which is a new independent body that was set up by the Welsh tourist board, Education and Learning Wales and the National Assembly is considering ways of matching available training with what is required in terms of work in the tourism business, whether we are talking of restaurants, hotels, leisure facilities or visitor attractions.

I recently had the great pleasure of attending a function at the Porthmeirion hotel, which is unique, to note the launch of a flagship project in my constituency. The Meirionnydd chef project is a publicly supported venture by the tourist board and the local further education establishment. Young chefs go to 10 or 12 flagship designations within the constituency, moving from one hotel to another and learning best practice in each one. It is an excellent step forward that will raise our game immensely. I am proud that it is being piloted in my constituency.

We need to raise our game, and we have done so during the past 15 years or so. The standard of accommodation is generally better, as is the standard of fare at local pubs. Standards are improving, but the dreadful events of 11 September pose a considerable challenge. The impact will vary from country to country, but recent information from the BTA suggests that the number of visitors from the USA will fall by 40 to 60 per cent., those from Canada by 30 to 40 per cent., those from Australasia by 20 to 25 per cent., and those from Europe by 10 to 15 per cent. Those are only estimates, but there is a huge challenge ahead.

I am pleased that a rural recovery plan is now being discussed in the National Assembly for Wales and that a similar initiative is being pursued in this place. I am also pleased that the Minister for Rural Affairs has realised that tourism is an integral part of rural life and must form a central plank of any rural recovery strategy to be pursued by Westminster. He pointedly restated that at a function last week, and we all hope that that aspiration will be transformed into urgent action to arrest the sharp decline in the rural economy in recent years. That is of particular moment to Wales because many rural areas support our Welsh-speaking communities, which are under threat. I welcome that indication from the Minister and hope that there will be progress in the coming weeks and months. We must make it possible for young people to work in good, well-paid jobs in high quality tourism, to branch out into the industry and to think positively about remaining in their local communities and developing their careers locally.

One area that is ripe for further development is diversification in the agriculture sector. Agri-tourism is an untapped resource and we should look for high-quality diversification projects that are sustainable in terms of local economies and the environment. We must also have regard to our competitors. The marketing budget in Wales is only £300,000, but in Illinois in the United States it is £24.5 million, in Florida it is £16.6 million and in Canada it is £21.3 million. In Wales, alas, where the industry is hugely important, the budget is only £0.3 million. That is a plea for greater assistance for the Welsh tourist board and the tourist industry generally—[*Interruption.*] The Minister seems to disagree. The marketing figures were printed in the *Western Mail* a week or so ago.

Dr. Howells: So they must be right!

Mr. Llwyd: As the Minister says, they must be right. The *Western Mail* was also right in what it said about the Welsh Affairs Committee.

We in Wales are proud that the Ryder cup will be played in Wales. That is a vote of confidence in the tourism infrastructure of the country and there will be a considerable spin-off. I do not want to fall out with my Scottish colleagues, but I have no doubt that they will learn from the Welsh experience—I say that with tongue in cheek and humour.

We in this Chamber realise the importance of tourism, but we must ensure that everyone realises that it is important. Tourism needs to be developed further and in a sustainable manner. We must concentrate on this great, untapped potential, and rise to the challenges to which I have referred.

10.5 am

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I, too, want to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing this debate. One can have nothing but the utmost sympathy for anybody who is trying to run a tourism business in this country or, indeed, anywhere in the world. The events of 11 September have had a devastating effect on tourism and travel worldwide. I was on holiday in the

United States at the time of the attack, and I remained there for a further 10 days. After touring some of the beautiful national parks of the south-west of America, it was disheartening to return to Las Vegas to discover that it was 90 per cent. empty. Indeed, Las Vegas was to prove a pointer for the deep impact of 11 September on other places, including this country.

Yesterday's crash underlines a difficult situation. In the past, we might have overcome such a terrible disaster relatively quickly. We know that air travel is statistically very safe, but in spending considerable time wondering about the cause of yesterday's crash, we add to the pall of uncertainty and fear that this new era of terrorism—with the fear of anthrax in the background—has cast over the world, and which has put people off travelling anywhere. There are those who still say, "What are we doing in Afghanistan and is it our war?" However, 11 September was an attack on us all: on the world economy, and on tourism as much as any other sector. The sooner we can put an end to this business, the sooner we will rebuild people's confidence in travelling, so that they can sample the delights we have to offer in the UK.

There has been a clear impact on the home-grown business of sending people abroad, and on the number of visitors to this country. The foot and mouth crisis showed us the value of tourists from America and other parts of the world, and recent events have only compounded the misery of foot and mouth. Although the business of Hoseasons—a great company in my constituency that specialises in holidays in this country—is not concentrated in the main areas affected by foot and mouth, it nevertheless took quite a hit.

Tourism is alive everywhere. Every town, village and community in this country has something of interest to show to visitors. My constituency, for example, has some great natural assets, but we do not make enough of them so we do not benefit from tourism as much as we should. I should say that Lowestoft officially has the best beach in the country. Although the English tourist board granted the award back in 1991, the contest has never been held since, so I say that we are still champions.

The River Waveney, which gives its name to my constituency, forms the southern boundary of the broads, and Oulton Broad, Beccles and Bungay all have delights to offer. However, there is a worry in my constituency that a wind of change is blowing through the Broads Authority. Certain proposals have caused disquiet. Some are saying that perhaps the business of attracting people to enjoying the broads—an activity that will always remain water-based—may be downgraded in the interests of conservation. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to keep a close eye on this matter because it will take an Act of Parliament or an order to make changes, should the Broads Authority propose them. I am keeping an eye on the issue, and I hope that he will too.

The other great asset in my constituency is the fact that Lowestoft is Britain's most easterly point. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) is present, so perhaps we can form a cardinal points club. Unlike John o'Groats and Land's End, Lowestoft is not famed as a cardinal point, but the potential is there.

To exemplify my point, I shall tell a brief story about our efforts to address the fact that we are not well known as the most easterly point in Britain. We have tried to develop a landmark because we do not have a natural point like Land's End—I must confess that I have not been to John o'Groats. We planned to install a great sculpture, and we found an artist to design it, but it has proved difficult to obtain funding. When we applied for European objective 5b funding, we were told that the site was 50 yards on the wrong side of a boundary, even though a landmark would clearly benefit the whole local area. When we tried the lottery, our case was considered to be funding for the arts. The fine art buffs thought, "We have never heard of this artist: the sculpture would not be of a high quality." They should have considered the case from the perspective that a sculpture could regenerate an area that has suffered from declines in manufacturing and fishing.

Although tourism is arguably Britain's biggest industry, it is not treated as such by the various layers of government. For example, many councils consider tourism with leisure services. Tourism connects with running swimming pools and parks, but people who run tourist businesses say, "Why can we not work with the economic development department that helps other industries?" It is difficult to access assisted area status funding. My constituency has that designation, but it is difficult to access those funds, which are considerable, for tourism. I have already described the difficulty that we had in accessing European funding, in which we currently have objective 2 status. There are unwritten rules that hinder tourist businesses and prevent them from accessing funds.

We can obtain funding to develop physical facilities. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston was Minister with responsibility for tourism, he was proud to come to Lowestoft to open our new yacht marina, which was a grand occasion. We have had funding to put on events such as Lowestoft airshow, which brings many people into the town. Events are a good way in which to draw in visitors and to attract attention to one's area, but tourism today involves looking after people when they arrive. Businesses that look after people need support and help to raise their game.

My remarks are mirrored in national Government. The previous Government had a Department of National Heritage, which created the impression that people would be attracted here if we merely preserved historic buildings, pageantry, Stonehenge and castles. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is broader than that, but I am sometimes concerned that tourism, the country's largest industry, is tucked away where it could easily be lost. People sometimes ask, "Who is responsible for tourism?" We have an excellent Minister and he is doing wonderful work. However, it is difficult for him to push tourism in the way in which the Department of Trade and Industry pushes the industries that it serves.

This is hard to say at a time when the tourist industry is suffering, but we must confront its biggest failing. Tourism is about not only attractions but the standard of hospitality that we offer to visitors. Hospitality is an important word, and I am pleased that we now talk about the hospitality industry. In general terms, our standard of hospitality is dismally low. When I travel

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around the world it is clear to me that we do not compare well with other places in terms of what we have to pay at hotels.

It is a similar story with our standards of service—in hotels, restaurants and shops, we are found wanting. Whenever I return from a holiday in the United States, I wonder why Americans want to come here, given the standard of hospitality that they receive. We sometimes mock them for their "Have a nice day" culture, but it counts for a lot—it is part of a national effort to train people to be pleasant and welcoming. Having returned from holiday, I went to the Labour party conference in Brighton. I queued for 10 minutes to get a bottle of water at a place where the four or five people who were behind the counter all thought that stacking boxes was more important than serving me. When I asked for a bottle of cold mineral water, the woman rummaged in the fridge and produced one that was not remotely cold. I said, "I asked for a cold one," and she replied, "Well, it's just come out of the fridge." That spoke volumes about the relationship between the service industry and the customer. During my three weeks in America, I visited public conveniences in deserts, mountains and cities that were spotlessly clean; those that I found on my return to Heathrow stank. That is not a good advertisement for this country.

The main task is to drive up our standards of hospitality, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take that as an important part of his mission. As well as naming and shaming the worst examples, we should give a helping hand to people who want to improve. We must find better ways of using existing funds to help our tourist businesses to invest to modernise and to improve their standards. We have so much to offer in the United Kingdom; I hope that we do not throw it away.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): For the benefit of hon. Members, given the time available I intend to start the Front Bench replies at half-past 10 and to call the Minister no later than 10 minutes to 11.

10.17 am

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I compliment my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on taking the time to secure the debate.

My right hon. Friend referred to diversity. That is important, because all too often we think about tourism only in terms of foreign visitors coming to the United Kingdom. Yet nowadays much of the market consists of visitors from other parts of the UK. People come to this country to travel around for many reasons—we should never underestimate the diversity of their tastes and interests.

I support my right hon. Friend's comments about the contribution of the film industry. When it comes to film, there is only one issue: location, location, location. It is a great plus to an area's local economy when a film is shot there, because hundreds of people—actors, actresses, sound recordists, and so on—live locally meanwhile. Moreover, once the film is made it brings a tremendous boost to the area's profile. For example, the second series of the BBC's "Monarch of the Glen" stimulated tourism in the area where it was filmed—people saw it on the screen and wanted to sample it for themselves.

The UK has traditional tourist areas, but many other areas want to be opened up and be considered attractive to tourists. Tourist boards must assist areas that have not been flavour of the month or even of the year, as they need help, too.

Many of these areas have great potential as tourist attractions. The Forth and Clyde and Union canal, which goes across central Scotland nearly all the way from Edinburgh to Glasgow, is one example. It was closed for 30 or 40 years and has been reopened with hundreds of millions of pounds of public money. There is a towpath for cyclists and walkers, a line of Roman forts and the Antonine wall alongside the canal These features make it attractive to many people, not only to those who want to use it for boating. Such areas need support because often industries and tourist attractions need to be reinvigorated and made attractive to people from abroad and throughout the UK.

I agree with what was said about service and making ourselves attractive to visitors; we need to get the basics right. I would be happy to talk all day about the good examples, of which there are many, but unfortunately, there are bad examples. If we do not face them, people will not revisit attractions. I had visitors from Italy for four weeks in the summer and I had to show them round Scotland, which was a pleasure, but it was discouraging that information at some major attractions was not translated into Italian or, in many instances, any other language. That makes it appear that we are turning our back on foreign visitors. It would not take much to get the basics right. We want to attract people to the UK for the first time, and then see them come back again and again. That is the most important issue for the tourist authorities, and, if they can get it right, tourism has a healthy future.

10.22 am

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): The debate this morning has a Scottish flavour. Listening to my right hon. Friend the Members for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons) made me want to get on the GNER and go up to Scotland. It could not be colder there than it is in the Chamber.

Scotland has a lesson for England and Wales, which would help to boost the tourist industry. It has nothing to do with "Monarch of the Glen" or "Rob Roy" but with the Scottish liquor licensing laws. In that respect, England and Wales are at a competitive disadvantage compared with Scotland, and that affects tourism. When he introduced liquor licensing laws in England and Wales, Lloyd George famously remarked: "We are fighting three enemies: Germany, Austria and the drink, and the greatest of these is the drink." That legacy has lived with us since that day, inhibiting entrepreneurs in the hospitality and tourist sectors.

All political parties now believe that it is time to reform the liquor licensing laws. During the last days of the election campaign, a significant number of the people working with me received a text message on their mobile phones saying, "If you don't give a 4X for the liquor licensing laws, vote Labour." I was waiting for one myself when I realised that it was being sent only to those under the age of 25.

I make the point seriously; it is wrong to advertise the advantages of reforming the liquor licensing laws as being only in the interests of the young, who perhaps go to pubs and clubs most. The main advantage of reforming the liquor licensing laws is that it would boost the tourist sector, and towns and cities in England and Wales would have a more civilised environment. Entrepreneurs could open premises where there was a demand. Tourists in London, York or Manchester cannot understand why pubs have to shut at 11 o'clock at night and they have to move on to a venue where they must pay over the odds to get in and for drinks when often all they want to do is have a quiet drink.

Large organisations like London First that represent our tourist industry and big cities say that in our current tight market the liquor licensing laws are a big disadvantage to London in attracting conferences and conventions, for example. When the all-party beer group went to Scotland to hear evidence on this matter, one Scottish pub executive, who shall be nameless, looked at us pitifully and said, "Even Cinderella was allowed to stay up until midnight." We are hampered by these laws in England and Wales. I know that their reform is high on my hon. Friend's agenda, and all power to him. I hope that we will have a Bill to reform our liquor licensing laws in the next Queen's Speech. I hope that there may even be the prospect of a draft Bill before then, because it would be widely welcomed by many Members and certainly by a hard-pressed tourist industry.

10.25 am

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing this important debate. As he will know, tourism is vital for my constituency. Obviously this has been a truly dreadful year for tourism. The foot and mouth crisis devastated tourism for many months in Perth and many parts of rural Scotland. The countryside was closed, and in places such as Perthshire it is a principal attraction. Some hotels in places like Crieff lost all their advance bookings for June and July overnight. It is hard to imagine how any small business that is already suffering is supposed to cope with such a devastating reduction in its cash flow.

Not only did we have foot and mouth, we had the terrible events of 11 September, which many hon. Members have mentioned. We must now work out ways to get Americans to fly to Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and that is a difficult task, not least because of the awful crash yesterday in New York.

All these issues have had a serious impact on tourism, but I should like to focus on two specific structural points relating to UK Government policy. Although tourism per se in Scotland is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, economic policy continues for the present to be set in London. The high pound policy is terribly damaging to tourism, as the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston alluded to when he quoted the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland. The high fuel tax policy is equally devastating, as my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) mentioned.

It is a puzzle to us in Scotland how, as the oil rich nation of the European Union, we pay the highest fuel taxes in the industrialised world. These two aspects of economic policy are extremely damaging to tourism. How does the Minister feel that the interests of the tourism industry can be promoted and fostered against the backdrop of such damaging economic policies? We also have high value added tax rates in the tourism sector. We have swingeing business rates that are once again higher than business rates in England because our former Finance Minister, Jack McConnell, soon to be our latest First Minister, I believe, decoupled the rates poundage between Scotland and England. Our tourism sector, which mostly comprises small businesses, is struggling.

In short, Scotland is in danger of being perceived as a high-cost destination, and that, allied with the poor transport infrastructure links in certain places, is causing serious problems. The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston talked about the direct ferry link between Rosyth and Zeebrugge, which the Scottish National Party welcomes. We have been calling for a link for many years, and want any such measure expanded to include direct air links. We also want an undertaking that the Government will secure a public service obligation for flights from Inverness to Gatwick and Heathrow, which are vital for business and tourism in Scotland. I agree with the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy that the potential for tourism in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK is huge. I laud those involved in the industry.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order.

10.30 am

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Before I begin, I should declare my interests because I am involved with several tourist bodies. I am president of the Tourism Society, patron of the Hotel and Catering International Management Association and chairman of the British Hospitality Association leisure panel. I am involved in many other bodies and I especially want to declare my presidency of North of Scotland Hospitality, which goes under the great acronym of NOSH. I am also a director of several companies and own a small hotel in the village of Halkirk in my constituency.

I have spent my entire life working in the industry and I am delighted that we are having this debate during World Travel Market week, as the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) said. I am grateful to him for giving us the opportunity to debate this important industry. He mentioned the size of the industry and the number of people it employs. Tourism is the third largest industry in the United Kingdom and is projected to be the largest employer and the largest industry in the world in the next five years. We want to be a key part of that market.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that much of Scotland has had a surprisingly good year. I lost a great deal of money in March and April, May was dicey, but things picked up from June. Hoteliers in my constituency tell me that they have had a rather good season after a terrible start because of foot and mouth disease. Indeed, Dornoch has had one of its best seasons ever, which might have something to do with the fact that Madonna got married there last winter.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Location, location, location.

John Thurso: Absolutely. Even the Dornoch caravan site has had an excellent season. It is well run, and if the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) is looking for superb quality, that is what the site offers.

Scotland has, however, had a bad time in the international market, which was badly hit by foot and mouth disease and the events of 11 September. I have no doubt that yesterday's tragic accident will have a further effect on the industry.

Fuel prices are definitely a barrier. That is not only because of the high cost of fuel, but because of the 15p a litre differential between Inverness and Thurso. It would be a great help if the Government could deal with that.

The UK tourism industry faces challenges in three areas: structure, quality and productivity. To state the obvious, tourism is an economic activity and is no different from a factory in that it creates social and environmental damage if it is not properly located. To take an extreme case, allowing passengers from 20 buses to get out in a Cotswold village of 50 houses, wander round, leave their rubbish and move on without spending any money would result in great inconvenience and disruption but no economic benefit. The key question for tourism must, therefore, be how to extract the maximum economic benefit with the minimum environmental and social damage.

Of the three challenges that I mentioned, I shall deal first with structure. The current structure of the BTA, visitscotland.com and the English Tourism Council is not working. In another place four years ago, I predicted that the way in which tourism was being devolved would be bad for the workings of the industry, as the industry itself now largely accepts.

There is a curious anomaly. I agree with tourism being wholly devolved to the Scottish Parliament and visitscotland.com, which has a full budget and responsibility for marketing. The BTA is a cross-border authority with responsibility for marketing Britain, but has all the money and marketing for England. The ETC, which was created some years ago from the ashes of the English tourist board, has no marketing budget. That is perfectly ludicrous, and I urge the Minister to rethink it. We must give it marketing clout. I am a federalist. I believe in the union, and a key point is equal devolution for England and Scotland. We also need a much clearer idea of what the BTA can do.

I disagree with the criticisms of quality made by the hon. Member for Waveney. The United Kingdom has some bad products and some superb ones. Talk of rip-off Britain and ghastly products does an immense disservice to those in the industry who work hard to achieve quality. I shall give an example. Skibo castle, Morangie house and Ackergill tower in my constituency are world-class properties. They are world beaters. One would not find a finer conference venue in the world than Ackergill tower.

We have many great products—London is now the world leader in food—but we need to root out the bad. There is only one way to do so, which is to grasp the nettle of statutory registration of accommodation providers. Until every accommodation provider is registered, we will not be able to deal with the problem. I advise the Minister of the consensus in the industry, which was not there five years ago. The Government should act on it.

I want to touch briefly on productivity and squaring the employment circle. The industry is a large employer and pays out—not to individuals, but in bulk—a great deal in wages. The industry has to become more productive, so that fewer people earn more money. Until they do, the sort of careers that we would like to see will not be possible. The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston mentioned the minimum wage, and I agreed with him. In another place, I voted and spoke in favour of it. My businesses had a minimum wage of £4 an hour two years before the Government brought in their minimum wage, and I always raised mine ahead of that. Happily, I am now out of the business and I do not know what it is doing. The minimum wage did a tremendous amount to force the industry to understand that it had to improve conditions. We must find new ways to work, to re-engineer businesses in the industry and to be more productive.

It is important to consider the Government's role. They must create a structure that works, as I mentioned, by considering the relationships of the national tourist boards and the regional tourist authorities in England and ensuring that they can be made to work better. The Government must also decide whether they want to sponsor the industry, or whether it is appropriate—there is an intellectual argument for this, although I do not accept it—simply to let the industry get on with its job. However, the Government must not dive in from the touchline to administer the occasional pat or, as has more often happened in the past, the occasional kicking, and then dive back again. The industry views the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in an unfavourable light. Much has been done, but there is a pretty clear consensus in the industry in favour of a return of tourism to the Department where many people think it properly belongs—the Department of Trade and Industry, where there are Ministers who understand the concept of supporting an industry. I ask the Minister to realise that the industry really desires the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to do something to help it.

10.40 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): It is good to debate tourism in your presence, Mr. O'Hara, as you and I had a very happy visit, with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to Athens last week, where we saw something of the Greek tourism industry and perceived the need to promote Britain abroad. I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing the debate, and particularly on doing so to coincide with the World Travel Market. I agree with him and the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons) about film tourism. Television tourism is very big in Ryedale. After "Brideshead Revisited", the number of visits to Castle Howard increased dramatically. Some people in the villages affected would still say that we have almost more tourists than we want, because of the "Heartbeat" programme. My view is that that is a tremendous advertisement for North Yorkshire.

The well documented difficulties experienced by many tourism businesses in this difficult year still overshadow any debate on tourism. The right hon. Gentleman highlighted the losses. The English Tourism Council's estimate of losses from foot and mouth disease this year

is £4.2 billion. Many of those losses will never be made up. That sum translates into the losses sustained by individual businesses and organisations. We all, I am sure, could tell of personal tragedies in our constituencies or, for those of us pursuing a tourism brief, in other parts of Britain. Today's news that the National Trust, which owns an important property at Nunnington in my constituency, has this year suffered losses from foot and mouth estimated at £7 million to £8 million, suggests the impact on many organisations.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Kate Mount and Christine Ames of New Forest Tourism have urged on me the point that in areas like the New Forest, where there was no outbreak of foot and mouth, the effect on tourism was nevertheless catastrophic because of a perception that people should not go there. It was almost as bad as if the disease had broken out. The losses were just as serious.

Mr. Greenway: I fully endorse that. My experience in Ryedale was the same. We had only one foot and mouth case there, in the north-west part of the constituency, as part of the Thirsk cluster. However, the impact on tourism has been devastating because most of the tourism in Ryedale is rural.

Other hon. Members have spoken about the events of 11 September and yesterday's horrific accident. Today we should say only that we recognise the importance of putting across the message that the skies are safe and that we are doing all we can to continue to improve passengers' safety and security.

Tourism is a £64 billion industry. There were signs in the immediate aftermath of the foot and mouth crisis that the Government and opinion formers recognised the value and importance of tourism to the economy. That recognition has not been followed through with sufficient action and zeal, although I do not believe that that is entirely the fault of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The difficulty is in the Government as a whole, and particularly in the attitude of the Treasury. Back in the spring, it was mooted that the Government were considering making an additional £50 million available to the BTA and the ETC for promotion. In the end, only £18 million was provided, £14.2 million of which went to the BTA.

It is our view also that support for small businesses in many areas is inadequate, especially in the foot and mouth hot spots. The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston mentioned Cumbria, which I have visited three times. More could have been done to help, especially with interest-free loans, but the problem now is that many of these cash-strapped businesses will have to start making some of the deferred payments of rates and VAT.

The Government have been reasonably generous in providing additional funds for the British Tourist Association—I have already said that it has received £14.2 million. I warmly congratulate the BTA: its tourist promotion programmes show great ingenuity and originality. However, they need to be repeated again and again if we are to win back lost customers from overseas.

I shall concentrate on Government support for the domestic market— particularly that in England, which represents four-fifths of the tourist industry. Support for the domestic market remains inadequate; post-11 September, it is even more likely that revival of tourism businesses will come essentially from domestic business and perhaps from the near continent. A further ferry link from Zeebrugge was mentioned; we have such a link in Yorkshire at Hull.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston—I have been saying so for the best part of a year—that the ETC must have a marketing role. It is nonsensical that the Government should still refuse to accept that fact. Funding for English tourism needs to be increased in order to catch up with that for Scotland and Wales. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) said that Wales, Scotland and England are different; he is right, but tourism businesses in England look with envy at the resources that the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament are giving those parts of the United Kingdom.

Our regional tourist boards are doing an excellent job but they are underfunded. In recent weeks, Yorkshire and Humber regional development agency and other agencies in the north-west and the north-east of England have given additional resources to their regional tourist boards. That is a good example of what can be done. However, the picture across England as a whole is haphazard and inconsistent, which leads to the conclusion that, when it comes to government funding for tourism, England is the poor relation.

Despite the current crisis, the ETC has received no additional money since April, when it received its £3.8 million share of the £18 million that I mentioned earlier. At last night's BTA reception, people were asking me how the Government could find £20 million to keep open an empty dome but could not make additional resources available to support tourism in England. The £3.8 million that the ETC received gave a return of £27 for each pound invested in tourism. The Government therefore have a stake in the tax revenues that would result from increased tourism activity as well as from a reduced demand for social security support for the staff of failed tourism business who are laid off. That suggests that extra Government help for promoting tourism in England would be a good investment. Above all, it would have a beneficial effect on the hard-pressed rural economy. I commend the concept to the Minister.

The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) suggested that the Government should sponsor the industry. I cannot agree with him that it would make sense to put tourism in the arms of the Department for Trade and Industry. However, it would make sense if "Tourism" appeared in the title of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport—a suggestion that was made in the Conservative party manifesto. One of the reasons why I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman is that, having been the shadow Minister in this area for nearly two years, I know that the present Minister, his predecessor and Department officials are sympathetic to some of the thoughts that I have expressed today. I hope that the concerns that have been expressed during our debate will help the Minister and the Secretary of State in their battles with the Treasury.

The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston said that we wish the industry well. Indeed we do, but the industry needs more than good wishes. It needs practical help and support.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing this important debate. I agree with much that has been said about the importance of tourism. There is no question that it is a hugely important industry. It is interesting that we rarely debate tourism in Parliament. That is because Parliament never debates successful industries—it only ever debates failing ones. It is important to remember that we have had very few debates on tourism during the past 20 years because it is a rapidly growing, successful industry. I would be the last person in the world to say that we politicians should get our sticky little fingers on tourism and start making choices for the industry as though we know what is best for it. We do not know what is best for it. It has grown out of the entrepreneurial expertise of those such as the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso), who are at the sharp end of the industry.

The industry has been tested in a way that it has never experienced before, first by the blight of foot and mouth and then by the effects of the terrible events of 11 September. The industry has been tested as hard as any has ever been tested. I have been to many of the places that have been mentioned today and seen the hardships, especially of micro-businesses, whose raison d'etre was to serve tourists on a footpath in, say, the northern fells of the Lake district. That is how they have always existed. There is no option for them to diversify into anything else. Once those paths were closed they were in desperate trouble.

I agree with many of the remarks made this morning, including those of the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who said that experience ought to have taught us something since last February and March about the importance of not making blanket statements about the countryside being closed and about the advice given to people not to go anywhere near paths that they may have walked on for many years. The question is complex. Only this week I have heard discussions on radio programmes and on television during which farmers have complained about the right-to-roam legislation. There will be big debates about whether people can go on certain parts of our hillsides and farms.

The issue is not one-sided. The National Farmers Union wanted the culling of animals. It wanted people to be prevented from going on our countryside. We should remember that it was not only the Government. It was, to say the least, an extraordinarily steep learning curve, and great mistakes were made that had a serious effect on the industry.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston is right in saying that that should have taught us about the nature of the industry. The industry generates huge amounts of revenue and it is labour intensive. It demands skills and is a great provider of them if things are done properly. Most importantly of all, it is sustainable in a way in which so many of those industries that were closed in the 1980s and 1990s, such as coal mining and shipbuilding, were not. That is the difference between those industries and tourism.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) is right to say that we must up the game and play to our strengths. That means, above all, that we must train our young people. We must go further than that; we must give them a real belief in the industry—that it has a future. We are the only major economy that I know of anywhere in the world in which to work behind a bar in a pub or to serve at a table in a restaurant is regarded as a second-rate or third-rate job. In France, Germany and Italy, those skills are regarded as key, but by kids in our schools such jobs are regarded as something that they might do only if they can get nothing else or want to make a few bob on the side to see them through to some other career.

We have to get real, and that will demand a great cultural change. The hon. Member for Ryedale is right in pointing out that the word "tourism" does not even appear in the title of the Department of which I am proud to be part, although it is a business with a yearly turnover of £64 billion. That is symptomatic of our perception of it as a not entirely serious industry. I am glad that hon. and right hon. Members have made that issue clear.

I could argue about the sums made available and the arrangements in place for the support of tourism in Britain, but instead I will shock my colleagues by saying that I agree with much of the criticism. It was a mistake to take the marketing role away from the ETC, and we must put that right, although it will take some doing. We must not react to the crisis in the industry in a knee-jerk way, because this is tourism's big chance. The spotlight is on tourism in not only rural areas, where no other employment exists for those who are suddenly without a livelihood, but London, which is the greatest city in Europe. Central London was hit harder than anywhere else in Britain by the first foot and mouth outbreak and the terrible events of 11 September.

I am glad that we are beginning to get the agencies together to tackle these issues in a co-ordinated way, because all too often the response in the past has been fragmented. We must consider carefully the configuration between the ETC, the BTA and regional tourist boards, including those in Wales and Scotland. No one has mentioned Northern Ireland, but it is an interesting case. It realised some time ago that its fate as a tourist destination was bound up with the phenomenal success of the Irish Republic, and it has made great strides in developing links.

I take on board everything that my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston said, especially on avoiding pessimism, which the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy repeated. The current issue of "*Travel GBI*" says:

"Tourism business in the UK showed a dramatic upswing last month in what many in the industry feel is a foretaste of things to come in 2002."

The article went on to mention a group that had

"enjoyed a 'hugely successful' 2001 season."

When I was in Taunton last week, the chief executive of the south-western tourist board, which is our most successful regional tourist board, described the situation as serious but said that for many businesses in the south-west this was the best autumn for 20 years. He said that some resorts were reporting the best season that they had on record.

As several right hon. and hon. Members said, the impact has been patchy. Some places have sustained themselves well while others have done poorly. No matter where we are, we must up the game and play to our strengths in delivering a product that is much better than the one we have delivered up to now. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross was right to say that we should not talk ourselves down. We have some superb establishments and we should do all that we can to publicise them and to spread best practice. Wherever I go in the country, everyone tells me that there is a shortage of good chefs. That fact is an indictment of the way in which we have approached education and training. We must give the industry a much better name and ensure that we learn from this crisis and build on our strengths. I am positive that we can go from success to success and that the industry will in future be a great one—as great as it has been in the past.

Railtrack

11 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I am delighted that so many hon. Members have joined us for the first of two debates today on Railtrack and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. We also have an interesting Select Committee meeting on the subject tomorrow.

Over the weekend of 5 to 7 October, the Government engaged in an act of confiscation without compensation against Railtrack. Until recently, Railtrack was one of the top 100 quoted companies in the country. By their action, the Government precipitated one of the largest ever corporate failures in the United Kingdom. The events leading up to that weekend and the role of the Secretary of State are the subject of a major debate in the House this afternoon. The motion in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), which I enthusiastically support, condemns the Government and the Secretary of State and calls on the Secretary of State to resign his post.

In our debate, I shall concentrate on the implications of 7 October, when the order that put Railtrack plc into railway administration was made. The actions of the Secretary of State over that weekend have made the problems of the railways far worse for the travelling public, those who work for Railtrack and the taxpayer. The travelling public are faced with a long period of uncertainty during which vital decisions on investment will be delayed. The situation for those who work for Railtrack is even worse. More than 10,500 of Railtrack's 12,000 employees are angry and disillusioned, having lost £1,000 or more each from their savings in Railtrack shares. One signalman, a lifelong Labour supporter—but not any more—has lost £33,000. The Conservative party regards those shareholders as loyal employees of a company providing a vital public service, while the Labour party's view is to condemn them as naïve, greedy and deserving of the fate that has befallen them. The Liberal Democrat party, in the words of its amendment on the Order Paper, "regrets the confusion arising".

It is more than confusion; it is confiscation. Indeed, some shareholders draw a parallel with the confiscation without compensation that President Mugabe resorted to against white farmers. The Government of Zimbabwe regard the mass trespass of their supporters on to private farms not as a threatening act but merely as the logical consequence of refusal to do as instructed—the same defence used by the Secretary of State in countering charges that he threatened the Rail Regulator. Fortunately, in this country the rule of law and parliamentary democracy still function, and that is why aggrieved Railtrack shareholders are intent on seeking compensation through the courts, while the independent regulator and the chief executive of Railtrack have spoken out fearlessly against the actions of the Secretary of State.

I ask the Minister a simple question: how can one run a better railway by making employees angry at their betrayal? I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes to reply to that now—or perhaps he will reply to it at the end of the debate. The answer, of course, is that

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

one cannot do that. While the Government claim that they want to run a better railway, they have betrayed its key stakeholders: the people who work for it. Significantly, the Government have not mentioned the people who work on the railway in their public statements since 7 October. Indeed, not only have employee shareholders lost out, but so have many other small shareholders, either directly or through holdings in pension funds. Who will pick up the bill for the loss of investor confidence? It will be none other than the taxpayer.

We have heard that American fund managers, far from being attracted to invest in the railways, will stop investing as a direct result of what the Secretary of State has done. Franklin Mutual of New Jersey, which has one of the largest holdings in Railtrack with 4 per cent. of the shares, said that the Secretary of State's political decision to force the company into administration has changed for ever its involvement in the British market.

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): Fund managers would say that.

Mr. Chope: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to expand on that, I shall give way to him. Franklin Mutual is absolutely right. It runs an investment organisation and realises as a result of the Government's action that they can no longer be trusted. David Winters, Franklin Mutual's portfolio manager, said:

"An injustice has been done. We did not expect the UK to do something like this. If the Government is willing to do this, it sets the tone for the entire market. A bigger risk premium is to be attached to investing in British companies now."

That is not only the American view. The director-general of the Confederation of British Industry said on Sunday:

"The capital markets like stability, they don't like surprises"

They had no stability and a lot of surprises when all this happened.

Without private sector investment, the Government's 10-year transport plan for the railways is unachievable. To deliver a "bigger, better, safer railway" requires £60 billion. It is common ground, at least between the Government and the Conservative party, that all that money cannot be afforded by British taxpayers.

The Secretary of State led us to believe that placing Railtrack into administration reduces the burden on British taxpayers. Is it not odd, then, that on Sunday a senior official in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions said:

"The relationship between the Department and the Treasury is the worst I have ever known. It is very sour indeed."

That official reported that the Secretary of State had become so isolated from the Chancellor that he had had to enlist the help of the Deputy Prime Minister to obtain a more sympathetic hearing. As someone who once served as a Transport Minister, I can only say that if the relationship between the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Chancellor of the Exchequer is worse than ever before, it must be dire indeed.

It would be extraordinarily out of character for the Chancellor of the Exchequer or any Treasury Minister to be at odds with a Secretary of State who had just taken a course of action to save taxpayers' money. The perception in the Treasury and elsewhere is that taxpayers will have to foot a much larger bill as a result of railway administration. The implications extend not just to investment in Railtrack and the railway infrastructure, but to all the Government's public private partnerships. Last Sunday, the *Independent on Sunday* printed an article under the headline, "Railtrack collapse might cost British taxpayers an extra £7.5bn." The article included a reference to whether we would receive the investment, and at what price, in the public private partnership being arranged for the London underground. It seems that the price will be significantly above what it would have been before the Government's actions on 5 to 7 October.

Under the Government's 10-year transport plan, the Strategic Rail Authority is responsible for using public funding to attract private sector investment to enhance the railways. How will Railtrack administration facilitate that objective?

The Secretary of State recently appointed a new chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority at an annual salary of £250,000 for a five-year contract. Has his remit changed from that of his predecessor and, if so, in what way? The glossy leaflet produced jointly by the Strategic Rail Authority and the Office of the Rail Regulator in May this year stated:

"The Strategic Rail Authority sets the overall strategic vision, brings together passenger and freight interests and ensures that passenger services, fares and other interests are controlled and protected in a way that provides better value."

Nine months have now passed since the Strategic Rail Authority started operations, but it has not yet produced a strategy. A strategy document has been promised for this month. I hope that the Minister can tell us this morning when it will be published and whether it will address the issue of how the strategic objectives will be furthered by putting Railtrack into administration. There are rumours that the document may be published in a truncated form and issued subject to review, which would not be of much use in setting a clear strategy for the railways.

What about the role of the Rail Regulator? I asked the Minister to explain how the Rail Regulator will fulfil his principal statutory duty to regulate Railtrack's stewardship of the national rail network now that it is in administration. The Rail Regulator is statutorily independent of the Government. Parliament invested him with a range of statutory powers under the Railways Act 1993, as amended by the Transport Act 2000 and the Competition Act 1998. His job is to ensure that Railtrack's income—a combination of private finance and public subsidy that is set by the regulator—is spent on the right things at the right time.

The Rail Regulator has not been without his critics, but he has been a vital servant of customers. As the glossy leaflet to which I have referred makes clear:

"By using his powers proactively, proportionately and fairly the Regulator is helping to create a better railway for passengers and freight customers."

How can investors in any company that emerges from the Railtrack administration be assured that the Rail Regulator will not be second-guessed and threatened by the Secretary of State? Does the Minister accept that the Secretary of State's actions on 7 October have destroyed at a stroke the credibility of the Rail Regulator's independence? Is it not obvious that the role of a regulator will vary greatly, depending on whether the company that takes Railtrack out of administration is a not-for-profit company or a for-profit company?

The administrator is legally independent of the Government and is obliged to consider all offers for the business on their merits. However, how can companies and organisations interested in taking Railtrack out of administration be convinced of the administrator's freedom of action? In his initial statement following the railway administration order, the Secretary of State made it clear that he was wedded to the creation of a not-for-profit company staffed by a miscellany of Government toadies. At that stage, the Secretary of State had it in mind that the chairman of Railtrack would be one such toady, but it was great to discover that he was not to be seduced in that way.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): My hon. Friend has hit on a very important point. Bearing in mind the vicious way in which the Secretary of State attacked the chairman of Railtrack in his statement to the House a few weeks ago, is it not surprising that he was the first person to come to the Secretary of State's mind as chairman of the new company?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Secretary of State is behaving in an extraordinary way. He is making many enemies among those who have made career changes in order to do their best to provide a good railway for our country. When they do not do as the Secretary of State insists, all they get is abuse. The issue is one of trust in the Secretary of State. When he decides, under schedule 7 to the Railways Act 1993, whether to accept the administrator's proposals, he will be judge and jury in his own favour on his own pet proposal.

On 23 October, the Secretary of State told the House that

"it will ultimately be for the administrator to assess and make recommendations on proposals for the transfer of Railtrack's assets out of administration, as a going concern."

That was an accurate statement. However, he continued:

"Under schedule 7 of the Railways Act 1993, I will have to approve any such transfer. However, there is every possibility that"—

as recent press coverage has made clear—

"there will be more than one proposal before the administrator. The Government and I welcome that."—[*Official Report*, 23 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 163.]

Like hell they do. The Secretary of State said from the outset that he had a proposal, and he implied that it would be implemented immediately on commencement of the administration.

For how long will the administration continue? I am told that it may be for at least a year, during which time it will cost an enormous amount of money. In effect, the same people will be running Railtrack as before, with the exception of the four administrators from Ernst and Young and one other person.

What are the implications for the administrator's freedom of action? For example, what freedom is he being given to reduce the staff overhead, which Railtrack had been preparing to announce in October? Is the £800 million that has been allocated to keep the administrator in funds the only payment that he will receive, or will there be more? Are those payments coming from the DTLR budget or from the contingency reserve?

When will a new business plan be produced? When will a prospectus be prepared? How is the anger of 10,500 employees who have lost their savings to be assuaged? The Government are talking about special purpose vehicles. How will that safeguard the west coast line project? How will not-for-profit companies be able to create surpluses? All the statements by the Secretary of State suggest that they will be able to create surpluses and will not be at risk of making any losses. The only way in which they can create surpluses is by charging more for access to the tracks. Where are the upgrades to come from, and how are they to be financed? How will the risks of performance and train operator compensation be handled through special purpose vehicles? The Minr needs to answer a whole host of questions.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): As the hon. Gentleman draws to a conclusion, I wonder whether he intends to refer at all to the customers of Railtrack, as so far he has not done so. Is anything to be gained by customers or taxpayers from bailing out an incompetent company, and what price is he prepared to pay for that?

Mr. Chope: I did refer to customers and to taxpayers; perhaps the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) was preparing his notes for his own speech. I am keeping mine shorter than the normal 20 minutes because I know that many hon. Members want to join in.

I want to concentrate on the way ahead.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chope: No. Those who work for Railtrack, private sector investors and taxpayers all have a role to play in solving the problems precipitated by the Secretary of State. One thing above all is clear: there will be no solution without his resignation.

11.18 am

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): The first thing that I want to say is that the Secretary of State's decision was the right decision, a brave decision and a hard decision. The alternative proposed by the Opposition is to drip-feed unsustainably, a casualty that was on a life-support system.

In the run-up to 1997, when the Conservative Government were facing inevitable election defeat, they sold off Railtrack at a fraction of its value—around £2 billion, although the markets valued it at around £8 billion. That is acknowledged by the Public Accounts

[Geraint Davies]

Committee. That enormous rip-off cost every taxpayer about £100—let us put shareholder loss in the wider context of taxpayer loss. The public were left not only out of pocket but with an unco-ordinated and fragmented mess and an absurd corporate structure. People have talked about false markets. Railtrack consisted of Government money—taxpayers' money—that had been paid to it. Some of that money could be lifted out for shareholders and some of it was invested in services, but the focus on cost reduction inevitably led to difficulties on the safety front.

I remember seeing the headline of an article in the trade press in which Railtrack put the case that signal investment did not make business sense. It made safety sense, but it did not make business sense to Railtrack's incompetent managers. When I say "incompetent managers", I am, of course, referring to Mr. Winsor's testimony to the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions:

"At my first meeting with the Secretary of State after the election, I said I believed that the core problem of the railway industry was the competence of the management of the company"—

Railtrack. When Mr. Winsor was asked why Railtrack chose to turn to the Government, rather than to him, for help, he replied:

"I have no duty or inclination to give taxpayers' money to the company to make up for it being inefficient and incompetent. It is possible that the company thought that if I would not give them money for being inefficient and incompetent, maybe the Government would. I think that would be an extraordinary judgment for the company to make".

His view was that there was incompetent management in an unsustainable and crazy false market.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): If Railtrack was badly structured and incapable of delivering success, why did the Government choose to make it the principle investment vehicle in their 10-year plan?

Geraint Davies: The 10-year plan was predicated on our starting point. However, we are moving toward a stakeholder model. A non-profit making corporate governance will bring together the various stakeholders who were in the business of blaming each other for our shambolic railway system. The shambles was caused by the previous Government's under-investment combined with an absurd and unsustainable corporate structure. We shall move toward train operating companies, the Strategic Rail Authority, customers and employees working together for a better future that will be supported by record Government investment, which is something that we did not see when the Conservatives were in government.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I am concerned about the hon. Gentleman's political career. Earlier, he rebuked the Deputy Prime Minister for suggesting that safety had not been compromised under privatisation. Will he clarify those remarks? Was the Deputy Prime Minister wrong?

Geraint Davies: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can explain what he means.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman said earlier that safety was compromised under Railtrack and privatisation. The Deputy Prime Minister went out of his way in the House to say that safety had not been compromised under privatisation. The hon. Gentleman clearly feels that the Deputy Prime Minister was wrong. Will he clarify his remarks?

Geraint Davies: The Deputy Prime Minister will stand by his remarks. The regulator requires the system to be safe, but in a private corporation such as Railtrack there is evidence, which I quoted, that there is a trade-off between investment and shareholder needs. Investment in signals, which is an overhead, has a bearing on safety. There has been an on-going discussion about signals, investment and time scale. It would be silly to suggest that there was not a trade-off between investment and shareholder needs.

The Government inherited Frankenstein's monster. To pretend that that will scare away investors in the private market is to misunderstand that market. There is no doubt that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) has correctly quoted American fund managers. If one can, one will invest in what appears to be a risk-free corporation. If one can buy shares in the knowledge that the Government will always bail one out, one will invest more money. Compare that with, for instance, private finance initiatives, of which the Government have completed more than 100. On 26 November the National Audit Office will publish a report on the relative success of all those projects.

I will not run through all the questions, but one was about the level of risk transfer and added value. There is not much risk transfer if the corporation thinks that it will be continually bailed out by the taxpayer. That was the false market of Railtrack—the absurd monster that was created by the Conservatives, who sit here smirking. I presume that their policy would have been to continue to drip-feed that monster never-ending amounts of money simply to support their prejudice. The British public know that that would not be the right thing to do, although it would be the easy thing to do. We have done the right thing, which is to issue no blank cheques. I know that the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) wants to offer £1 billion from his coffers.

Mr. McLoughlin: I should like to take the hon. Gentleman back to what he was he saying about safety. It is important that this point is not misunderstood. Does he say that the Health and Safety Executive has failed in its duty on railway safety over the past five years?

Geraint Davies: No, of course I do not. I simply say that Railtrack is losing confidence and has issued press releases saying that various investments in safety matters did not make business sense. That is clearly borne out by the cuts that Railtrack has made. It seems rich that in his opening remarks the hon. Member for Christchurch said that the workers had been betrayed on the issue of costs, yet a moment later he asked the Minister to clarify what facility there was to reduce the staff overhead as Railtrack planned. In his opening remarks the plan was to look after the workers, yet later it was to sack half of them to reduce overheads. That is ridiculous.

In 1996, as we approached privatisation, the Conservatives adopted a scorched-earth approach. The idea was to sell off a publicly-run industry at any price,

just to get it out of the system so that it could not be publicly accountable or represent value for money again. We have managed to turn that round. We have got rid of the system that I have described in which a corporate intermediary pays Government money to shareholders while cutting investment.

There have been horrendous failures in rail safety such as at Paddington and Hatfield. It was notable that the then chairman of Railtrack, Gerald Corbett, who had apparently been running a very safe system, closed it down to change all the tracks. We are led to believe that until that point the system was safe, yet all of a sudden he had to close it down and then he resigned and ran off to India to go on a diet, having been given an undisclosed amount of money. We are supposed to support that system of secrecy. The same week that Gerald Corbett went off to India with his massive pay packet, Kevin Keegan, another well-known figure, resigned because he was not doing his job properly. He did not take any money with him. The whole system was absurd.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Geraint Davies: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), as I should like him to comment on how that step change took place overnight.

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. This is a hugely important point. Is he aware that Lord Cullen made two very clear statements in his second report—first, that the nature of the privatisation of the railways did not have an adverse effect on safety and secondly, that the railways have continued to become safer since privatisation? None of us feel anything but the deepest horror and shock about the accidents at Ladbroke Grove and Hatfield, but they are not typical of the safety trends in the rail industry.

Geraint Davies: There certainly have been fewer fatalities and greater safety over time. My point, as the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell will know if he was listening, was that the chairman of Railtrack was in charge of a system that was apparently completely safe, in the aftermath of Paddington but decided to close down the rail industry because it was not safe. Either it was safe or it was not. I respect what Lord Cullen said, but it is strange. He said, too, that in the immediate aftermath of the sale there should not necessarily have been a systemic reason for safety problems. It is bizarre to say, "This is a completely safe system," and at the same time say also that it is fair to close it down because there are problems with the track.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Geraint Davies: No. I will move on, as other hon. Members may wish to speak.

The previous Administration had no record of building public-private partnerships or levering in private money; they sold off our assets on the cheap. However, there is an enormous groundswell of investment from this Government. The Conservative policy on the tube was simply to sell it off, but when the private sector cut costs and services and raised fares to maximise profit, there would have been a problem again. The Opposition have no understanding of the culture of public-private partnership and bringing the best to bear in terms of risk transfer and added value; to them it is a matter of selling the industry to the market and perhaps having to bail it out. That is not what the public want, and their verdict at the election made that clear.

The Conservative focus on the issue is non-strategic; the Opposition are not addressing the strategic interests of a customer-driven rail network in the new millennium. They are interested only in the tittle-tattle of who said what in a meeting. That is all they talk about in the Tea Room. What the public want to know is whether they can get on a train, and whether they can have an environmentally sustainable fast system that works for Britain. They were let down by 20 years of under-investment and the virtual destruction of the rail system as the Conservative forces backed away from the public, who threw them out on their ear.

We are now rebuilding a new corporate governance to bring together the different parts of the rail industry to work with a public investment commitment that has never been seen before. That will renew the culture of working with the private sector, perhaps on project-based delivery to provide the best value for money and the best quality for customers. Workers, customers, Government, business and environmentalists will clap their hands and welcome this great change.

I wish the Secretary of State the best of luck. I am sure that he will not be distracted by the rubbish, tittle-tattle and trivia of Conservative Members, who will stay in opposition for many years to come.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. It may assist the many hon. Members who want to participate in the debate to know that the winding-up speeches will start at 12 o'clock and the Minister must be called not later than 12.20 pm.

11.34 am

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): The speech of the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) was typical of Labour contributions to debates on the railways: they simply retell history and give no reason why, if what happened was so catastrophic, they did not do something at the start of their Administration, rather than wait for four and a half years. They claim that they are doing something decisive, but they are merely reacting in panic to events to which they have contributed.

The second aspect of the Government's lamentable performance since they came to office is that they have simply dumped everything on the Railtrack management and staff in a disgraceful manner. They inherited the innovative and new structure of Railtrack and the operating companies when they came into office. They had the opportunity to nurse it and to achieve the good management that would have delivered better service and, crucially, retained private sector confidence so that private money could be levered in, as was intended all along.

[Mr. John Horam]

The hon. Gentleman talked about the Government's expertise and success but totally ignored the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) created the present structures. He introduced the public-private partnership and the private finance initiative, and was extremely successful in dealing with prisons, roads and motorways. That happened well before the hon. Gentleman was even a Member of the House of Commons, and he should not rewrite history in the way that he did.

Geraint Davies: It is worth telling the hon. Gentleman that, as leader of Croydon council, I oversaw the tramlink public-private partnership. We started discussing the issue in 1986 and it went through the House under the previous Conservative Government. The idea that I have no hands-on experience of projects worth hundreds of millions pounds is quite false.

Mr. Horam: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says about tramlinks, which are an excellent idea. He should not, however, distort the history of the private finance initiative and public-private partnerships, which were well advanced before a Labour Administration ever thought of them. The Government have simply carried on with the good aspects of Conservative Government policy but, sadly, they have failed to take advantage of some initiatives.

When they came into office, the Government had an opportunity to manage the situation in a way that would have produced better results for those who use trains regularly or take long journeys and for employees—my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) was right to focus on those groups. The Government had an opportunity to make the industry viable but, sadly, they failed.

We are where we are today because the Government failed to take the opportunities offered by the innovative and new structure that they inherited from the Conservative Government. They have totally failed, and it is apparent to all concerned—Members of Parliament, railway users and Railtrack employees, who are undoubtedly angry—that the Secretary of State is in a mess.

In a spirit of fairness, I fully accept that the railway management cannot entirely escape blame. It did not always live up to its operational responsibilities in the way that we would have wished. Equally, the Rail Regulator cannot entirely escape blame for some of the things that happened. He gave punctuality and regularity of service too much priority over safety, which gave Railtrack wrong incentives, for which we have paid. However, when anything has gone wrong in the past four and half years, Ministers have regularly and repeatedly dumped all the blame on the Railtrack management—the executives and board—like a shot.

I know Railtrack well because I represent a commuter constituency in outer London, and I have often talked to Railtrack and Connex, which is my local operator. I know that their morale has suffered because repeated and unfair Government statements have dumped all the blame on them. Even this summer, when I last talked to Railtrack, it thought that things were beginning to come round post-Hatfield. Indeed, Tom Winsor, the rail regulator, said that things were beginning to move in the right direction, that some major problems had been resolved and that those involved were close to getting things right—but then the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) became the Minister responsible for the issue. From his point of view, it is probably unfortunate that he, as a law lecturer with no experience of management, has been put in jobs that demand some understanding of the role of management. People often think that management is simple, but it is quite difficult and requires skills and experience. In a previous incarnation, the Secretary of State completely messed up the BMW affair, and he has messed up again now.

A propos the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch about the relationship between the Treasury and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, it is probably true that a Blairite Minister was confronted with a Chancellor of the Exchequer who was not always his best friend.

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), knows that a Treasury Minister should be in the Chamber as well, because the Treasury is, to a considerable extent, to blame for some of the problems that have occurred in the industry. In relation to London Underground and Railtrack, the Chancellor of the Exchequer's attitude has not been fundamentally posited on giving a better service to users and a better job to employees. He has simply considered the subjects from a narrow Treasury point of view.

It is sad that what has to be done with Railtrack was already beginning to be done. It needs to be run in a decentralised way, with the organisation structured so that it can respond sensibly to the investment needs of operating companies.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): After privatisation, had passenger numbers on railways not reached a post-war high? Passenger numbers, investment and safety levels were increasing. Now there is a complete lack of confidence in the railway system. Surely my hon. Friend's constituents want increased investment in the railways and some hope that their rail service will improve.

Mr. Horam: My hon. Friend is right to stress hope. The present situation is disastrous. I talked this morning to servants of the House, some of whom are my constituents. They said that their train was late every day last week as they came to work. Such problems are regular. Overcrowding is severe and safety remains a problem. People want hope, but at the moment they have no hope. Hope has receded as a result of the measures taken by Ministers.

The company could have been nursed into life, but now we face total uncertainty. We do not know whether a not-for-profit company, another private organisation or something else will succeed Railtrack. There is huge delay. What will happen to schemes that my local Connex rail managers had banked on to improve problems such as overcrowding and regularity? For

example, there were schemes to invest in platform lengthening and signal re-siting so that the trains could carry 12 coaches rather than eight or six, which could mean that more people were carried in greater comfort and with greater regularity. That is what commuters in Orpington want.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The hon. Gentleman talks about a lack of investment. Will he confirm that on 18 February, long before the Secretary of State's action, Railtrack announced that it was slashing its major project budget?

Mr. Horam: I am not familiar with that fact. A report in *The Observer* made the point that

"Improvements worth billions of pounds for Britain's ailing rail network are to be put on hold indefinitely because of the Government decision to force Railtrack into administration."

They had not been put on hold before that. I have talked to Connex South Eastern, my local rail operator, which was to have talks in September about the schemes that I mentioned—platform lengthening, signal re-siting and so forth—to improve the capacity of trains. Those talks have been postponed because Railtrack was put into administration.

The report in *The Observer* continued:

"Industry sources have told *The Observer* that modernisation schemes for struggling commuter lines, improvements to mainline routes between cities and track maintenance to reduce delays will have to be put off because of worries about the railways' future."

It suggests that the delay will be between six months and two years, so I disagree with the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). A package was clearly emerging for my local rail operator, which is the only one about which I can confirm anything, but all that has been put into the future.

I have pressed the Minister on such matters before and I will do so again. I want to know when there will be clear investment plans that will benefit the users of the railway. I also want to see the commuters into central London getting proper priority against the more visible main line track improvements. London is one of the great wealth creators of the country, as I am sure the hon. Member for Croydon, Central will agree. I will continue to press the Minister, because transport under this Government has been a disaster. Jonathan Porritt, appointed by the Government as chairman of the Sustainable Development Commission, singled out transport as the biggest area of total disaster under this Government when he made a speech at the beginning of this year in the presence of the Minister for the Environment and others.

Transport, whether one examines the case of Railtrack or that of London Underground, has gone backwards under the Government. We are now worse off than we were five years ago, when progress was being made. That is a disgrace, and I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch secured this debate so that we could discuss these important issues.

11.45 am

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I will keep my contribution as brief as I possibly can, Mr. O'Hara, to allow other Members to speak.

A specific aspect of the placing of Railtrack in administration was featured on the front page of the *South Wales Echo* last week. The newspaper pointed out that we have been assured by the Secretary of State that, under any new arrangement anticipated by the Government, the Vale of Glamorgan railway line will be reopened for a passenger service at the beginning of 2003. That will be the largest single investment in railways in Wales since the days of Beeching. The service will be fine and passengers will flock to it and be able to catch the train, which will now run from Barry all the way to Bridgend, to stations in Rhws and in Llanilltud Fawr. If we are lucky, it will run to Llandow, but we will have to wait and see.

My other point is one that I did not anticipate making until I heard the speeches of Conservative Members. Sitting here, I wondered what sort of "Alice in Wonderland" world we were living in. I never thought that we would hear Tory Members, with their alleged commitment to the private sector and their ideological commitment to free enterprise and the market, defend a clearly incompetent company. Mr. Winsor made it clear, in his evidence to the Select Committee, that the company was incompetent and believed that if it could not keep going back to the regulator for more money, it could go straight to the Government and demand whatever it wanted for as long as it wanted.

Railtrack believed that the Government would carry on pouring money into a black hole, irrespective of the outrageous record of this allegedly private company. I have had the privilege of managing a limited company and recognising the commercial disciplines of answering to its shareholders and—most important in any successful company—meeting its customers' needs. If a private company fails to meet its customers' needs, it will never satisfy its shareholders. Yet Conservative Members want to bail out a failing company. Until now we have not heard a figure, and I hope that at some stage in the debate they will tell right hon. and hon. Members exactly how much taxpayers' money they would be prepared to use to bail out a failing private sector company. Will it be £1 billion extra to bail out their shareholder friends, or £1.5 billion, or £2 billion?

I look forward with interest to hearing what price a party committed ideologically to privatisation and the success and achievement of the private sector is prepared to pay to bail out a failing private sector company. I have never heard anything so absurd in my life. Somehow, the Opposition suggest, confidence in the private sector and private-sector partnerships will be regained by a massive taxpayers' bail-out, but that is not how the private sector works. If investors see that money is being pumped in to bail out a failing company, they will desert that company as surely as night follows day. Exactly how much taxpayers' money should be spent on bailing out an incompetent company?

I picked up a point from this morning's debate that is important for the people of this country. What alternative do the Opposition propose? We have heard no alternatives apart from some fuzzy reference to a decentralised organisation—a suggestion that came from a member of a party that created one of the most centralised, centrally planned and inefficient structures ever seen. Let us hear of an alternative. And what of their crocodile tears for small shareholders? They do not give a damn about small shareholders—they care only

[Mr. John Smith]

for the institutional shareholders, who are now crying out because the company that they invested in, which has been a total failure, is not going to be bailed out indefinitely. I am glad that that company will not be bailed out indefinitely, and the sooner we replace it with a new structure that puts the customer first, the better. I recognise the interests of stakeholders at every level, but services must be customer focused or they will not succeed. That must be top of the agenda.

Geraint Davies: Does my hon. Friend think that the Opposition might move towards privatising the industry again, given that it originally cost £6 billion, which, along with the £1.5 billion compensation package, comes to quite a lot of money? Everything added together comes to a total of £13.5 billion. Does he think that they will propose privatisation again, as it was clearly such a good idea?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. After this morning's contributions from the Tory Opposition, I would think them capable of doing it again. The company was privatised in an ill-considered way and was given a huge advantage when the taxpayer was ripped off by its undervaluation. It was given a huge capital base to work from as well as revenue support from central Government. The fact that it failed so badly only shows how incompetent the company was.

The regulator has been mentioned in the debate—specifically, the disagreement between the regulator and the Secretary of State. That does not bother me so much; what interests me is that the regulator said that the company had neglected both its assets and its customers. I think that he was right.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I think that the hon. Gentleman needs a little break—and to keep taking the tablets. Does he think that lambasting the private sector as he is doing will make it more or less likely that it will invest the £30 billion that the Government need for their 10-year plan?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman has no idea what he is talking about, unfortunately. Unlike him, I have worked for the private sector and for a limited company. I know how the real world works. I am not running down the private sector—far from it. The private sector will see through the Conservative party's ridiculous proposals quicker than anyone else.

The structure of any future company must be customer focused and customer driven. From my limited experience I suggest that, whatever formula the Government devise for partnerships, they recognise their strengths and weaknesses and the fact that one cannot make the private sector do what it is unable to do. It is driven by a commercial imperative, so they should ensure that any accountabilities and responsibilities belong to the relevant part of the partnership.

Similarly, one cannot ask the Government and the public sector to do what they cannot do. The successful formula is one that demarcates responsibilities clearly and gives the two sectors the freedom to do what they do best without interference. If that formula is used we can look forward to the outcome, as it will deliver a service to the hard-done-by train passengers, who have suffered for so long.

I want to make a point that has been overlooked in at least two contributions to the debate. There is a difference between a not-for-profit company and a non-profit-making company. It is wise not to confuse the two. We should strive for a not-for-profit company that is organised on clear commercial lines, but is customer driven.

11.57 am

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I thank the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) for keeping his remarks brief and leaving me three minutes in which to speak.

On 18 June, the Secretary of State said:

"I am not going to embark on big structural changes. What the industry needs now is a period of stability and certainty so it can concentrate on the vital job of delivering safe, reliable services for passengers and freight".

Two weeks later, he turned Government policy and the previous statements of the Strategic Rail Authority on their head by saying that he wanted to progress not 20-year franchises, but two-year franchises. Nine days after that was the famous meeting between him, his officials and John Robinson, the chairman of Railtrack, at which there was or was not, depending on whom one believes, a discussion about Railtrack's viability as a business.

The dominant issue over the past three months is whether Railtrack was really insolvent or whether the Government attempted to push it into insolvency to deliver nationalisation at no cost. If it was insolvent, what happened between May and October to make it so? There is no evidence of any major adverse financial developments. The financial results due at the end of October were likely to be in line with market expectations, so what problems did Railtrack face?

The first problem was that the regulator's review had offered the company an increase in spending for repairs, renewals and operational expenses for the next five years from £12.9 billion to £13.3 billion. That is extremely little, given the huge challenge that Railtrack faces if it is to cope simply with the increase in passengers during the past five years, let alone the Government's target of a 50 per cent. increase in the next 10 years.

Another problem concerns Renewco, the company agreed by the Government to be established as an alternative vehicle for some of the investment finance. It was due to be set up in June, but it was delayed and delayed and never happened. The £162 million grant that was supposed to underpin the next stage of investment never appeared. Then the Government scrapped their own regulatory system to remove any option that the industry had to sort out its financial predicaments.

On what information did the Secretary of State act? He did not talk to the Strategic Rail Authority, the regulator or, I suspect, the Minister. So who was involved in the discussions? What due diligence was there with regard to the financial position? Did the Secretary of State really take his decision on the basis of a single meeting with the Railtrack chairman, or had he already taken it? Was he looking for an excuse? We now

see investment plans on the shelf in all directions. I shall listen with interest to the Minister's comments about that and about what happens next.
12 noon

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Given what will happen later, I suspect that we are at the beginning of what can truly be described as groundhog day.

I listened with interest to the thoughtful and analytical speech of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), whom I congratulate on securing this Adjournment debate. However, I remind him that one is in danger of losing the plot if one exaggerates too much. The hon. Gentleman went way over the top by comparing the Secretary of State's actions to those of President Mugabe in Zimbabwe. I noted with interest that his thoughtful speech neither acknowledged that significant problems needed to be tackled nor offered solutions.

I also noted with interest the sedentary suggestion that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) would give us some solutions. We look forward to them. I understand that he will suggest the precise sum that should be invested. I have taken a small risk—

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman risks anticipating what other hon. Members might say.

Mr. Foster: I suspect that you might be right, Mr. Hancock. However, I have taken a risk and written down the sum to which I suspect the hon. Gentleman will refer.

There is no doubt that significant problems needed to be tackled within Railtrack. At least the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) was prepared to acknowledge that there were some problems with the management of Railtrack. There were concerns about the golden goodbyes that various people were given. When he retired, one of the recipients, Mr. Gerald Corbett, was prepared to acknowledge that there were significant problems with Railtrack. There were concerns about the management and supervision of contractors, project cost overruns and the organisation's financial viability. As hon. Members will no doubt discuss later in great detail, Railtrack was placed on credit watch and its rating was reduced. We are all aware of its frequent attempts to go around Whitehall with its begging bowl and its plans to sack one in 12 of its staff. I do not entirely share the view, but there are concerns in some quarters that safety remains a problem, as the hon. Member for Orpington said.

Many of those who are close to what is happening are highly critical. The hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) referred to the critical comments that the Rail Regulator, Mr. Tom Winsor, made about Railtrack during his evidence to the Select Committee last week. For example, he said:

"They are the authors of their own misfortune."

He continued:

"The core problem is the competence of the management of the company."

He talked later of Railtrack's failure to look after both its assets and its customers. It was interesting to note from his answers that he had tried on three separate occasions to persuade Railtrack voluntarily to produce something as simple as a register of all its assets, but that it had not done so.

The train operating companies have been critical of Railtrack. The passenger figures for the four weeks up to 13 October have fallen by 2 per cent., which means that more than 2 million passengers have deserted the railways. Phil White is the chief executive of the largest train operating company, National Express, which has nine out of the 25 rail franchises. He has blamed Railtrack for much of the problem:

"Passengers are becoming increasingly frustrated at the number of speed restrictions still in place."

Railtrack has repeatedly given us dates by which the system will be back to normal. Time after time it has given us dates; time after time it has failed to deliver.

I was fascinated to hear from the hon. Member for Orpington that he had had discussions with Railtrack as recently as this summer, when he was told, "we are beginning to come round". We were promised that the problems would be over by last Christmas, but now we are told that the company is still coming round.

There were significant problems with Railtrack, and the Government had to make a decision. One solution, which was not sensible, was to continue to pour more and more taxpayers' money into this ailing and failing company. The time had come to pull the plug and to find an alternative way forward. Let us remember that Railtrack's advisers calculated that there were only three options: to restructure, to renationalise or to put the company into receivership. The Secretary of State's decision was correct. For far too long there has been an obscene conflict in a monopoly between shareholder profit and passenger safety; it had to be brought to an end.

Chris Grayling: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, excluding the west coast main line project, Railtrack had been given a standstill budget for repairs and maintenance for the next five years?

Mr. Foster: There were many difficulties in the funding arrangements, but the real difficulty was Railtrack's inability to attract the necessary private sector finance to carry out its work. I remind the hon. Gentleman of my earlier intervention: it was in February, not in the past few weeks, that Railtrack acknowledged that it must make significant reductions in its funding for a variety of projects. Something had to be done, and the not-for-profit public interest company approach is correct. I would say that, of course, because Liberal Democrats proposed the idea on 14 February 2001. One week after we proposed it, the Institute for Public Policy Research came up with a similar proposal.

My criticism of the Secretary of State relates to the way in which he has handled the issue. There is no doubt in my mind that had he given serious thought to the matter at an earlier date, when everybody knew the problems, there would have been a variety of ways in which to introduce the new model. He did not have to adopt the nuclear option. There would have been an opportunity for discussions with Railtrack given that its advisers had raised that possibility. The speed with which the Secretary of State operated, and the way in which he did so, has led to considerable confusion.

[Mr. Foster]

There is also confusion about who owns which assets. That is an understandable concern for Railtrack's shareholders. However, the shareholders should point the finger of blame not at the Secretary of State but at Railtrack's managers, who have let the shareholders down.

Huge confusion has arisen about who said what to whom and when. The hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) has described that debate as "tittle-tattle". The travelling public are not interested in that—they want to know when they will have a safe, reliable and affordable railway. Many key issues relating to the future of our railways need to be addressed. They include not just the structure of Railtrack, but ways of reducing fragmentation, sorting out the problem of ridiculously high fares, bringing together train and track, further improving safety and so on. Those are the issues that the travelling public are concerned about. They will not be interested if Members on both sides of the House spend all their time discussing what the hon. Member for Croydon, Central described as tittle-tattle. They want to know how the Secretary of State will end the current confusion and how we will move forward.

12.10 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on securing this excellent debate. As the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) said, he approached it analytically and with his customary moderate and middle-of-the-road style, which was most welcome and refreshing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) said, rightly, that the Government were reaping what they had sown and and that they had failed to take various opportunities that were offered to them. My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) raised some pertinent points on whether Railtrack was bust. I suspect that we shall remember the opening part of the debate and the speech of the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies), who organised the equivalent of a parliamentary egging of the Deputy Prime Minister by suggesting that he was silly to suggest that privatisation had not in any way compromised safety. I wish the hon. Gentleman godspeed when he leaves the Chamber.

We are aware of exactly what the Labour Whips wanted.

Geraint Davies: It is quite wrong for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that I said that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister was silly. I simply made a point about what Railtrack had done and what was said in the press—that it had closed down the system and issued press notices saying that there was a trade-off between signal investment and business sense.

Mr. Pickles *rose—*

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Minister will expect and need 10 minutes in which to reply. If the hon. Gentleman takes further interventions, he will not have extra time.

Mr. Pickles: We have been chums for a long time, Mr. Hancock. I am like a chronometer and will stop. I was merely concerned about the hon. Member for Croydon, Central.

We shall return to the matter later. The Minister may be Secretary of State before the day has passed and, if he is, we wish him well.

We need to know whether Railtrack was bust. The various questions would then be relevant. Was Railtrack bust according to the classic balance sheet or cashflow definition? We know, because my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell said so, that Railtrack was operating from its business plan and there was nothing new. Everyone knew what the position was and it was clear that the company needed an extra £1.5 billion in January and March this year. The hon. Member for Bath reminded us that Railtrack was taking steps to cut back, but he drew the wrong conclusion. On 2 April an agreement was made between the Strategic Rail Authority, the Government and Railtrack to obtain the extra £1.5 billion.

We know that that work was undertaken with City advisers Lazard and with Linklaters and Paine to create a company, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell referred, called Renewco. Half was to be owned by Railtrack and half by the Strategic Rail Authority. We also know that by triggering Renewco, Railtrack would have received £162 million under schedule D of the April agreement. That in turn would have generated an extra £318 million from the banks, so Railtrack would have had not much less than £0.5 billion at its disposal. With the Government's payment of £330 million, on which the Secretary of State was keen to comment, and the extra money, Railtrack would have received only a little less than £1 billion.

We now know that during the summer, the Treasury dragged its feet on the creation of Renewco. We know that until days before the Government pulled the plug on Railtrack, they were still promising the £162 million. That was equivalent to saying, "The cheque is in the post". The Government are now able to pay the £162 million, so they have made an offer to Railtrack. What has changed? Why can they now pay the money? The only explanation is that offering the money earlier would have prevented Railtrack from going into receivership. It is because of the Government's decision that Railtrack is in precisely that position.

As for future funding, a chief civil servant at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions said at a meeting with Credit Suisse First Boston that the creation of a not-for-profit company would be neither appropriate nor attractive. Before the Select Committee, the regulator warned the Secretary of State against a decision that would fundamentally undermine policy on public-private partnership deals. In future, City institutions will be looking for between 0.5 per cent. and 1.5 per cent. on all deals.

In a few weeks, the first of two public-private partnership deals involving London Underground and two consortiums—Metronet and TubeLines—will be signed. Some £8 billion will have to be raised. The City estimates that an extra £10 million a year in interest will have to be paid as a direct result of decisions taken by the Secretary of State. That is £10 million less for public services and improvements to the line. Hospitals, roads and rail will cost more because this Government have decided to pull the plug on Railtrack. In an earlier intervention, the hon. Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas), who is Parliamentary

Private Secretary to the Minister, said, "They would say that, wouldn't they?" That is more than £1 million a word.

We hear the mocking of those hard workers who decided that they wanted not only to work for the rail industry but to make a contribution. Some 92 per cent. of Railtrack employees made investments. They are not highly paid: a grade 1 signaller gets a little less than £12,000, and a clerical worker gets only £18,000. Overnight, those people have had the equivalent of a wage cut. Signallers lost 9 per cent., and clerical workers lost 6 per cent. Some signalling managers lost £7,500, and some assistant area production managers lost £20,000. Most of those shareholders decided to take script dividends because they were committed to the railways. However, the Government have kicked them in the teeth.

I shall let one example speak for all. In an e-mail sent to my office, a railway worker asked me to put the following question:

"How can the railways improve now that he"—

the Secretary of State—

"has just robbed 90 per cent. of railway workers of their savings and pension contributions?"

He continued:

"I myself worked on the railway between 1992-1997, and have invested £11,000 in Railtrack...This year I have been made redundant, and lost 90 per cent. of my savings. New Labour, New start?"

That railway worker was encouraged by the Government to take out an employee share ownership scheme. Today, we will see whether the Secretary of State is prepared to do the right thing and put the interests of the railways above those of his own political career, and whether he will ensure that the only blockage to substantial investment in the railways is the Secretary of State himself. We look forward to his ultimate departure.

12.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on securing the debate. I constantly marvel at how often Conservative Members give us an opportunity microscopically to examine their handling of transport when they were in government. I believe that the hon. Gentleman was a barrister in his former incarnation. If this had been a court of law, Mr. Hancock, you as the judge would have thrown the case out after a few minutes owing to the total lack of evidence.

People who listen to these debates or read *Hansard* will be interested to note how Conservative Members talk endlessly about personalities, but seldom about the needs of passengers. The former Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, must have been in a debate like this when he said,

"When the eagles are silent, the parrots begin to jabber."

Today's Opposition Benches confront us with a row of budgies, endlessly repeating half truths, hearsay, innuendo, supposition and false rumour. One of those false rumours, which seriously undermines the Tories' case, was the newspaper story that occasioned the private notice question a week ago about the so-called scandal of the leaked fax. I have that document in my possession. It is a statutory instrument that was laid before the House on 8 October, but that did not stop Conservative Members getting very excited about it. The document was not actually a fax—what hon. Members thought were fax codes at the top were printers' references. If the Opposition are to make a case, they need to do their homework first.

Dr. Pugh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I shall not give way—there is a lot to cover.

The hon. Member for Christchurch raised several matters. The new chairman of the SRA, Richard Bowker, will consider a strategic plan, and I anticipate that that will be published by the end of the month.

I have already dealt with funding for the administration in a written answer. The immediate funds are to be provided from the contingency reserve, to be replaced by departmental funding in the winter supplementary round.

I liked the summary by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) of how privatisation was undertaken. The people who should be in the dock are sitting on the Opposition Benches, not the Labour Benches. Sir Philip Beck, who was the chairman of Railtrack until early this year, said on the "Today" programme as recently as 9 November:

"I've also said...that the privatisation was initially conceived with some perverse incentives which were unhelpful to the railway industry and...as a consequence to the travelling public".

The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) said that a Treasury Minister should be in the dock. I should be interested to hear some Conservative Members answering questions about how privatisation took place and why we find ourselves in the current situation. The hon. Gentleman made a wide, sweeping claim that the Government had done nothing for transport. He did not mention that the funding for his local transport plan in Kent had been increased by 76 per cent. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) was obsessed with personalities. We heard him rattling through the personality questions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) raised a good point and even invited the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) to intervene. He did not and I shall give him a further opportunity.

Mr. Pickles *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman has not heard what I want him to intervene about yet. He should be patient. My hon. Friend invited him to tell us how much would be needed to compensate the shareholders at the suggested level of £3.60 per share. Like the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), I wrote down a figure. We will see whether the hon. Gentleman gives us a figure that matches those that we have before us.

Mr. Pickles: I am happy to do so. Perhaps I could trade a quote from Sir Philip Beck, who said that the Secretary of State would

"find it very difficult to get any private sector funds in"

under the new arrangement. The Minister does not seem to have been listening to the shareholders—

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a speech. Interventions should be short.

Mr. Pickles: I will just finish my point, Mr. Hancock. The shareholders have made it clear that they do not require any help from the Government. There are plenty of assets in Railtrack. The Minister must therefore address the problem of finding that investment.

Mr. Jamieson: That was very interesting, Mr. Hancock.

When asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan, the hon. Gentleman said from a sedentary position that he would say how much they would compensate to the penny. He did not. I can tell him what the figure is. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Bath has written down a similar figure. To compensate the shareholders at the level that has been talked about would cost £1.5 billion. I should be interested to know whether the hon. Gentleman has cleared that with the shadow Chancellor who, only last week, told us that he wanted the state's proportion of gross domestic product to be reduced to 35 per cent. I do not know how he will do that in the context of providing £1.5 billion.

Mr. Pickles: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman must be patient; I am just warming to my task. If that £1.5 billion is to be paid to the shareholders, how will that improve any of the services for the travelling public?

Mr. Pickles: The Minister makes my point exactly. The Government can do nothing to prevent that compensation. It will all take place in the courts. Railtrack and the rail industry will be locked up for years. The Minister will be unable to deliver any of the promises.

Mr. Jamieson: We have clearly rattled the hon. Gentleman's budgie cage today. He has not got an answer to the points that we made.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was faced with continuing and increasing difficulties with Railtrack. On 15 October he outlined the further measures that he intended to take to put the travelling public first. That was his priority. The House will be familiar with the history of Railtrack. I will not delve into all the details today, but in 1996 Railtrack was privatised. It was the only publicly floated utility that was directly subsidised by the Government; the subsidy made up for two thirds of its revenue. After the Hatfield crash, the whole of the network was urgently reviewed and fundamental safety issues were addressed.

The hon. Member for Orpington said that safety was a problem. Perhaps he could write to tell me exactly where those safety problems lie in his area, as I am not aware of any.

Mr. Horam: Is the Minister inviting me to seek an Adjournment debate? I should be delighted to bring those facts to his attention.

Mr. Jamieson: If the hon. Gentleman would like to apply for an Adjournment debate to discuss rail safety, I should be happy to answer his points.

As always in these debates, there is not enough time for the Minister to give a full response to every point. This has been a curtain-raiser for our debate this afternoon on the Floor of the House. I am sure that we shall hear again this afternoon what we heard this morning. We have a Tory party that is putting passengers in second place. We have a Labour Government who are putting taxpayers and the travelling public first. I know where the interests of the British people lie. The people will listen to what we have to say and not to the Opposition's obsession with personalities.

Ministry of Defence Fire Services

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) has asked me whether he can make an intervention. He has cleared it with the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) and I see that the Minister has also agreed to that.

12.30 pm

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): We have heard a great deal lately about firefighters' sense of public service, public spiritedness, selflessness, bravery, and brotherhood and sisterhood. Our Prime Minister rightly praised New York's finest for their dedication to duty, humanity and bravery. Within hours of the dreadful occurrences of 11 September, more than 100 men and women from our Ministry of Defence fire service volunteered to go to New York to help with the rescue. As far as I know, there are no plans to privatise New York's fire service. The House and the country will be surprised to learn that, on the other hand there is, every possibility that the Ministry of Defence fire service will be privatised.

Under the Ministry of Defence's airfield services study project, the work of nearly 3,000 defence fire service and air support staff at about 100 military sites across the UK and abroad is potentially the subject of bids for a contract worth around £4 billion over 15 to 25 years. In Yorkshire, the bases covered by the Ministry of Defence fire service include RAF Linton-on-Ouse, RAF Dishforth, RAF Topcliffe, RAF Church Fenton, which is in my constituency, RAF Fylingdales and the US air force base at Menwith Hill. As I said, the bases are scattered throughout the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) has a base in his constituency, for example.

On 20 September this year—with impeccable timing—three private consortiums were invited to tender for the work of the Ministry of Defence fire service and associated support services. "Associated support services" may be an anodyne phrase, but it means tanker drivers, mechanics, vehicle technicians and refuellers—the very people upon whom our pilots rely for their lives and whose sense of public service, professionalism and patriotism we all too often take for granted.

The origins of this sorry situation go back to the late 1980s, when a major study was undertaken to review the Ministry of Defence fire services. The study recommended that the existing Navy, Army and Air Force departmental services should be rationalised into one fire service under central control. The trade unions, led by the Transport and General Workers Union, backed the proposals in full, showing great farsightedness; it was a failure of management not to implement them. At the time, the total concept was resisted by the management of the three services, principally because it was believed that commanding officers should retain control of their own fire service personnel. Partial rationalisation followed, in the form of a renamed Ministry of Defence fire service with common technical standards and training. However, each service continued to manage its element of the fire service in different ways, to suit its service culture. Duplication inevitably occurred—the very reason the trade unions had argued for a unified structure in the late 1980s.

Parliamentary answers to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), who has taken a particular interest in the subject, show that in 1995 the then Government initiated a feasibility study to look at the viability of privatising the provision of airfield support services to the Ministry of Defence worldwide. The new Labour Government received the report, which indicated that there was, not surprisingly, significant private sector interest in the idea. Further work continued. Some negotiations with the trade unions were held, and in September this year, with no statement of any kind to the House, invitations to tender were issued.

I have much respect and regard for right my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence. I cannot imagine that he has ever got up in the morning with privatising the jobs of Ministry of Defence firefighters at the top of his agenda. When I first heard about the issue, I thought that perhaps he was faced with a recalcitrant work force who refused to contemplate change, put safety and security at risk by their inefficiency, and gave public service a bad name, and that in those circumstances he had to contemplate drastic change. However, the truth is that his work force has been crying out for change and modernisation for a decade.

I repeat: the work force has backed far-reaching change in the defence fire service in the 1980s and more recently, the trade unions and the stakeholders—the defence fire service management, the lieutenant colonels and the wing commanders—have got together and produced the Ministry of Defence "Fire Study 2000", which shows clearly how to cut costs by 20 per cent. and retain the fire service as a true public service in the public sector. The study states:

> "This report identifies that, although previous reports have proposed changes for efficiency and effectiveness, reluctance to change has meant that all possible savings have not been realised... The Study Team proposes in this Report the creation of a new organisation—Defence Fire Risk Management Organisation—as an agency to be responsible for all fire risk management and fire support for military capability worldwide...The study team identifies that...there would be substantial cost savings (at least 20 per cent. per annum on current operating costs) through a leaner, more efficient structure, localised service provision, functional support direct to service providers with reduced travel and subsistence costs. There will be efficiency gains through multi-skilled personnel, reduced levels of management, effective IT and communication and personnel with devolved responsibility".

That is management speak, but staff who have given their working lives to the defence fire service and the associated services felt for the first time that their ideas for improvement were being taken seriously. The irony is that because the external tendering process has now started and will not be finished for a year or two, there is no start date for implementing the public sector solution outlined in the report. In the meantime, taxpayers' money is being wasted and best value set aside.

There are three elements to the airfield support services project: first, the procurement of equipment in which the trade unions are happy to embrace private sector involvement; secondly, the defence fire service where a robust public service comparator has now been established; and, thirdly, all other support services. Under the chairmanship of Wing Commander Bob Waldegrave, who initially met the trade unions at Transport house—I do not know whether it was over beer and sandwiches. An intense effort was made to

[Mr. John Grogan]

identify future inefficiencies to provide the most efficient and effective in-house support service for the Ministry of Defence. The Ministry set a deadline of 2002 for the work, which is unrealistically tight and restrictive; it will not allow enough time for a robust public sector comparator to be established for the support workers, whose jobs I mentioned earlier and who are outside the defence fire service. The private sector has had five years to put its case together and it seems strange to go out to tender before a complete public service comparator is available.

What is to be done? I paraphrase the Ministry's line, which is, "We've started so we'll finish. We will only privatise if there is demonstrable value for money and if operational effectiveness is not affected. It is too early to say what the outcome will be." But operational effectiveness cannot be guaranteed in a contract, no matter how clever the lawyer. Operational effectiveness in the military and, crucially, its support services, depend on men and women being prepared to go the extra mile, to set aside their own interests and to be flexible out of loyalty, duty and patriotism; men and women who have a clear sense of belonging to the organisation that they work for and are part of, not that to which their boss is contracted or subcontracted.

For example, the defence fire services currently provide free cover to support the civilian services in counties such as my own—North Yorkshire. That is particularly valuable in a big rural area. Last year, during the floods in York and Selby, crews from the Church Fenton station spent hour after hour trying to assist local people. Moreover, in the past two years, parliamentary answers reveal that defence fire service personnel have been deployed overseas 91 times on military operations and exercises. Perhaps firefighters from a privatised force would have to go overseas as part of their contract; however, Darren Gribben, a firefighter recently returned from several months' service in Kosovo, said:

"I was proud to serve in the hostile conditions of war-torn Pristina, but I would be unsure of returning under a privatised service."

I believe in the power of the public service ethos. It should be constantly tested and probed, but it should always be acknowledged out of respect for those for whom it is a driving force. I hope that the Government would prefer to have an efficient and modern defence fire service in the public sector. If not, some will ask what are our limits. They will want to know whether the Government will consider privatising the whole fire service.

Three consortiums are bidding to win the contract under offer which, remarkably, will be for between 15 and 25 years; however, the media and politicians have only just started scrutinising them. One consortium, Logicair, includes Serco, whose safety record was criticised when it bid unsuccessfully for the civilian air traffic control service. All three consortiums are considering drastic job cuts.

On grounds of safety and security, in light of all recent circumstances and of the services' efficiency plans, the Minister should today remove the threat of privatisation from the defence fire service. He should also announce an extension of next February's deadline to allow those working in associated support services—they, too, have served our country well—a chance to get their act together, so that a fair public sector comparator for their work can be established.

12.41 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): I start by praising the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) for securing today's debate. It is timeous and necessary. I also thank him and the Minister for allowing me to speak. Knowing that time is short, I shall be brief.

Like the hon. Member for Selby, I have strong concerns about the proposed privatisation, not least because my constituency contains two of the most significant Royal Air Force bases in the United Kingdom—Lossiemouth and Kinloss. Many of my RAF constituents have raised the planned privatisation with me, and I voice those concerns today.

I share the view of the hon. Member for Selby that the proposals are misguided and ill timed. In the short time available to me, I shall raise also a number of other matters. The concerns expressed by the hon. Gentleman are shared by Moray trades council, which has written to me on the subject, the Transport and General Workers Union and the Scottish National party.

I wish to raise several questions with the Minister: I hope that he will be able to respond. Many of the firefighters at RAF Lossiemouth, whose morale is at rock bottom, are extremely concerned about back-fill—the ability to bring in extra firefighters to cover changes in the category of planes that use those bases. In general, Tornadoes operate from RAF Lossiemouth, but an increasing number of VC10s and Tristars now use it. Those planes are large and have heavy fuel loads, and their status for firefighting goes from category 4 to category 7. The base also has squadrons on detachment, and there is flying every day.

Will the Minister confirm that squads at RAF Lossiemouth will be reduced from seven to six? I would be keen to hear his views on how airfield commitments can be met with fewer men. I wish also to bring to his attention the fact that morale is at rock bottom. Is he not concerned about the safety implications?

Lastly, I wish to speak of some specific measures that were incorporated in the minutes of the local works Whitley council, which met on 28 September. It noted that RAF Lossiemouth is to be re-categorised as a category 3 station and that its four firefighter crews will be

"reduced from 7 to 6...However, the Command Fire Officer at the time"—

who is named in the report—

"stated in writing that these figures did not include crew commanders, only the operational firefighters."

The report adds that the person in question has, however,

"now retired and Command Fire has not subsequently substantiated his statement. It transpires that the revised manning figures do include crew commanders and are now enshrined in Joint Services Publication 426."

The document adds that

"the Trade Union side wished to record its dissent over the deceitful and underhanded way in which this issue has been handled."

I should be grateful if the Minister could deal with those matters.

12.45 pm

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on securing this debate on the future of the Ministry of Defence fire service and providing the House with an opportunity to discuss a subject that is important to him and to other hon. Members. Many have raised issues with me by way of parliamentary questions and other means.

Some emotive language has been used, and I understand why, but I want to remove some of the emotion from the debate, not because I cannot become as exercised as other hon. Gentlemen about the valuable and important service performed by the staff in question, but because we need to think about the matter in a logical, reasonable and structured way. It is better, therefore, that I define the work that is being undertaken in the Department that has clearly given rise to the debate.

Two separate but interlinked work streams are under way in the Department: the airfield support services project—known as ASSP—and "Fire Study 2000". I want to explain their key features to put them in context. The ASSP is investigating whether a public-private partnership would be the most viable and cost-effective way of providing airfield support services to the Ministry of Defence worldwide without compromising operational effectiveness or safety. That final phrase is, of course, crucial and nothing that is done will detract from operational effectiveness or safety.

Fire cover is an important element of ASSP, but we are considering the full range of airfield support services: aircraft fuelling, movements and air cargo handling, airfield clearance, which includes sweeping and snow and ice clearance, and other more general aircraft services such as towing, water, waste and lifting services. The ASSP approach came out of "Front Line First", where specific defence cost studies suggested that airfield support had potential to yield efficiencies, possibly by public-private partnering. Indeed, a number of multi-activity contracts—private contractor arrangements—have been in place at RAF airfields for some years. It is now intended through ASSP to draw together the experience and lessons learned from running those contracts and to consider whether one overarching contract encompassing all the necessary services would provide the best value for money. It is a tri-service, defence-wide project. All the key stakeholders have been involved, as we tried to ensure that, if it proceeds, ASSP provides the right service and outputs.

In September we issued an invitation to negotiate to three consortiums, inviting bids against the statement of requirement. Hon. Members and the trade unions were informed that the invitation to negotiate had been issued. Bids for 15 and 25-year terms are invited. The three bidders involved— Airside, Approach Services and Logicair—are companies that already run multi-activity contracts at many Ministry of Defence airfields. They are not new to the territory, and the concept that we are examining is not a new one. Existing multi-activity contracts already include fire cover—fire cover is not separate—for a number of the RAF stations and airfields, so this is not an unprecedented step into the unknown.

In terms of the next stage of the project, bids are due back by the end of February 2002. There will then be a comprehensive and detailed evaluation before the next major decision stage, which is planned for the end of 2002. If the ASSP is judged to offer the best way forward, and I stress that no decision has been made—this is not top and tail and there are no preconceptions about the outcome—we would then announce a preferred bidder with a view to letting the contract in late 2003. The new service would be implemented in a rolling programme during 2004. That is the background to the matter and the time scale that could apply if a preferred bidder was chosen and we decided to proceed on that basis.

Entering this process by issuing an invitation to negotiate does not mean that a PPP solution is inevitable. There is still a lot of work to be done before any final decisions are taken about the preferred solution. I want to return to some the issues that were raised relating to the ASSP project in a moment, but I would like to turn now to "Fire Study 2000", which is a separate issue running concurrently with the ASSP.

The Ministry of Defence fire service is a large and complex organisation based both in the UK and overseas. The service covers some 108 operational fire stations and employs some 1,320 civil servants, 673 RAF firefighters, 450 Royal Navy aircraft handlers, 422 contractors and 263 locally employed civilians at overseas stations. In addition to their regular duties, it has also made its expertise available in areas of tension across the world including, at the present time, in the Balkans. My hon. Friend the Member for Selby referred to that role.

Although we recognise the fire services' outstanding record of service, it became clear in the late 1980s that a rationalisation of the Ministry of Defence fire service structure was overdue. A major review was undertaken at that time, which recommended that the fire services of the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force should be rationalised into a single fire service under central control. Although the proposal was embraced by the fire services themselves, other concurrent organisational changes within the Department meant that some important aspects of the rationalisation did not go ahead. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Selby that that was an opportunity lost, and not because of a lack of commitment from the work force at the time.

Following the over-arching strategic defence review undertaken by the Government in 1998, it was clear that the structural problems of the defence fire service had not gone away and that a fresh study was needed. A major review known as "Fire Study 2000" was accordingly launched in January 2000 with a remit to review the current organisation and operation of the defence fire service and develop an optimum strategy for meeting the Department's current and future requirements for fire risk management in times of peace, crisis, and war.

The first stage of "Fire Study 2000" was completed in July of this year and the second stage, involving a more detailed financial appraisal, is due to be completed by the end of December. The proposed future organisation embraces all fire safety support services required by the MOD and comprises a single

[Mr. Adam Ingram]

totally integrated organisation that provides opportunities for a more effective and efficient organisation delivering improved value for money.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does the Minister accept that one of the support services for the defence fire service is training? Is he aware that the fire service college in Moreton-in-Marsh provides high-quality cost-effective training? Will he consider carefully whether defence fire service staff could receive their training at that college?

Mr. Ingram: I shall take those comments on board. I accept the point that training is an important aspect of how any defence service is delivered at airfields and elsewhere and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about the point that he raised.

By explaining the two strands of examination, I want to point out the clear relationship between ASSP and "Fire Study 2000". We must be driven partly by the desire to ensure that all that we deliver is as efficient as possible. The public sector comparator—an essential aspect of the public-private partnership scheme that we envisage—must be as taut and well constructed as possible. It should inform the overarching examination of the delivery of service at our airfields. "Fire Study 2000" informs the public sector comparator, so it will help to provide a robust comparator against which we can judge the bids. That seems a sensible approach. I would like to hear any dissent from that—any logical argument against trying to ensure that maximum efficiency is brought into play and that we exercise our best minds to ensure best value for money in all aspects of service delivery.

My hon. Friend the Member for Selby and I have commented on the trade union commitment overall, in terms of approaches to study. The trade unions are heavily engaged in developing the public sector comparator. I want to compliment them on their close examination of the subject. However, that does not mean that we then assume that the private sector can necessarily provide the right level of service and best value for money. The next step, logically, need not follow. Similarly, we cannot assume that the existing service necessarily offers best value for money to the taxpayer.

We are dealing with a big organisation with huge inefficiencies that have been identified time and again, and have not been tackled in the past for reasons that we need not discuss. Now we are tackling them in a logical and coherent way. We have to test the market and then assess the bids. We should not refuse to consider what the market can provide, and we must recognise the fact that the market is already in place through several schemes linked to the overall delivery of service. We should see what they can do to ensure best value for money.

Angus Robertson: Will the Minister use his limited time to answer one or more of the questions that I asked him?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman wears on his sleeve great concern about what is happening in his constituency, but his party would probably close down the activity of bases in Scotland. It is opposed to NATO and the defence posture of our country. I am trying to deal with the main issues raised by my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Selby, who secured the debate. I will deal with the questions posed by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) in writing, because sufficient time is not available. As ever, we have to make do with the time available.

We are simply guaranteeing the safety and security of all services delivered at the airfields. There is no privatisation initiative. The allegation that we are privatising the Ministry of Defence fire service will not stand up to an examination of the explanation that I have given. Jobs will not suddenly be cast aside. Many protections will be put in place to maintain the jobs of the civilian staff who provide the service. My hon. Friend accepted that the unions recognised the need to ensure a rational approach, so that there is a logical development. Overall employment plays a part in the equation on efficiencies. Everyone is facing up to the need to tackle the problem constructively and responsibly.

The two studies being conducted on two strands are closely interrelated. However, our overall strategy will be to ensure that operational effectiveness and the safety of our armed forces are never put at risk. Those services exist to provide that safety, albeit with armed forces personnel as part of their delivery. We recognise the important role played by those who deliver the services, but we must get value for money from them. We must regard every penny as having the value of a pound.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Order. I ask hon. Members and others who are not staying for the next debate to move quietly and quickly out of the room.

Skegness and District Hospital

1 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I am grateful to Mr. Speaker for granting me the debate and to you, Mr. Hancock, for allowing me to start so promptly. I also thank the Minister for being here to reply to the debate. There have been several similar debates during the past few weeks and I anticipate that she will be kept busy responding to further debates in the forthcoming months as health care in the United Kingdom continues to decline and deteriorate.

There are only two hospitals in my constituency: Pilgrim hospital, in Boston, which is the main one, and the community hospital in Skegness. The two hospitals are approximately 22 miles apart and are connected by a poor road, requiring a 25-minute journey by car and a 35 to 40-minute journey by ambulance. The town of Skegness is growing, and the inherent population is now some 18,000. The town has doubled in size since Pilgrim hospital in Boston was built. Many people retire to Skegness, especially from the former coalfields of the midlands, and some of them require continuing medical treatment.

Skegness is also a strong tourist destination. Hundreds of thousands of people visit the town and its immediate surrounds each year. It is no longer just a summer destination—it is visited irrespective and in spite of the weather. Butlins holds 8,000 to 9,000 people at a time and is open almost all year round. The enormous population fluctuations that used to occur are now more evenly spread throughout the year.

I am concerned about the future of Skegness and District hospital for my constituents and for those who spend their holidays in the area. With the creation of the primary care trusts and, in particular, the establishment of the proposed East Lincolnshire primary care trust from 1 April 2002, the transfer of Skegness community hospital is inevitable. It will be the responsibility of the primary care trusts to develop the future strategy and level of provision of health care. It is essential that all medical staff work with colleagues in the community, including community nurses, social services, the voluntary sector and most importantly the users, and take note of their views and concerns. I have no issue in principle with the responsibility, provision or level of health care being entrusted to the medical professionals in east Lincolnshire, with local clinicians and managers ensuring that the local services reflect the needs of the local community. That is apparently one of the thrusts of the Government's National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill.

I understand that the transfer of Skegness community hospital to the proposed primary care trust is to take place on 1 April 2003. An enormous amount of work must be done, and the purpose of this debate is to ensure that sufficient funding and importance of service are attributed to enable the hospital to remain open and guarantee that there is no diminution of service provision for the people of Skegness and its visitors. Current service provision at the hospital provides two wards, X-ray, physiotherapy, a day unit, out-patients and an accident and emergency department. It is my duty to represent all my constituents, to convey their concerns and to ensure the provision of top-quality health care.

I will refer specifically to some matters. First, the accident and emergency department is an essential pre-requisite for any thriving town, especially one with such an enormous and growing tourist population. I have heard medical professionals talk about the best geographical location for accident and emergency services, and the implications of that need not be spelled out. The best location is and must remain Skegness, even though it would still be managed by the United Lincolnshire Hospitals trust under the new proposals.

Second the general thrust of the proposed primary care trusts is to provide modern surgeries that are accessible, particularly by car. That is admirable, but the poor car parking facilities at the Skegness community hospital are not at the apex of the agenda for the town's many elderly retired people who have no alternative to public transport. New surgeries tend to be in fringe or out-of-town locations, so a centrally located hospital is a must. Primary and intermediate care must complement and be in addition to services in Skegness hospital—it must not replace them.

Thirdly, the two existing wards have 39 beds, 15 of which are GP led and 24 of which are consultant led. It is feared that those could be used solely for general practitioners under the proposed primary care trust. That would not allow consultants to transfer patients back to Skegness from Boston's Pilgrim hospital for aftercare treatment. That could cause further bed blocking and exacerbate already difficult problems, lengthen already unacceptably long waiting lists and increase cancellations of operations. Furthermore, if the proposed primary care trusts ran short of money, an obvious saving could be made by shutting a ward and using fewer beds. What safeguards will the Government put in place to ensure that that will not happen?

Fourthly, I am concerned that consultants' clinics and out-patient departments might be moved away from Skegness to Boston under the proposed primary care trust. That is a concern particularly because of the terrible shortage of consultants in Lincolnshire. In one recent example, the United Lincolnshire Hospitals trust had to stop the portable breast screening service because of consultant shortages. There is also an ever-worsening shortage of general practitioners—indeed, the Government's figures suggest that there were 19 GP vacancies in Lincolnshire in 2000 and 49 this year. There is a similar problem with nurses. If there is to be any improvement in service provision, staffing levels must be improved throughout. The cost of moving the out-patient department would be enormous both financially and in terms of the health of the people of Skegness.

There is an ever-growing trend in the national health service to specialise. That is understandable given the enormous cost, for example, of providing a specialist cardiac department. However, there must be scope to provide a general level of service in a community, and the Government are ultimately responsible for that.

The safety of nursing staff is not an issue that is unique to Skegness or Boston, but it concerns many of my constituents. Skegness hospital was recently broken into during the night, staff were attacked and knocked to the floor and patients were robbed. We all know that that is an unacceptable state of affairs, and I ask the Minister to make additional resources available for security and staff safety in the hospitals in my constituency. If that is not the Department of Health's responsibility, will she

[Mr. Mark Simmonds]

assure me, as the representative of the dedicated health professionals in my constituency, that she will speak to her counterpart in the Home Office or wherever else the funding comes from to secure that extra funding?

In conclusion, I want health care provision in Skegness to be improved and widened to allow more patients to be treated nearer their homes, particularly because we have an ever-increasing and ageing indigenous population and an ever-increasing number of tourists. Neither I nor my constituents will be happy if Skegness hospital is turned into a glorified surgery under the proposed primary care trust. It is a hospital and must remain one.

Skegness hospital is a good, well used, well established and modernised hospital that must be maintained. Will the Minister give an assurance and an unconditional guarantee that sufficient emphasis will be placed on maintaining Skegness hospital in its totality, without any diminution of service provision? Delivery of a satisfactory level of health care is ultimately the responsibility of the Government.

1.10 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) on securing this important debate on the future of Skegness and District hospital. I am aware of some concerns among local people in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, as he ably outlined, about the future level of provision at the hospital. I reassure them and him that they need not fear for the future of what is an excellent community hospital: there are no plans to close or to downgrade it.

Skegness and District hospital dates back to 1913 and, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree, has served its residents and the summer tourist population as a community hospital admirably since then. It has been part of the United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS trust since April 2000, when all the acute hospital trusts in the Lincolnshire health authority area merged. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is also aware, that was a merger of management teams rather than a reconfiguration of services. As a result, management costs have been reduced with no consequent detriment to services.

As the hon. Gentleman said, Skegness and District hospital currently provides 39 in-patient beds, 15 of which are GP run and 24 of which are consultant-managed medical beds. I will come to the issue of the primary care trust management but I assure the hon. Gentleman that there are no proposals to change the balance or use of those beds. The hospital also has X-ray, physiotherapy, out-patients, and day unit facilities and services and an accident and emergency department. As a thriving community hospital, Skegness dealt with nearly 25,000 accident and emergency attendances and almost 500 admissions or transfers into the hospital in the last financial year.

As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, the accident and emergency department in particular experiences peaks in demand at certain times, particularly in summer with the influx of tourists, although those seasonal differences have decreased over recent years. Routine discussions are, therefore, held regularly between the United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS trust, Boston and Skegness primary care group, Lincolnshire social services and Lincolnshire ambulance and health transport service NHS trust to ensure that accident and emergency services continue to be provided in the most appropriate manner to best meet the needs of the patients who use it.

For some time, some patients have been stabilised at Skegness hospital and then transferred to Pilgrim hospital, Boston, if their condition has allowed that. A clinical working group at the United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS trust has just begun the process of formalising protocols that will enable ambulance personnel to identify patients who would be better taken directly to Pilgrim hospital. This might include people seriously injured in road traffic accidents or who need specialist diagnostic facilities such as CT scans. On current numbers, that might mean that up to 10 people a day who would previously have been transferred to Pilgrim hospital following stabilisation at Skegness could be taken there directly, thus speeding up their treatment.

The purpose of the proposals is to maintain the accident and emergency services at the hon. Gentleman's local hospital. In the past 18 months, the Government's commitment to the national health service has translated into leading—edge service developments at the hospital. The most obvious example of that is the introduction of thrombolytic treatment by paramedics prior to arrival at the hospital. Since it was introduced in July 2001, ambulance paramedics have been liaising directly with hospital doctors at Skegness in order to administer clot-busting drugs that give patients with suspected heart attacks the best possible chance of a successful outcome. That is on top of the fact that Lincolnshire ambulance service is consistently meeting its eight-minute response time targets in 75 per cent. of category A emergencies.

A telemedicine project in the accident and emergency department at Skegness means that more complex cases can be dealt with locally through the telemedicine link with specialists at the neighbouring acute hospital in Boston. Additional services have been added on to dovetail with accident and emergency services, such as the development of care pathways for cases of fractured neck of femur and heart attacks. Nurse practitioner training continues, and a weekly fracture clinic has been introduced.

The out-patient department continues to provide the local community with a comprehensive service, and it is always keen to create new opportunities for improving services in conjunction with its partners. Examples of that include the addition of a home blood pressure monitoring service and the introduction of the Lincolnshire visual impairment service to consultant ophthalmology clinics. This means that trained volunteers can provide patients with extra information and support on their conditions, and the benefits and aids that are available.

There are many other recent examples of improved and increased service provision at Skegness hospital. The important point is that this is indicative of a thriving hospital, with excellent services and a clear commitment

from everyone in the health and social care community to continue the current level of those services at Skegness hospital.

It would appear that some local concerns about the future of Skegness hospital relate to the proposed formation of East Lincolnshire primary care trust from 1 April 2002. Under these proposals, Boston and Skegness primary care group and its counterparts in neighbouring East Lindsey and South Holland will, subject to the approval of my ministerial colleagues, come together to form East Lincolnshire PCT.

Public consultation on these proposals took place between 11 June and 10 September this year. The proposals were supported by the health community, local community health councils, Boston borough council, Lincolnshire county council and the vast majority of general practitioners, nurses and members of the public.

Within those proposals, and as detailed during the thorough public consultation, it is planned to transfer the day-to-day management of the community hospital in Skegness from United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS trust to the East Lincolnshire primary care trust. However, that will not take place until April 2003, to ensure that this transfer of management responsibility to the PCT will not disrupt services, staff or patients. This has always been a top priority of the local PCT development board.

If approved, East Lincolnshire PCT will be able to commission services such as acute hospital care and directly provide community health services through its community hospitals from April 2002. It will also be able to provide health visitor services and district nursing services, so that there will be greater opportunity to integrate primary and community health services within one organisation for the benefit of local patients. Although the proposals would mean that East Lincolnshire PCT would take the lead in developing any future strategy for Skegness hospital, this will be in partnership with acute and mental health trusts.

Out-patient facilities will continue, there will be further development of intermediate care services, which will be important for the older constituents whom the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness mentioned, and there will be a new range of minor surgery procedures available based on the skills of local general practitioner specialists. Crucially, it is planned that accident and emergency provision will continue at Skegness hospital. It will be managed by the United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS trust to continue to meet the needs of both the local and the holiday population of Skegness.

The primary care trust's vision for Skegness hospital also includes the development of a model of care that will facilitate the complete integration of community and intermediate services for the older population in particular. That will include in-patient day care with access to day hospital services, care in nursing or residential homes and the provision of care at home.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that in a user-centred service, particularly for older people, the emphasis of primary care trusts on both modernisation and local determination of the needs of patients will be important. It is clear, therefore, that any developments in Skegness will be designed around the needs of patients with services that can be delivered and managed locally in accordance with local needs and for the direct benefit of patients in and around Skegness.

To alleviate any concerns that the hon. Gentleman may still have, the United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS trust board has publicly made a commitment to have community focus groups or even a citizen's panel in any future discussions of the pattern of services. Any significant planned changes to service provision down the line would be subject to full public consultation and the Department of Health would monitor any changed processes to ensure that they are carried out properly in line with national policy and established rules on public, patient and stakeholder involvement.

The hon. Gentleman placed his concerns about Skegness hospital in the context of the Government's overall approach to supporting the NHS. We have set out our plans for investment and reform of the NHS. In March 2000, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the biggest ever investment in the history of the NHS. This unprecedented investment will allow the NHS to grow by one half in cash terms and by one third in real terms in just five years. That additional resource will fund extra investment to benefit every part of the health service. The NHS plan announced by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health on 27 July 2000 is the most fundamental and far-reaching programme of reform in the history of the NHS. Most importantly, within the NHS plan is the recognition that future care and treatment must be redesigned around the needs of patients. The investment, coupled with the plan for reform, will provide 7,000 extra beds in hospitals and intermediate care, more than 100 new hospitals by 2010 and 500 new one-stop primary care centres. There will also be increased investment in staff with more consultants, GPs and nurses in addition to the increased number of nurses and doctors that the Government have already provided in the NHS.

I take very seriously the point made by the hon. Gentleman about staff security in Skegness hospital. I understand that the incident was an isolated one, nevertheless, it is absolutely clear that staff in the NHS must be able to work without fear.

Mr. Simmonds: I should like to clarify the matter. The Minister is correct in saying that the recent incident at Skegness hospital was an isolated one. However, nurses' representative and nurses I have met from Pilgrim hospital, Boston are worried about the constant stream of not only verbal abuse, but often physical abuse, particularly in the accident and emergency department late on Friday and Saturday nights. It is not consistent throughout the week, but it is a matter that I should like the Minister to address, in the future if not now.

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already announced the NHS zero tolerance campaign on violence against staff. Trusts will be able to prosecute people who are violent towards our NHS staff and I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are taking the matter very seriously.

[Jacqui Smith]

The Government and the local NHS are implementing developments locally and nationally to ensure that the future and the services of Skegness hospital are secure. The hospital will benefit from the Government's reform of the NHS and the extra investment that will ensure that the needs of the hon. Gentleman's constituents are at the centre of developments.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to debate the development of the NHS, which is an important matter for his constituents and more widely. Given his earlier comments, I look forward to plenty more opportunities in the House to outline the Government's progress on delivery in the national health service.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): As the Minister is not yet present for the concluding Adjournment debate, our proceedings will be suspended for a couple of minutes.

1.23 pm

Sitting suspended.

East Coast Main Line

1.26 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am pleased to have secured today's Adjournment debate because it allows me to raise a matter that is of particular significance to my city, my constituency and many other communities situated on the east coast main line, and is also of national importance.

As hon. Members will know, in terms of both passenger and freight transport the east coast main line is one of the most heavily used lines in the country. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, the line is operating at or near to full capacity. As with other services, increased demand for passenger and freight services in recent years has stretched the line to its limit and exposed a number of structural weaknesses, such as overhead power lines that are in need of remedy. As the Minister, will know, the matter has been the subject of several recent parliamentary questions.

I know that the Government are committed to upgrading the east coast main line, and I welcome that, but today I want to raise several concerns about the short-term extension of the franchise. As hon. Members will know, earlier this year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced that the Government favoured a two-year extension to the current franchise, rather than the longer-term franchise that was originally envisaged. I share some of the worries about granting a two-year franchise, and I shall return to them briefly later. Having said that, I can appreciate why my right hon. Friend decided to ask the Strategic Rail Authority to proceed on the basis of a two-year franchise, and I do not wish to argue against that decision in principle. Instead, I want to express my view that a short-term franchise extension should not result in a freeze on improvements to east coast main line passenger services for Scotland in general and Edinburgh in particular.

Hon. Members might recall that when the Secretary of State invited the SRA to negotiate extension of the existing franchise, he set out a number of new passenger benefits that he wanted to emerge from those negotiations. According to the press release, those benefits should include a service every 30 minutes from London to Leeds, early placement of orders for a new fleet of inter-city trains, improvements to existing rolling stock, early investment in station improvements, for example at Doncaster and York, and a range of other potential benefits, including spare locomotives to improve service reliability.

Those are all admirable objectives. However, my concern from a constituency perspective is that the bulk of the benefits will be enjoyed by those using the more southerly sections of the line. Improvements to the London-Leeds services and at Doncaster and York were mentioned, but nothing was said specifically about improvements to services to and from Scotland or the north-east of England, or about long-awaited station improvements such as those required at Edinburgh Waverley. The apparent concentration of benefits on the more southerly sections of the line in the requirements for the franchise negotiation is paralleled by the fact that the first two phases of the infrastructure upgrades will feature improvements at Leeds, Peterborough and King's Cross, but not further north.

I appreciate that improvements at any point on the line have benefits elsewhere on the line—for example, more trains on the London-Leeds service will benefit services running further north by providing extra capacity. I also acknowledge the references to new investment, namely a new fleet of inter-city trains and spare locomotives.

Notwithstanding the promised improvements, I am concerned that the basis on which the SRA has been asked to negotiate the two-year franchise extension is too limited and that consequently services to Edinburgh, the east coast of Scotland and the north-east of England will not be improved over the next three years as they should and could be. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider some specific ways in which the negotiations on the franchise extension could be widened to bring benefits to the communities on the northern section of the line. I shall outline a few suggestions that are supported by a body of opinion in south-east Scotland and beyond.

First, we need a faster service with fewer stops between London and Edinburgh. Cutting out some stops should be possible, given the new half-hourly service from London to Leeds and the additional services that Virgin Cross Country is beginning to provide on the northern section of the route.

Secondly, we want guaranteed journey times of four hours or less from London to Edinburgh on as many trains as possible, preferably all. Shorter journey times are needed to compete to any greater extent with air travel, and reliability and consistency are also important, especially for business passengers.

Thirdly, we need to increase the frequency and consistency of the journey time of trains running from London to Newcastle and Edinburgh. That would allow for greater consistency of departure times and, perhaps more importantly, arrival times at Edinburgh. Arrival and departure times should, as far as possible, remain consistent throughout the day in summer and winter timetables and from one year to the next. As well as bringing benefits to the inter-city traveller, that would have the knock-on effect of making it easier to plan local train services on the basis of inter-city timetables. Another advantage of a more fixed timetable is that it would enable the scheduling of more local trains on the tracks south and east of Edinburgh.

Finally, we need improvements in track capacity in the Edinburgh area. That is important for long-distance services, not only for Edinburgh, but to serve cities and towns further north such as Dundee and Aberdeen. Track capacity improvements also allow for improvements to suburban rail services in the Edinburgh area, for which the city council and the Scottish Executive have ambitious plans.

All those improvements could be included in the short-term franchise extension, and I urge Ministers to consider asking the SRA to include them in the negotiations with the franchise holder.

As the Minister will no doubt be aware, a rail capacity study is under way in central Scotland, but it seems to be proceeding at a snail's pace. The lead body is the Scottish Executive, but I urge the Minister to do what he can to ensure that the study is completed as soon as possible. I have little doubt that the study will also recommend capacity enhancement. I ask the Minister to ensure that the Strategic Rail Authority takes early steps to begin the enhancements identified in the study, rather than waiting until the end of the two-year extension of the franchise before making any commitment recommended by the study.

I ask the Government to ensure that the SRA takes steps to ensure that the promised early placement of an order for a new fleet of inter-city trains is carried out, by including some funding or guarantee, if that should be required. Some in the industry suggest that the current franchise holder will be unable to commit itself to such orders on the basis of a two-year extension and that the SRA will be required to make a purchase, or underwrite such a purchase, if the new trains are to be provided. I do not know whether that is correct and I appreciate that there will have to be tough negotiations on such matters with the franchisee. It is essential that the order for new stock is placed and I ask the Minister to do everything he can to ensure that that is done.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important and timely debate. I agree with him about the importance of improving services to Scotland and the north-east of England, as well as to my constituency of York. New rolling stock is essential to such improvement because without additional trains we cannot have more services.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Order. The rules for debate allow only for short interventions in speeches by hon. Members, and a speech can be made only with the prior agreement of the Member and Minister concerned, and notified to the Chair.

Hugh Bayley: We had spoken about this beforehand, Mr. Hancock, but I shall be brief.

Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be sensible for the SRA to consider whether it is necessary to extend the franchise by a further one or two years to ensure that we get additional rolling stock?

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. If the short extension already proposed were necessary to ensure the provision of new rolling stock, it would have much merit.

I ask the Government to reconsider providing direct passenger train links from Scotland and the north of England to the continent through the Channel tunnel. As hon. Members will be aware, such links were promised when the channel tunnel legislation went through Parliament but that promise was not fulfilled. Those of us who use the east coast main line regularly can enjoy the fine, new White Rose train service from London to Leeds in the trains that were originally built for the European service and that have now been leased to operate from London to Leeds by GNER.

In the present economic climate, and given the current contraction of the airline industry, the need for our tourist industry to have direct European links is stronger than ever. Although I appreciate that it is a separate issue from the east coast main line franchise, there is no better time to reconsider the possibility of acquiring such services and I urge the Minister to look at the issue.

[Mr. Lazarowicz]

I shall to dwell a little longer on the two-year franchise extension rather than the granting of a longer franchise. I understand why the Government took that decision but it is essential that once the current restructuring of Railtrack and the rail industry and the strategic and regulatory framework is completed, the long-term strategic vision for the east coast main line must be clear. We need a 10, 15 or 20-year perspective, not just a five to seven-year one. That position of long-term certainty needs to be reached sooner rather than later. There is no need to wait until well into the term of a two-year franchise to reach decisions for the long term.

I know that the Government do not want a lengthy hiatus in decisions about the future upgrading of the east coast main line. I urge them to ensure that the negotiations for a two-year or perhaps slightly longer franchise extension, hopefully including the improvements to services to Scotland that I have outlined today, are brought to an early conclusion. Thereafter, the industry needs an early decision and a response to the Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan when it is published. Like other hon. Members, I welcome the vision and commitment to the future of our rail industry shown in the 10-year plan and I want to see that vision resulting in concrete improvements in the long term. If we are to give travellers faith that the long-term vision will be delivered, we also need significant improvements in the short and medium term.

1.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on securing the debate. I have had the pleasure of hearing him on a few occasions and, at the risk of embarrassing him, I must say that his contributions are well considered and well argued. He speaks well and powerfully for his constituents. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) is here. His interest in the subject that we are considering is well known.

You were in the Chair, Mr. Hancock, for our debate on Railtrack. I contrast the positive and inquisitorial way that my hon. Friend has tackled matters with the point scoring in the earlier debate. I am glad that my hon. Friend also recognises that the improvements on the line that benefit England also benefit his constituents in Scotland. At the outset, I reassure him that the Government remain committed to delivering a better, safer railway with increased punctuality and reliability, reduced journey times and higher standards of customer services. Our intentions are clear and our 10-year plan provides the mechanism to achieve our aim of 50 per cent. more passengers and 80 per cent. more rail freight over the next decade. The east coast main line is a strategically important route that will no doubt have a key role to play in achieving those targets.

As my hon. Friend knows, the east coast main line carries Britain's fastest passenger train service and also handles heavy bulk freight and mail trains. On an average day it caters for 1,900 passenger trains carrying 200,000 people. Yesterday it was 200,001 because I, too, was on the line, although not travelling as far as York. The latest figures, for the period from 24 June to 21 July, show that 69.9 per cent. of GNER's services arrived on time. Since those statistics were published, I understand from the Strategic Rail Authority that performance has improved over each of the last three months. I hope that that trend in service improvement will continue. The SRA will publish updated statistics in due course.

The spring 2001 national passenger survey revealed that 84 per cent. of GNER passengers were satisfied with their overall service. Only 52 per cent. were satisfied with the punctuality and reliability of services and a disappointingly low 38 per cent. of passengers believed that GNER offers value for money. My hon. Friend explained that the SRA is negotiating a potential two-year extension to GNER's east coast franchise. We are looking to the SRA to use the negotiations to secure improvements that will make a real difference to passengers' journeys, the need for which my hon. Friend articulated so well.

We want better rolling stock, refurbished stations and new services. New services are on the table but I cannot say today exactly what a two-year extension would deliver. In a single-tender negotiation such as this, it would be irresponsible of the SRA or Ministers to be wedded to particular outputs, regardless of the price. Whether a deal can be reached will ultimately depend on what is on offer. Similarly, I trust that the House would not expect me to weaken the SRA's negotiating position. There is potential value in terms of saving the taxes of my hon. Friend's constituents in setting a public deadline by which negotiations will be completed. We will not let them drag out indefinitely and good progress is being made. Passengers rightly demand improvements and, as my hon. Friend outlined, we want them to be delivered as quickly as possible.

I am aware of the accusations of short-termism generated by the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ask the SRA to negotiate a two-year extension to the franchise. I would therefore like to put the decision in context, which would be helpful to my hon. Friend. The Secretary of State could give the SRA the required direction to award a new franchise early if he were satisfied that there were particular benefits to be achieved. A 20-year franchise would have provided extra capacity through additional rolling stock and improved infrastructure. The costs and design of the east coast main line upgrade were therefore central to maximising the benefits of a long-term franchise. However, it had become clear that neither the design nor the cost of the upgrade was finalised. Indeed, SRA papers indicated that it could take a further two years to finalise.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State concluded that better terms with reduced risk for both parties were more likely to be achieved nearer the expiry of the current franchise, when the upgrade would be better defined. No one wanted a repeat of what happened with the west coast main line. He was also clear that benefits should in the meantime be obtained for passengers on that important route. That is why we believe that a two-year extension is the best way forward. It delivers investment quickly without prejudicing options for the longer term.

The objectives of the east coast upgrade project are to provide for an increase in passenger and freight capacity between London King's Cross, Leeds and Edinburgh. I summarised earlier how busy the line is; it is clearly running out of capacity, and accommodating extra trains for both passenger and freight operators is not possible within the existing infrastructure. The proposed solution is to reduce the number of conflicting movements through infrastructure works at known pinch points and to use better parallel lines for freight. The SRA, which is working closely with Railtrack, continues to drive forward the upgrade project.

As recently as 14 September, a further £17.5 million of development work was provided for phase two of the upgrade. That has not been affected by the decision to put Railtrack plc into railway administration. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced last April that we had reached an agreement with Railtrack that the east coast upgrade would be taken forward as a joint venture project known as a special purpose vehicle—an SPV. Special purpose vehicles bring together specialist project managers, private sector financiers, relevant train operators, the SRA and Railtrack to provide a specific major enhancement or project. They are also being developed for other projects such as the infrastructure elements of the south central franchise. The SRA will set out its proposals for SPVs in more detail in the forthcoming strategic plan.

I also assure my hon. Friend that the enhancement project for Edinburgh Waverley station will not be affected by Railtrack's current situation. I hope that that brings some comfort to him. Railtrack is working on a business as usual basis, and we have no reason to believe that that will change once its successor is in place.

I would like to comment on some of my hon. Friend's other specific points. He mentioned direct services through the channel tunnel to Scotland. The Channel Tunnel Act 1987 placed a duty on the British Railways Board to prepare and publish a plan for the provision of regional Eurostars. The board's original plan was published in 1989 and last year a revised plan was published following a review. The plan concluded that regional Eurostar services would make a heavy loss and that there were no economic, environmental or social grounds for providing a subsidy. The Transport Act 2000 requires the SRA to formulate a strategy relating to services in various parts of Great Britain for facilitating the carriage of passengers or goods by rail through the channel tunnel. The formulation of the strategy is currently under review.

My hon. Friend also rightly raised the matter of the two-year extension for the northern section of the east coast main line. I have noted with interest the list of improvements that he would like to be included in the franchise extension and I undertake to ensure that the SRA is aware of them. He will understand that I cannot commit myself to the improvements in this debate, but I will ensure that they are brought to the attention of the relevant parties.

There are two main reasons for that. First, negotiations have been under way for some time and are already working within established parameters. Shifting them now could significantly delay agreement on an extension. Secondly, and more importantly, the development of a railway timetable is a complex and long-term process. Making some of the changes that my hon. Friend suggests could reduce the capacity on the east coast main line and potentially conflict with our objectives of improving performance and reliability. I recognise my hon. Friend's concerns and I agree that he raises some real issues that the SRA will examine within the flexibility available to it.

On franchising policy, it may be useful if I set out our proposed new approach, which the Secretary of State announced in July. It focuses on key 10-year plan targets and aims to deliver early passenger benefits such as better performance, rolling stock and passenger facilities. It points to the possible alternative of shorter-term improvements that make a real difference to passengers by making existing franchises work better and, where necessary, improving or extending their terms.

Such short-term improvements sit alongside longer-term investment. It is not, as was widely reported, a short-term policy but a horses for courses approach. We are not precluding the early replacement of the shorter seven-year franchises, but that approach will be adopted only when benefits cannot be obtained in other ways. Neither does our approach rule out a long-term franchise for east coast services in due course. However, long-term franchises need to be tied to long-term investment and in the case of the east coast, that investment is most likely to take the form of the upgrade of the line.

We also issued for consultation new draft directions and guidance for the SRA. The draft sets the authority objectives that cover the need to improve standards of punctuality, safety and comfort throughout all franchise services and the much clearer and more focused approach to franchising that I have just mentioned. The consultation period ended on 21 September and we hope to issue the guidance and directions formally as soon as possible.

I am sure that I do not need to remind hon. Members that the Secretary of State appointed Richard Bowker as the new chairman of the SRA on 24 October. He will play a key role in delivering a better, safer railway. Under his leadership, the priorities of the SRA will include working alongside train operators to give passengers a better deal, implementing its strategic plan for the industry, increasing passenger numbers and the rail share of the freight market, and driving forward the £60 billion, 10-year rail investment programme.

I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured by the SRA's approach to balancing the short-term delivery improvement to passengers with the long-term needs of the east coast line. We are aware that much needs to be done, but we are moving in the right direction, as I am sure he agrees. The 10-year plan provides the investment and the mechanism to improve the national rail network and achieve our aim of 50 per cent. more passengers and 80 per cent. more freight over the next 10 years. The SRA's forthcoming strategic plan will set out its priorities for enhancing the network, and will identify improvements that can be achieved in the short term.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing us to discuss the subject, and I was interested to hear what he said. If he feels that any of his points have not been covered in the clarity or detail that he would like, I would be happy to correspond with him.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 14 November 2001

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Airline Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Ainger.*]

9.30 am

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I should be grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you would pass on to Mr. Speaker my thanks for being given this opportunity to raise an issue of fundamental importance to the British economy and, equally important to my constituents, Heathrow airport. I should also like to thank those involved in the aviation industry, including the airlines and the airport, who have helped me with much of the information on which I shall draw in the debate. It may be a surprise to hear a Conservative Member thank the Transport and General Workers Union for its help, but that makes the point that this is a national and local, not a party-political, issue.

Before I come to the substance of my speech, I want to make three preliminary points. First, whenever we discuss events that arise from 11 September and from Monday of this week, we must keep in mind that we are debating personal family tragedies because people have lost loved ones, and now people have loved ones at risk in Afghanistan. Whatever else we may say and however much we might argue, the foundation of the debate is personal family tragedy, and I want to add my regards to and concern for all those who have been affected by those events.

Secondly, despite what happened on 11 September and on Monday, air travel is still a safe activity. It is easy to become rapidly alarmed by such events, especially when one represents a community near an airport, as I do, and I understand those anxieties. I represent 70,000 people who live right next to Heathrow, near the boundary fence, and I live under a flight path, so I need no lectures about what that is like. The last time there was a crash at Heathrow, the Trident landed in my constituency. The community that I represent is directly involved, and the closer one gets to the airport, the more understanding and philosophical people are. It is easy to talk about the risks of living near an airport, as I heard on the media last night, but I remind everyone who becomes involved in the debate about safety that the Lockerbie crash occurred nowhere near any airport, so we must not allow ourselves to be carried away by the understandable emotion and anxiety surrounding that point.

Thirdly, my approach to the subject is not party political; I speak for all my constituents. I represent many people who use Heathrow regularly. I represent many shareholders of British Airways and the British Airports Authority. I represent many senior and middle managers—the bosses—and many people who belong to trade unions and who work at the airport. I represent 70,000 people, every one of whom is touched in some way by aviation. I speak for them all, not for any particular group.

The British aviation industry faces a serious crisis and needs help from many sources, including the Government. I sought the debate because of my constituency connection. A growing number of my constituents face crisis and need help. The local context is that 26 per cent. of those among my constituents who are in work depend directly on Heathrow for their livelihood. In that sense, my constituency is similar to, say, a coal mining or shipbuilding community in its reliance on just one industry.

It is easy to see my part of what many people consider to be west London—I protest that it was, historically, in Middlesex and is now in Surrey—as commuter country, but that is not so. I represent people inextricably linked to the airport. At least 10,000 jobs have been, or will be, lost from the major airlines, and it is impossible to predict how many more will be lost among the airport's smaller employers. It is equally impossible to derive a constituency figure for how many of those job losses will affect Spelthorne. My best guess—it is only a guess, but I think that it is not too wide of the mark—is that between 2,000 and 3,000 of my constituents must be worried about their future, and they face a bleak Christmas.

Beyond the immediate job losses, the knock-on effect will be huge and is impossible to determine. Many depend on the airport, such as freight forwarders, spare part suppliers and catering businesses around the airport. The crisis will affect them all. Many more people will be indirectly affected, such as shopkeepers and garage proprietors in Spelthorne. All of them will feel the impact of what is taking place. That is why I sought the debate.

We must understand the causes of the crisis so that we may focus our suggestions for help. Some will say that the crisis is being hyped out of proportion to reality. Everyone must accept, however, that one cause of the crisis dates from before 11 September. The downturn in the world economy had an impact on aviation and one must accept that overcapacity in the aviation industry was already resulting in a shake-out. Although those problems arose before 11 September, they are no less real and they have affected current events.

One need not stress the horror of the events of 11 September. I retain to this day an image of what seems like a Hollywood movie. I find it hard to understand the reality of what happened that day. None the less, the impact on the world aviation industry, and on the British industry in particular, was immediate and dramatic. Two months on, some may have thought that the worst was behind us, that the crisis might be bottoming out and that people might be pulling their businesses together again. Then came Monday when a tragedy that seems to have been a dreadful coincidence—I imagine that what happened then will eventually be established as having been an accident—clearly set back any bottoming out of the crisis.

One other cause of the crisis requires our understanding. The events of 11 September and of Monday were catastrophic and tragic, but they also happened in the United States. The significance of that fact is that half the world's aviation market is in the United States, which contains the world's biggest carriers. The two tragedies unsettled the world's aviation business, but had their biggest impact on the largest part of that business. For that reason, the wider impact has been all the greater.

[Mr. David Wilshire]

We must understand the nature of the crisis as well as its causes. The crisis that has hit the British aviation industry has been dramatic. There has been an instant drop in demand, with awful consequences, and an immediate increase in costs. Insurance and security costs have increased. It is easy to focus on aircraft security because people understand it. The newspapers write about it, and when people travel they witness the effects of increased security on themselves and their baggage. There are, however, other security costs. Far less known but none the less serious for constituencies such as mine and for businesses such as the aviation industry, is the dramatic extra security cost on cargo handling. That will have an effect on jobs and on British business.

Many of those costs cannot be passed on. Newspapers and television programmes usually give examples of scheduled airlines. It could be argued that those airlines are hardest hit, but there is much less debate about charter airlines, which, particularly in this country, make up a large segment of the industry. I have before me some figures from the charter holiday trade. On 1 October, there were approximately 5 million advance bookings. Those who go on package holidays know only too well that once they have paid their money and entered into the contract, they are stuck with their part of it, and the ability to pass on extra costs from the charter airline is not good. Some 5 million people are, therefore, locked into contracts, and the suppliers of the flights face insurance and security costs, which they cannot recover. The impact of that on charter airlines could be considerable.

This debate is not solely about scheduled airlines, although that is easy to forget if one represents a constituency such as mine, because there is no charter business in and out of Heathrow. However, that affects others. It is easy to consider the drop in demand and the increased costs, but there are knock-on effects, to which I have already referred. There are considerable support industries to the aviation industry. For example, we all eat airline meals. Whether or not one likes the food, providing it creates jobs around an airport, so airport communities will lose jobs as a result.

I shall refer later to the impact on Heathrow, but if there are fewer passengers and fewer flights, there is less revenue for the airports and that has an effect on them. Air traffic control is a particularly British issue, although I enter into the debate with as much care as I can, as I promised that this would not be a party political issue. We have had some debate about Railtrack, partly because of the need to invest. I will not go further than that, as I do not want to re-open that subject. Air traffic control was part privatised by the Government so that private money could be brought into air traffic control services and investment could take place. We have rapidly got to the stage where investment for future improvement of the service in Prestwick in Scotland has been pushed back, for the simple reason that air traffic control depends on the same principle of aircraft movements to generate its revenue. I simply flag up, without trying to score any points, that we need to be careful about the future of air traffic control in Britain after this crisis. I am not suggesting that what has happened will compromise safety, but it may compromise investment. That would lead to a diversion of world aviation business to our competitors and away from us. That is my concern, but I shall go no further than that.

The other obvious knock-on effect is on aircraft manufacturing. We note with concern that Boeing has said that it will lay off 30,000 people. What is less understood is how little of a Boeing aircraft is made directly by the company itself. All over the world businesses are making bits of Boeing and other aircraft. I do not have a figure for the total number of jobs in the United Kingdom that depend on Boeing contracts, but it looks as though the Minister does, and I am sure that he will give it to us in a moment. Nevertheless, the figure is large, as it is with the airbus. British Airways expects the delivery of 50 more airbuses during the next few years and will seek to renegotiate, cancel or delay some of those options, which conveys some sense of the impact on jobs in the manufacturing industry.

The last issue of concern is the knock-on effect on tourism. I have no figures, but it is blindingly obvious that we are suffering. At the moment, one has only to queue for the London Eye to find that no American accents are to be heard there. Indeed, there is often no queue at all. What is happening is clear from anecdotes alone.

We need to be clear about the extent of the problems that British airlines face. About 38 per cent. of British Airways' capacity worldwide is on the north Atlantic route, which has been hit hardest. Virgin Atlantic depends on the north Atlantic routes for about 60 per cent. of its passengers and is in a vulnerable position. In the first week after 11 September, British Airways experienced a 60 per cent. fall in its north Atlantic traffic. Throughout all its routes, there was a 36 per cent. decline in passenger numbers. For the longer term, British Airways anticipates between 20 and 30 per cent. fewer passengers. It does not specify for how long a period, but that is a question of how long the current crisis will last. The effects of the Gulf war seemed to last about four years. If the current crisis lasts a similar length of time, it would be big indeed. Virgin Atlantic reports a decline in north Atlantic business of 25 per cent., and the figure is higher in its business class, which is where most of its profits are made. Virgin Atlantic is finding the impact of the situation worse than that during the Gulf war—although others say that it is not as bad.

It is important to consider the question of insurance. There have been immediate cancellations of some policies, the immediate imposition of significant increases, extra payments per person, extra payments per aircraft and stringent extra conditions attached to new policies. That has been done on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, and a company can do nothing without insurance.

That is the nature of the crisis. We must also clarify the consequences for British aviation. First and foremost is the issue of cash flow. The aviation industry is not a manufacturing industry. It is not an industry in which, if times get difficult, one can sell off stock, or if times get more difficult, in which one can build up stock. Airlines cannot do that. They are service providers, and as such, they have no means of falling back on manufacturing to delay or spread the effects of a crisis. Airlines either fly today or cancel; their product is here

and then it is gone. They are service providers and they are hardest hit in a downturn. It shows up instantly in cash flow. Without warning, British Airways and Virgin Atlantic, which depend so heavily on the north Atlantic routes, found that their entire income from those routes was closed off for four days.

If one believes the media, BA is losing something in the order of £2 million a day. That is a dramatic figure. One can speculate on what would happen if the cash flow of the four major airlines of Europe were to be switched off and they had to try to survive on reserves. According to the figures that have been calculated for me, Lufthansa would be the worst hit because it could survive for only 16 days on its cash reserves. Air France could manage for 29 days before going bankrupt. KLM could manage for 37 days and BA could survive for 40 days. We need to be honest. We are kidding ourselves if we pretend that the big European carriers are immune from bankruptcy. Some high stakes are being played for here.

Cash flow is the most obvious problem. The second most obvious problem is the cancellation of routes. British Airways has grounded 20 aircraft. Virgin Atlantic has grounded all its 747s. The only beneficiary from this exercise is the Evergreen air centre in Arizona, which provides storage space in the desert for unwanted aircraft. It is expecting well over 100 aircraft in the immediate future to join the others on their airfield. One of the most significant consequences is that whitetails—aircraft that have not even been painted in any airline's colours because they have never been used—are being mothballed. That gives some idea of the implications for airlines and manufacturers. I have not found it possible to come up with a complete list of the routes that have been suspended or cancelled but there are plenty of them. That clearly has a knock-on effect to passengers wanting to get from A to B who no longer find that possible.

Then we come to jobs. I do not know the exact figures although I know the current minimum figures for job losses. In the US alone between 20,000 and 30,000 jobs have been lost. At the last count BA had announced that it needed to shed 7,000 of its 60,000 employees. If things do not improve that figure will be bigger. British Midland, the next of the big carriers at Heathrow, has announced 600 job losses. That is more than 10 per cent. of its work force and half of the losses will be at Heathrow. Virgin Atlantic has announced 1,200 job losses. It is important to understand that when one is trying to deal with a cash flow crisis reducing staff gives no relief in the short term. Those are preliminary figures: unless action is taken or an upturn comes that is only the beginning of the job losses in the industry.

It should also be borne in mind that not only is the aviation industry suffering this immediate impact, but its long-term position is being undermined. Those aircraft that are being sent to Arizona and even some of those that are still operational were once all assets. Some are now valueless. A business that had good assets and good long-term prospects for using its aircraft suddenly finds itself having to write down its assets. In many cases those aircraft are not owned by the airlines themselves. They are leased and the banks and many others are finding that what they thought was good business may suddenly be turning into bad business. The knock-on effect of that is clear. The bottom line in any consideration of the effect on the aviation industry must be profit, because profit brings growth and continued employment.

The best figures that I know for the effects of the Gulf war suggest that the world aviation industry lost some $15 billion in the four years that followed. Some people suggest that the world aviation industry will lose $12 billion in the first year following 11 September. If we are to believe financial analysts, British Airways alone is set to lose £600 million this year. It lost £125 million in the month following 11 September.

We cannot consider the aviation industry without considering airports, so I shall focus on the one that I know best. Heathrow airport reports that it had 900,000 fewer passengers this October than in October last year. That is a decrease of 20 per cent. Some might say that that is good news, but that is not so for my constituents, or for the airlines, BAA or those who work in duty-free shops. Some may not like duty-free shops, but they create employment for my constituents. All those factors add up to a serious situation.

BAA has produced only one redeeming statistic: it reports that the passenger decrease is less than it was during the Gulf war. That is the opposite of what others report, so we are receiving some mixed messages. Airports suffer because of the charge levied per passenger and per aircraft. That has a knock-on effect on airport businesses.

I should like to explain why I wanted a debate on the topic, and why I want the Government to do something. Some might smile quietly or show surprise that a Tory Member should urge the Government to become involved and rescue a private industry, but I have good and compelling reasons for doing so, and they do not compromise my political principles. United Kingdom airlines play a vital role in the economy. They are a lynchpin in the success of UK plc, and all of us, the Government included, must take care of them.

Whether we like it or not—I do not—we must accept that the world aviation industry is hugely Government-regulated. There are frequent debates about flag carriers. Aeroplanes are not allowed to land, take off, or pick up passengers unless some Government say that they can. Whether or not we approve, such private industries are beholden to Governments all over the world to carry on their businesses, so we cannot escape discussions with Governments when considering the industry.

We must face up to the fact that foreign airlines, which are just as troubled as British airlines, receive massive amounts of Government aid to keep them afloat. If we do not take note, we will lose the most jobs, while foreign Governments support local airlines at our expense.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): My hon. Friend has touched on an extremely important point. Does he recognise that the Government must keep in close touch with the European Union competition authorities to see what state aid EU countries are likely to give to their flag carriers? It would be unacceptable

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

for our flag carriers to compete on unequal terms with EU countries' flag carriers that have received subsidies from their Governments.

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend anticipates what I was about to say, and knows that I am unlikely not to mention the EU in such a speech, although I keep it in mind that my party likes to sideline the subject. Nevertheless, we cannot escape discussing the EU, because it is a subject to which the Government must respond. We cannot leave it to the EU to respond to the crisis for reasons that I will mention in a moment. It is simply not adequate to say that it is an EU problem, not a British Government problem.

Without apology, I am advancing the argument that aviation is a special case. I know that everyone always tries that argument, but on this occasion I think that I am right to do so. Aviation as an industry is untypically vulnerable. Therefore, when a crisis arises, particularly an unexpected and instant crisis such as the present one, that industry is much more likely to need support. As I have explained, for the simple reason that airlines are service providers, the effect on them is dramatic, and they do not have time to take avoiding action.

However, in saying that the Government must take action, I would not escape with my life until lunchtime, and Michael Bishop of British Midland would not let me get away with it, if I did not add the caveat that any Government help from any country must not be an excuse to bail out uncompetitive, unprofitable airlines. There is a dividing line, and I readily acknowledge that the case for Government help can be made for genuine reasons or used as an excuse to continue some of the nonsenses of the past.

My hon. Friend touched on foreign aid, and we need to understand what we are up against and why we cannot leave the matter to the EU. Its approach—I mean this kindly—is to say that its business is to ensure a level playing field within the internal market. If that is what the treaty of Rome is all about, it is right that the EU should ensure that British Airways can compete with Iberia, Alitalia and other airlines on a level playing field. However, that is not the point, because the real competition does not come from the rest of the EU. We have to achieve a level playing field between us and the United States.

To understand why fairly urgent and radical action is required, we need only consider what the American Government are doing. They instantly gave US airlines some $5 billion in cash to see them over their difficulties and backed that up with another $10 billion worth of guarantees. The US Government are also providing several billion dollars worth of help for extra security measures and $150 million to support routes in the US, which they know as thin routes. That is what we are up against and it will hit us hard if we do not take action.

Notwithstanding the European Union, Sabena—do we not love it dearly?—is bankrupt yet again, and Belgium is bailing it out to the tune of $391 million as a straightforward internal national exercise. The French have provided $276 million in aid for its airlines, and the last I heard Italy was debating whether to waive VAT on domestic ticket sales to help its aviation industry. All that help is provided on a national basis. Admittedly, the EU will support some of that help, but they are not EU initiatives. The only European initiative of which I am aware is the allowing of short-term help for insurance costs.

Let me explain what I hope the Government response to the crisis will be. As I stressed initially, I am not criticising the Government; I am trying to work with them as they are working with everyone at Heathrow and elsewhere. The crisis requires all of us to work together. Immediate responses and confidence building are needed, and longer-term issues have to be considered.

Incidentally, I am aware that the Government attended a meeting at Heathrow to discuss those issues. Indeed, I am sure that the Minister will refer to it. It is sad to report, however, that no Conservative councillor or Member of Parliament was invited to that meeting. I stress that that was not the fault of the Government, who attended the meeting as the guests of its organisers.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): It is interesting to note, however, that on this occasion only the Minister is present on the Labour Benches.

Mr. Wilshire: Yes. Those who set up that meeting do not want to get involved when Conservatives on the other side of the airport raise these issues. However, I will not pursue that matter.

The Government are giving short-term insurance help to the aviation industry and I urge them to make it longer term, because the effect of increased premiums will not go away within the Government's time scale. I have no quarrel with many of the necessary security requirements, but they are nationally imposed standards, not airline-imposed requirements. It is possible to go even further to reassure the travelling public, and the Government should think about making financial help available for the extra security costs.

Cash handouts are not popular in my party, but I plead for one in this case because every operator on the north Atlantic route instantly lost four days' business, without being able to take precautions. British aviation companies are having to carry losses of £48 million because of the shutdown of the north Atlantic routes, unlike those of other countries, whose Governments did something about it. There is scope for help from the Government, which they may care to consider: they raise about £1 billion a year from passenger duty, so they have a ready means of showing their support for the aviation industry in the short-to-medium term by returning some or all of the £1 billion.

The Government must make it clear immediately, notwithstanding the fact that they want to play fair by the European Union or that they are led by someone who wants to be at the heart of Europe, that on this occasion they will stand up for the national interest. They must say, "We will work with the European Union but we will not be dictated to unless and until everyone else is, and unless and until the European Union deals with the unfair competition from the United States."

It is a technical matter, but the Government should also consider giving immediate help to airports by way of indemnities against war risk.

I have outlined what I think should be the Government's immediate responses and I shall now say what should be done to build confidence, as this is not only a factual, dull, dry economic debate, but a hearts and minds debate, too. The Government have one card that they can play with the minimum of effort to build confidence: they can take the opportunity to say, "We give permission to build terminal 5." The Minister would probably love to say so here and now, but I do not think that he will do so, and I understand why. However, it would help if he went back to the office and said, "Please, please."

The biggest single boost to the British aviation industry, especially in my constituency, would be to give T5 the go-ahead now. We need that confidence building; it would be a shot in the arm and proof that we have confidence in the future, not only of Heathrow but of British aviation, and show that we are determined to act straight away. Even if action is taken now it must be understood that the delay to the decision on terminal 5 has caused much harm—apart from utterly discrediting the British planning system with the farce and nonsense at the public inquiry. The delay in allowing T5 to go ahead has cost UK airlines dear.

A few years ago, before Heathrow became so overcrowded, passengers could be ticketed through that airport in three quarters of an hour. The process now takes an hour and a quarter and it is getting longer, which means that many people who used to use Heathrow in transit are choosing other routes. They are not going via Stansted, Gatwick, Manchester or Bristol but choosing Paris, Amsterdam or Frankfurt, thus jobs and opportunities go to other countries.

The delay in T5 has helped foreign competition. While we have dithered and listened endlessly to the head-in-the-sand brigade—who seem determined to close Heathrow and bankrupt my constituency—foreign competitors have laughed happily. Charles de Gaulle airport alone has built a terminal and a runway while we squabbled. We have undermined UK plc by undermining Heathrow. I know that the growth of an airport upsets some people, and the growth in Heathrow during the past five years has been about 14 per cent.—some say that that should not have happened, but I say that it should have—but during the same period, Charles de Gaulle in Paris has grown by 54 per cent. That is a direct threat to local jobs and UK plc. In 1990, Heathrow was the No. 1 European hub for destinations served out of that airport. Today it is fourth, after Paris, Frankfurt and Amsterdam.

One other factor that we must make clear on terminal 5, confidence building and helping the British aviation industry—I say this with feeling to the head-in-the-sand brigade who are desperately trying to wreck my constituency—is that the T5 debate is not about safety. Trying to scare people on the back of an application to build a terminal is irresponsible. The number of flights adds to the safety risk, not the number of passengers, and terminals are about passengers, not the number of flights. The T5 debate is not rendered unnecessary by the events of 11 September, because Heathrow was overcrowded anyway and, despite the 900,000 fewer passengers last month, is still overcrowded. Many of the passengers who want to use terminal 5 already use the airport and still use it, despite recent events. Even if the downturn in the aviation industry of the past few weeks continues for the same length of time as the Gulf war, that would not be an argument against T5. Even if the Minister were to stand up in a minute and say, "I allow it now," the terminal would not be operational until 2007. If anyone is suggesting that the crisis will last until 2007, I can say only heaven help the British aviation industry.

T5 is the confidence boost that the industry wants now, and I wish people would stop continually harping on and saying that an unbuilt terminal caused last year's flooding and led to an outbreak of ragwort on Staines moor. They say that a terminal 4 inspector, had he had a crystal ball and been able to see the future, would have taken a different decision. He would not have done. If that inspector could have seen the future, he would have backed a grand national winner and gone to live in the Bahamas. He would not have bothered to get involved in planning applications.

The Government should consider longer-term measures to help the British aviation industry. They should learn from what the United States has done to help its industry and take a far tougher line in bilateral negotiations with it. All too often, we roll over and play dead at the first shout of a threat from the USA. I am in favour of open skies across the Atlantic, but only if that is fair to both sides and not an American attempt to bankrupt us and bail out its airlines. We must take a tougher stance in negotiations.

We must take steps to help consolidation in the European aviation industry, provided that we do not damage our interests by being kinder than anyone else. One difficulty of competing with the Americans is that we have much smaller airlines. It is easy to fool ourselves and think that our big players are the biggest in the world, but they are not. They are at the top end of the medium-sized players or the bottom end of the big players, and are vulnerable. In the Brussels discussions, the Government must resist the European Union's crazy idea of imposing a tax on aviation fuel while it applies only in the EU. It will simply cripple us if we allow others to use untaxed fuel while EU airlines cannot. Having said that, I will not be party political, so I gently urge the Government to introduce an aviation policy; they have been silent for four or five years. We need to know where we are going and to take decisions about our runways and infrastructure. Information on those issues would help.

I make no apology for my long contribution, because the issue affects the whole of the United Kingdom and forms a basic part of a prosperous British economy. It fundamentally affects my constituency and others immediately around the airport. As I said at the beginning, what has happened arose from personal tragedies, mainly in the United States, and our hearts go out to all the families that have been affected. However, a serious crisis faces the British aviation industry. Problems will be experienced in the constituencies of all colleagues who represent areas immediately near airports. Whether we like it or not, whatever our party politics, the problems will be solved only by Government action, alongside the actions of the airlines. The airlines are doing everything that they possibly can to meet the crisis, which they could not have expected and for which, therefore, they could not have planned. Without Government assistance, they will be struggling.

[Mr. Wilshire]

The issue transcends party politics. All local and national politicians of whatever political persuasion must work with the Government to meet the crisis and to ensure that our industries, people and jobs survive.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): As we are now 46 minutes into a 90-minute debate, it might be useful if I remind hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member who is about to address the House, that it is customary to start the first of the three winding-up speeches 30 minutes before termination, which will be at 11 o'clock. We will commence the winding-up speeches at 10.30 am.

10.17 am

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) for this timely debate. Like his constituents, many of mine work at Heathrow and depend for their livelihood on the vigour, strength and prosperity of the airline industry, and that is the case throughout west London. The industry is crucial to London's economy as a whole. The London airport system includes Heathrow in the west, Luton in the north, Stansted to the north-east, City, and even the two business airports at Farnborough and Biggin Hill. It is important to our country's prosperity that we develop policies that will revive the airline industry, which has suffered acutely not just from the economic downturn but from the acts of aerial terrorism on 11 September. Obviously, confidence in the industry will have been further shaken by the recent tragic accident involving an American Airlines airbus in New York.

It behoves us all to see what we can do to help the industry. I am sure that most hon. Members were deeply impressed by the lobby from airline workers last week. I addressed a huge meeting, as did other hon. Members, at which I said that the Government must introduce a policy for the air transport industry at the earliest possible date. As my hon. Friend made clear, that is overdue and now is the time to do it.

No decision would give greater confidence to the industry and the travelling public than a favourable decision on T5. The opening of that terminal as early as possible—my hon. Friend says that it could not be done before 2007—would help British Airways to consolidate its operations at Heathrow. It would also assist the smooth flow of passengers. The current terminal system was designed for a maximum of 54 million passengers a year, but around 62 million a year now use it in conditions of some discomfort. That must be rectified by the construction of the overdue fifth terminal and improvements to the surface transport system to help to bring passengers more smoothly and easily into the fifth terminal and into Heathrow for the benefit of our airlines. The airport needs railway links from Reading and Waterloo, the construction of the M25 motorway spur and, last but not least, the crossrail link. Surface transport access is an important determinant for passengers in deciding from which airport to depart.

It is noteworthy that in October passenger numbers fell by 12.7 per cent. at Gatwick and some 20 per cent. at Heathrow, but increased by 4.9 per cent. at Stansted. To a large extent, that was because north Atlantic traffic suffered severely after the aerial terrorism in the United States in September. Numbers fell by one third at Gatwick and Heathrow. Regional traffic and intra-European traffic has not been so adversely affected and airport passenger figures have increased not just at Stansted, but at Scottish airports. It is interesting that low-cost carriers such as easyJet, Ryanair, go and buzz and, to some degree, British Midland are weathering the storm more effectively than the high-cost flag carriers.

In the aftermath of the demise of Sabena and Swissair and, most recently, of Canada's No. 2 carrier, it is instructive to ensure that the European Commission produces measures on a European scale to allow a competitive environment to exist while tiding the industry over its current difficulties. I note that the Belgian Government are to be permitted to make a temporary loan of some 125 million euro to Delta Air Transport, Sabena's subsidiary. That may be acceptable if it is temporary, but long-term subsidies such as those described by my hon. Friend are not acceptable. The Government must either eliminate the passenger departure tax or, perhaps more intelligently, allow its revenue to be applied to airlines for the provision of the security measures necessary in the current emergency situation. It is also necessary for the Government to bear part of the burden of insurance costs on a more continuing basis and that they reimburse the revenue lost during the four days when north American airports were closed.

Last, but not least, I hope that in pursuing a competitive strategy, Her Majesty's Government will encourage the confidence necessary to get passengers back into aircraft. They have done so to some degree with the Prime Minister's flight to the United States on Concorde, and the re-establishment of the Concorde service across the Atlantic by Air France; and British Airways symbolises the determination of the European airline industry to get back in the business and not to be put off. I was pleased that the Minister for Transport also went on the inaugural restored Concorde service.

In pursuing that competitive strategy, I hope that airlines will also play their part. British Airways must not only consolidate, as Mr. Eddington wishes to do, with other European carriers, such as KLM, but move towards meeting the needs of the majority of the travelling public by attracting more passengers back into aircraft. It should not devote its attention to premium traffic, which has been its strategy in recent months.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend secured this debate and I am confident that the industry will be restored to strength, but that needs the support and encouragement of Her Majesty's Government.

10.24 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on securing the debate and on the forceful and articulate way in which he made his case. To add to the ideological confusion of the argument, I follow two rather right-wing Conservatives from a right-wing party who made a case for Government intervention, but I come from a party to the left of them and will argue for a liberal, competitive market and against Government intervention. However, I acknowledge that the issue is

more subtle and the hon. Gentleman made it clear that we are discussing not just broad dogma, but specific problems concerning security costs, the insurance market and so on. Those matters must be examined individually on their merits and the outcome is not a straight yes or no.

Although I am my party's spokesman on the matter, I also represent an airport constituency. It is not as large as that of the hon. Gentleman, but several hundreds, perhaps thousands, of my constituents work at the airport and many others use it for business purposes. Its commercial and broad economic importance is understood, and many people live under the flight path, as I do, and are conscious of the environmental impact and safety implications. The debate in my constituency is better balanced than that in Spelthorne.

It is important to understand that the situation in airport-dependent constituencies is not the same as in coal mining and shipbuilding constituencies. South-west London is part of the wider London and Surrey labour market; mining communities are not like that. A basic feature of the economy in my constituency—I am sure that this is true of Spelthorne—is a chronic labour shortage and there is a great deal of ability to absorb job losses in one area as against another for precisely that reason. The matter must be considered in its broader economic context.

The hon. Gentleman set out clearly the problems in the aviation industry: the massive loss of profitability for large carriers such as British Airways, the failure of Swissair and Sabena, and the collapse of air traffic. I want to emphasise what the hon. Gentleman said about the second round effects. It is not only the airlines that are affected, but the equipment manufacturers that supply the airlines, the aero engine industry and the tourism industry. The aviation industry, like livestock farmers, is well organised and has effective lobbies, but the tourist industry does not and its concerns are always overlooked, although it is a bigger industry. The impact of the disaster on the tourist industry has been much greater than that on the higher profile sectors.

There is a problem, but there are qualifications. As the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) said, some parts of the aviation industry are doing rather well. Ryanair, easyJet and other low-cost airlines are relatively flourishing because they seem to have a business model that is better suited to the current environment than some of the flag carriers. The proprietors of easyJet and Ryanair have been aggressive in arguing against Government intervention precisely because they believe that they have made good commercial judgments and that they should be rewarded for that in the market. They argue that British Airways, for example, made serious commercial errors in opting for concentration on the executive market. The executive market may have been rewarding some years ago, but it has collapsed in the short term. The low-cost airlines have opted for a different segment of the market and have done well from that. Partly for that reason, Luton and Stansted are surviving the present crisis much better than Heathrow. There is an issue of commercial judgment as well as the knock-on effects of an international crisis.

I must emphasise that some of the airlines that are crying out for help have been bleeding money for many years. Sabena has been losing money for 39 of the past 40 years. The crisis has triggered its insolvency and subsequent rescue, but the problem is of long standing and had to be dealt with at some time.

It is dangerous to take at face value airlines' claims that they desperately need financial help. They will make claims in their own defence and argue for help, but it is clear from a superficial examination of British Airways' accounts—I have not analysed them carefully—that it is in a strong position. It has £1 billion in cash and probably £2 billion to £2.5 billion in realisable cash from disposal of property and credit lines. It must use its commercial judgment to deal with the problem and not run to the Government; it has the asset base to cope with it. That is what a commercial enterprise should do.

I want to confront the broad policy issues. Should a flag carrier go bust? Technically, it can, but there has always been an assumption that our national flag carrier and others should never be allowed to go bankrupt. I should like to pose the question why. These are privatised companies—I am in favour of the privatisation of airlines—that have assumed commercial risks. Their shareholders have done well over the years, and if they are in financial difficulties why should they not face the risk of insolvency like any other commercial operation? In extremis that should be contemplated.

There are several reasons why it is not the Government's job to protect the national flag carrier from the verdict of the market. It is unfair to other operators in the business. Ryanair and easyJet argue that they are competing with British Midland, which is now part of Lufthansa, and British Airways. If British Airways makes commercial misjudgments and suffers bad luck, that is its problem, not the Government's.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne did not touch on hidden implicit subsidies to the industry. Airlines pay passenger tax, which they argue it is an unfair and difficult imposition, but they enjoy many implicit subsidies. Until the Government began to reform the system, the airlines paid highly subsidised landing charges because of the way in which the regulatory system works—the so-called single till principle. The Government are addressing the problem, but landing charges at Heathrow are ridiculously low. Unlike United States' airlines, British airlines pay nothing for their landing slots. The slots are grandfathered and are effectively a large gift from the taxpayer. Those are hidden subsidies built into the airline business, and if airlines cannot make money in that environment, something is seriously wrong. We must question the assumption that the flag carrier must always be baled out by the Government.

A trickier argument, which must nevertheless be confronted, concerns the case made by the hon. Gentleman that if the Americans are helping their industry, we must help ours—the UK plc argument. I understand the level playing field argument, but it is not as clear cut as the hon. Gentleman implies. If one country chooses to waste its taxpayers' money, why should other countries do the same? The previous Government chose to take a firm line on industrial subsidies, and they understood this point. It used to be argued that we should subsidise the coal industry because the Germans do, but the previous Conservative Government rightly rejected the logic of that argument. People used to argue that the Koreans subsidise their

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

shipbuilding industry so we must subsidise ours. Others said that the French subsidise their farmers so we must subsidise ours. That is the road to ruin, and we cannot do that on a national basis. That the Americans have done something so we should do the same is not a logical justification for industrial support.

Moreover, the American situation is different because its industry has been exposed to greater competition than the European industry. The issue of auctioning licence slots is a good example. American airlines in America pay the price of scarce landing facilities while our airlines do not. The Americans can reasonably question whether their position is exactly the same as ours.

Having made a general argument against Government intervention, I come to policy issues. There are some specific problems that must be addressed individually. I sympathise with the airlines on the compulsory four-day grounding, which resulted from a specific crisis for a specific period of time over which they had no control. The principle of compensation for that limited period, which occurred due to factors outside of the airlines' control that were induced by political circumstances, is fundamentally reasonable.

Similarly, I have some sympathy with the argument that the Government were right to help the industry with emergency insurance cover. It would have been wrong if the aviation industry had been grounded indefinitely because of a failure in a segment of the insurance market. The Government were right to act as a temporary insurer of last resort but, unlike the hon. Gentleman, I think that it is important to stick to the principle that that is temporary. Companies providing commercial insurance and reinsurance are emerging, and that market should provide for the needs of the industry. Even if that is at a relatively high cost, there is no need for an indefinite subsidy.

If there are additional security costs they should be paid for by the industry, which means that passengers will ultimately pay. That principle would apply to every other industry. However, there may be specific cases concerning security at airports, the cost of which will fall on the public.

The hon. Gentleman made a point with which I sympathise about the problems of cash flow in the industry. There may be ways in which the Government can affect the timing of payments of passenger tax. That would not represent a subsidy, but it would ease the cash flow position in the industry. I would be open to the argument that that is fundamentally reasonable. However, it is wrong to argue that the Government should provide open-ended support or large-scale assistance of the type that appears to have been provided by the US Government. The European Union is right to take a hard line on state aids—it may have relented in the case of Sabena, which would be unfortunate—and Loyola de Palacio, the European Union Transport Commissioner, has said the right things and has taken the correct view on industrial assistance.

At the end of his speech, the hon. Gentleman forcefully discussed whether the Government should give a signal of support for the industry by backing T5. I do not want to prejudge the argument, which we may have as early as tomorrow, about T5, but it would be wrong to decide that large, complex argument on the basis of a current crisis of confidence in the industry. There are strong long-term arguments, which we shall rehearse in due course, for and against T5, but it is wrong to argue that because there is a temporary crisis of confidence, we should give the industry a shot in the arm by giving planning approval. When the decision comes—I suspect that it will be an approval—the important issues will concern the conditions attached to it on matters such as night flights and restrictions on flights. Treating T5 in terms of a general crisis of confidence is not the way in which to approach a complex planning issue.

The Government must not be deflected from regulatory reform. As part of their aviation review, they have rightly begun to examine the system by which the aviation industry is regulated on matters such as slot allocation and landing charges. Airlines may have to pay more for landing rights because that is what the economy and the environment require. The Government must not be deflected by demands from the aviation industry.

10.38 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful to catch your eye, Mr. Cook, in this, the third debate on this subject in as many weeks in this Chamber. That reflects hon. Members' concern, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on obtaining the debate. He made a thoughtful and analytical speech on a subject of critical importance to his constituents, and to the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable). All three hon. Members made important points.

We must not say anything in this debate that would discourage people from continuing to travel by air. Air travel is one of the safest forms of transport in the world, despite the terrible crash of flight 587 in New York on Monday, which was a hammer blow to the American people after their experiences on 11 September. On behalf of the Opposition, I should like to send our deepest possible sympathy to those affected.

We must try to ensure that something positive comes out of recent events. We have already seen that the US Congress and Senate have stopped their bickering over the new security Bill, which they will pass in the shortest possible time. The Home Secretary has announced that the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill will come before the House next Monday. We shall, of course, want to scrutinise that Bill, but it contains several important measures on nuclear security, aviation security and hoax calls. I hope that the Government will enable the Bill's speedy passage through the House, and where possible we will assist in that process.

It is particularly important to stress the need to update the Aviation Security Act 1982 in respect of access to our airports. Many of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne work at Heathrow. It is one of the safest airports in the world, and its workers have to be carefully screened. Given that the airline industry depends on north Atlantic trade, we

must make it clear to the American people in particular that it is safe to travel to this country. The sooner we can return to normality, the better, and as my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood said, anything that we can do to engender confidence must be of benefit.

It has rightly been pointed out that the aviation industry was experiencing major problems before 11 September, and some restructuring was planned in any case. Given that we want to maintain competition where possible, I ask the Government to scrutinise carefully the proposed merger of British Airways and the American airlines. That merger would account for about 50 per cent. of all passengers on north Atlantic routes and some 85 per cent. of the market as a whole. It would lead to 100 per cent. dominance of 13 routes to the United States, and more than 50 per cent. dominance of five other routes. We therefore need to look at that issue critically.

The International Air Transport Association has predicted that, as a result of the events of 11 September, the industry as a whole will lose £7 billion this year. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne pointed out that many businesses and industries in his constituency that are connected with Heathrow airport will suffer, but so will the wider economy. It is estimated that for every job that depends directly on the aviation industry, another three depend on it indirectly. Many other types of business have already been affected, from a creamery in Cornwall, which has lost half its business because there is no winter market for its products, to laundries and a host of other businesses. The economy will undoubtedly suffer, and anything that the Government can do in the short term would be welcome.

It is worth reiterating one or two points that I have made in previous debates. It is part of the Opposition's duty to give credit to the Government when they do things right, and I duly give them credit for stepping in commendably quickly as the insurer of last resort for a period of one month. However, as I said the other day, they should give the industry a great boost by making it clear that they are prepared to extend that period.

Having increased the airport passenger duty rate on taking office, the Government now raise more than £1 billion from it. There is a clear case for recycling some of that tax to pay for specific security measures at airports. It is unreasonable to expect individual airlines to bear the cost of increased security measures, and the Government need to consider that issue carefully.

Time is getting on, so I shall turn to one or two other key points. The T5 announcement, which is becoming a farce, has been mentioned. Everybody in the industry believes that the Government have made up their mind, so why can they not reveal their decision to the House? That would give the industry a huge boost in the light of the haemorrhaging of business elsewhere. Reference has been made to increased capacity at Charles de Gaulle airport. Since the T5 application was made in 1993, two more runways have been built at Schipol, and capacity at Frankfurt is also being increased. As my hon. Friend said, at the moment we are simply exporting jobs to other European centres.

The new terminal would provide a great boost, and would not necessarily lead to increased flights. An extra terminal is necessary to handle existing passenger numbers in greater comfort, and to provide more parking room for the larger aircraft to which the airline industry is turning. There are a host of issues that airlines must plan for, and the sooner the T5 announcement is made, the better.

I want to press the Government strongly on the question of the future of the National Air Traffic Services, which I have raised in recent debates. The NATS public-private partnership was predicated on the basis that £1 billion of private capital would be injected into the industry. On 26 October, the Minister for Transport, in a written answer to a question from the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), said:

> "NATS are reviewing their long-term investment plan to take account of the impact of the 11 September terrorist attacks on the aviation industry. They are due to report on the new Business Plan, which includes the long-term investment plan, in November 2001."—[*Official Report*, 26 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 428W.]

Given that the plan and the entire future of air traffic control centres at Prestwick and in the south are predicated on the basis of private investment, the Government must make a clear statement on how matters will proceed. We cannot operate in a vacuum, and if the Minister cannot provide that information today, I should be grateful if he would write to me and make it available in the Library.

As time is short, and so that the Minister can respond to the many issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne, I am prepared to curtail my speech. I conclude by pointing out that we need some positive proposals from the Minister today on how to build confidence in the industry. Perhaps the most important issues are competition and state aid. Some $5 billion has been made available immediately to American airlines, and a further $10 billion may be in the pipeline. I have already asked, in an intervention on my hon. Friend, about the precise nature of the Government's negotiations with European Union competition authorities. One thing is sure: if European flag carriers are subsidised, our airlines will face unfair competition. I am not necessarily saying that our own flag carriers should be subsidised, but it is incumbent on the Government to ensure that the competition that they face from Europe and from across the Atlantic is fair. Only the Government can do that.

10.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on securing this debate, and on the measured and largely consensual way in which he conducted it. The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said that he cut short his speech, but he took longer than the allotted 10 minutes. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) is smiling, but he took even longer. It seems that those who ask the questions in debates such as this have considerably more time than those who must reply to them, which I shall now attempt to do.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne rightly pointed out that the airline industry is of fundamental importance to our economy, and the Government fully recognise that fact. I agree entirely that the recent events that we are debating have in some cases resulted in personal family

[Mr. David Jamieson]

tragedies. I also want to reinforce the view that air travel is safe. During all our debates, we should bear in mind that the number of air travel-related casualties, injuries and accidents is very low compared with other forms of transport. I realise how important those issues are to the hon. Gentleman's constituency and to those of other hon. Members, and we are mindful of the jobs and associated industries involved.

I noticed that two Conservative Members talked, with some affection, of Government involvement in private industry, resonating yesterday's Railtrack debate. We are interested to see a gradual movement in policy by those hon. Gentlemen.

I shall deal with specific matters because there is little time to talk in generalities. First, the Government recognise the importance of the T5 announcement. Alas, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a decision today—he will have to contain his disappointment for a while longer, but he may not have to wait long. I noted his comments about the planning system and the time that it has taken to be resolved. I am sure that he welcomes the Government's new approach to planning.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the issue of aid from the United States Government to the airline industry across the Atlantic. We agree on the need to prevent competitive distortion with the United States and I assure him that we are carefully watching that. The European Commission is considering drawing up a code of conduct with the US Government to prevent anti-competitive behaviour, and we are mindful of the importance of that.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the number of jobs concerned with Boeing. I thought that I had a figure for the amount of exports from this country to Boeing but it is not precise so I shall only say that it is substantial. I met Boeing on that subject last week. He is right to say that a substantial number of jobs rely on Boeing. In response to his question on indemnities to airports for war risk, the Government have given indemnity to them and other service providers, including NATS. I hope that that satisfies him.

I know that the European Union is a somewhat sensitive point for Conservative Members. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the solutions to the problems of the airline industry in the United Kingdom must be found in this country, but we must also find agreement in the European Union. We cannot tackle such matters alone. If we did, we might find even the 15 countries in the European Union having to compete against one another, which would offer no benefit or advantage. I take his point on not bailing out failing airlines, but sometimes our national interests are closely interwoven with those of the European Union.

National Air Traffic Services has been clearly affected by what has unfolded during the past two months because its revenue comes from airline movements, which have been substantially depleted. It now faces an extraordinary and totally unexpected situation. It asked us for a pause in the building of the new centre at Prestwick, and we sanctioned that, but we remain totally committed to the two-centre strategy. We have received no financial request from it, but are keeping the situation under close review.

I am aware of the concern about the situation in the airline industry. The hon. Gentleman referred to last week's debate, which was fortunately extended owing to House business. A number of hon. Members whose constituencies surround the Heathrow area spoke with passion then about the issues raised today. I emphasise that the Government recognise the great importance of the aviation industry to the United Kingdom, and are paying close attention to its problems.

As pointed out—I am grateful for the comments of the hon. Member for Cotswold—we reacted quickly to the events of 11 September to counteract the failure in the aviation insurance market and enhance security measures at all United Kingdom airports. We are actively considering payment of emergency aid to airlines for the four days that United States' airspace was closed, but any decision will be in accordance with European Commission guidelines.

In addition to those measures, we are doing what we can to restore confidence in air travel. Much of the difficulty lies with that intangible thing called confidence. The airlines need not only state aid, which may help them for a while, but a return of their customer base and confidence. A fortnight ago, I made a trip to some British regional airports to encourage confidence in air travel and boost morale. Heathrow is holding up well at present, but it is important that all concerned should be in a position to react quickly to a deterioration in the situation. The job transition service is engaging with employers to ensure that those employees adversely affected by recent events have access to the fullest advice. I think that that was discussed with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport when he visited recently.

Despite the Government's long-standing policy not to intervene in the aviation market, the exceptional circumstances warrant Government action. As I have already said, we took immediate steps to counteract the failure in the insurance market: within a few days, and before the imminent withdrawal of cover grounded the entire UK fleet, we made the necessary third party war risks cover available to our airlines and related industry. We were so quick off the mark, and our remedy so effective, that our lead has been widely followed throughout the world. Initially, the cover was for one month, but it has recently been extended until 23 November and we are examining that almost on a daily basis.

Despite a few deplorable lapses that have been reported recently, pre-existing standards of security in the United Kingdom are among the highest in the world. None the less, we have enhanced security measures at all UK airports, and for airlines leaving this country. We are also carrying out a fundamental review of aviation security to make air travel as safe from terrorist attacks as we can, while balancing that with freedom to travel. I am sure that the hon. Members will welcome the fact that BAA estimates that it will need something like 150 extra security staff at Heathrow—it expects a good response to job adverts in the local press.

With one eye on United States Government support for its airline industry, some are calling for more generous aid for United Kingdom airlines. I stress that that is a matter for the European Community, which has exclusive competence for monitoring state aid that could distort or threaten competition in so far as it

affects trade between member states. The European Commission acted quickly to address the repercussions of the terrorist attacks for the air transport industry and issued a communication reiterating that member states must not depart from Community rules on state aid and set out how the Commission will interpret the rules in the current situation. We will monitor how that is done with great care. The extra costs of security, together with the losses directly attributable to the closure of US airspace and the provisions of insurance cover by Governments are identified as areas where state aid would be justifiable. The Government are considering whether further aid to UK airlines should be made available, taking relevant guidelines into account.

This debate has been useful and many matters have been aired again. I have had little time to cover the enormous number of points raised by hon. Members, but they are welcome to drop me a line about anything that I have not covered, and I will endeavour to send them a full, written response.

Hepatitis C

11 am

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I am pleased to have secured this important debate, in which I wish to draw the attention of Parliament and the people to hepatitis C, a serious condition that affects the health of hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens and is likely to become at least as serious as the onset of HIV/AIDS a few years ago. The Government do not appear to regard the situation as that serious; this is an opportunity for the Minister to clarify their position.

It was not deliberately planned, but yesterday the Haemophilia Society and the all-party group on haemophilia held a reception in the House, and today they are holding a photo call on College green to mark their "carpet of lilies" campaign. That is why some of us are wearing lilies on our lapels to represent the fact that more than 1,000 haemophiliacs have died as a result of contracting the HIV and/or hepatitis C viruses, through receiving contaminated blood during national health service blood transfusions. I shall not say much about that issue, but I am sure that other hon. Members will cover it adequately.

The hepatitis C virus, HCV, was first identified as recently as 1989. It infects the liver but it can also cause damage to kidneys and white blood cells. HCV is an enveloped ribonucleic acid of the flaviviride family, which is believed to have a narrow host range. It is incredibly resilient, being capable of surviving in dried blood for long periods. The incubation period for the virus is commonly six to nine weeks, although it is frequently longer. It can lie in the body without causing obvious disease for a lifetime, and infected people can put others at risk without realising the dangers. HCV has a high mutation rate and it is thought that six common strains exist, each with many sub-strains. It is possible for a person to be infected by more than one strain at the same time. The strains have the ability to mutate spontaneously, which is partly why it has not been possible to develop vaccines to combat the virus.

The World Health Organisation estimates that about 170 million people worldwide are infected with HCV. However, the epidemic is fairly new to the United Kingdom. It probably began in the late 1960s, but a large cohort of people is believed to have become infected in the early and late 1980s before needle exchange schemes and other interventions to reduce transmission of the virus became widely available. The official figure for the number of infected people in the UK was recently given in a parliamentary answer in the other place, which stated that there were 300,000 people with chronic carriage of the virus. However, specialists working in the field believe that the true figure may be much higher—possibly 500,000. That figure was quoted in an article in *The Independent* in July 2000. In the same article, the former Surgeon-General of the United States, Everett Koop, said:

> "We stand on the precipice of a great threat to our public health . . . It affects people in all walks of life, in all states, in every country . . . and, unless we do something soon, it will kill more people than AIDS."

HCV is a growing concern, as its transmission through contaminated blood is incredibly common. Misconceptions, rumours and misinformation are the greatest allies of HCV infection because, like the AIDS virus, it carries a stigma.

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

In 1999, HCV killed 743 people in England. The provisional figure for 2000 is 1,042, but most deaths from HCV-related complications are not recorded with HCV as the cause, so the true figure for deaths caused directly or indirectly by the virus must be much higher.

In 15 per cent. of cases HCV disappears spontaneously, but the other 85 per cent. of those infected will proceed to develop a long-term chronic illness. HCV is the biggest cause of chronic liver disease in the western world and is known to exacerbate the severity of underlying liver disease when it co-exists with other hepatic conditions. Some 30 per cent. of victims will contract cirrhosis of the liver over a 30-year period, and of those some 5 per cent. every year will develop liver cancer and 2 per cent. will suffer liver failure. Even among those less severely affected the symptoms, which include fatigue, depression and lethargy, can be debilitating and all lead to a poor quality of life.

As a result of HCV infection, over the next 10 years 30,000 to 60,000 people in the UK are expected to die from cirrhosis of the liver and 15,000 to 30,000 are expected to die from primary liver cancer. Heavy drinkers, especially alcoholics, who are unaware of their HCV infection are putting themselves at particularly great risk.

HCV is incredibly difficult to treat owing to its high mutation rates. Indeed, viral infections in general are notoriously difficult to treat with known drugs. The most successful treatment that is currently available, which is approved by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, is a combination therapy of ribavirin and alpha interferon. However, it is extremely expensive—it costs about £8,000 per patient per annum.

Until now a few, but not all, health authorities have commissioned treatment from their central budgets. Knowledge of the advent of primary care trusts in April 2002 has made specialists working in the field fearful that far fewer patients than at present will receive the combination therapy. I put it to the Minister that it might be preferable to commission expensive treatment of that sort from a centralised regional budget—after all, liver transplants are funded in that way—and I look forward to his response.

Significantly, the combination therapy, which is successful in curing approximately 40 per cent. of those infected, is cost-effective, according to consultants. Moreover, it reduces the eventual need for long-term care and the demand for liver transplants. Apart from the fact that transplant operations cost about £50,000 each, the recent organ retention scandals have severely reduced the supply of livers for such operations.

The most common cause of HCV transmission is injecting drug use—specifically, the sharing of injecting paraphernalia. It is estimated that, on average, 30 to 40 per cent. of current and former injecting drug users may have the virus, and the figure can be as high as 60 per cent. for long-term injectors. More males than females are infected because the former are more likely to inject drugs. Four out of five deaths from HCV infection may be categorised as drug-related.

It is believed that one in 11 injecting drug users who began injecting in the past three years have the hepatitis C infection. Occasional users are more likely to share equipment. Their drug use is often unplanned and their first experiences of injecting are nearly always with borrowed equipment. HCV can be transmitted by using any injecting equipment that has been in contact with an infected person's blood. The lending and borrowing of injecting paraphernalia is common. In 1999, direct sharing of needles and syringes was reported by 32 per cent. of drug users who had injected in the previous month.

Dangerous sharing practices include not only syringes, but spoons and other containers used for mixing drugs, water, swabs, filters, tourniquets and utensils such as lighters and knives. There is also a growing concern that sharing straws to snort cocaine may be a route of infection through weakened nasal membranes.

Although there is strong evidence that needle exchange facilities significantly reduce the incidence of HCV, no formal assessment of the availability of such schemes throughout the UK has ever been carried out. There is a wide disparity in the distribution and quality of such services.

Some 27 million syringes are distributed every year for harm reduction. Assuming that there are 100,000 regular injectors, which is probably an underestimate, that provision represents less than one clean syringe a day for each injecting drug user. No wonder injectors are forced to share syringes.

NICE and the British Society of Gastroenterology have advised treatment providers against generally giving treatment to current drug injectors. That advice is apparently based on problems of compliance and re-infection. An article in the 19 July 2001 edition of the *New England Journal of Medicine* examined the rationale for excluding drug users with chronic HCV from treatment and rejected the NICE advice. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will re-examine the advice.

I also draw the Minister's attention to an article that appeared recently in the 2001, volume 34, issue 1 edition of "Hepatology", beginning on page 188. It shows that prejudicial statements about poor compliance are inaccurate and that injecting drug users with chronic HCV can be treated successfully with combination therapy.

It is thought that the risk of newly acquired HCV is highest among prisoners, and that transmission in prisons occurs through not only the re-use of needles but the sharing of other items, and through piercing and tattooing. The Prison Service already has a strategy for preventing the spread of communicable diseases in prisons, involving training, education, prevention, risk reduction and harm minimisation. It is necessary for that best practice to be spread nationally throughout the community, which calls for the development of a national strategy.

My final remarks are about such a strategy. In the 1980s, the Department of Health responded to the growing threat of the HIV virus with national advertising campaigns informing the general public. They were coupled with more detailed information made available to groups at the highest risk. There is a growing concern among specialists working on HCV that if some form of information is not soon made available, it will become more widespread than HIV has ever been. Although programmes such as needle

exchange schemes have been implemented in most parts of the country, they are patchy and the current situation is inadequate. Unfortunately, many who use needle exchanges still regularly share equipment.

Although many injecting drug users are aware of HCV, not all are familiar with the ways in which it can be contracted. A national strategy to inform and educate the public would reduce the number of people contracting it and that would reduce the money that the NHS spends on treatment. Without adequate information, HCV prevalence is likely to rise further. It is vital that those at risk are informed and helped to avoid contracting the disease. The Prison Service already has a system of education and risk reduction, but why is the giving of information confined to prison inmates? Could the DOH modify the information programme used in the Prison Service and use it to spread awareness throughout high-risk groups of the general public?

It cannot be denied that the strategy against HIV and AIDS significantly reduced the numbers becoming infected. It is hoped that a similar national strategy against HCV, if and when it is launched, will reduce the incidence of that infection in the same way. I look forward to hearing the views of my parliamentary colleagues and the Minister's response.

11.14 am

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on raising an issue that is a medical time-bomb waiting to explode, and taking on a subject that has still to penetrate the public consciousness. I shall try to cover in more detail some of the points that he raised.

I am aware of the situation because of my contact with the Bure drugs centre in Norwich, Norfolk, which has helpfully provided local information. In a quiet city, which, the newspapers tell us, is a city of the future, the problem is just as deep-seated as anywhere else in the country. The problem is worldwide and global, but it is also found in our cities—quiet, nice and productive of a good quality of life though they are—and throughout the country. I therefore congratulate my hon. Friend again on raising the issue.

The help that I received from the Bure centre came via Paul Brierley, who, as the harm minimisation nurse in the community drug team there, is at the coal face of the problems. His role at the centre is to operate a confidential advice and testing service for bloodborne viruses, including hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HIV. He participates in the surveys of the Public Health Laboratory Service, and in a 2000 survey testing for hepatitis C antibodies in individuals, from a sample base of 211 people in Norwich and Norfolk, 42 per cent. responded positively. The sample base was representative of Norwich and the old East Norfolk health authority.

There is no accurate figure for the number of individuals that that percentage would translate into in Norfolk because, as my hon. Friend pointed out, many injectors are invisible to that, or any other, form of survey. We are aware that there is in Norfolk a significant number of dependent opiate injectors who never access any form of treatment, as well as a probably larger group of non-dependent opiate and stimulant injectors, and several who may have injected a few times, or a long time ago. The Bure centre currently has 700 open cases and in excess of 3,000 closed cases. The vast majority of them are at some risk of infection. The medics who operate at the Bure centre think it reasonable to conclude that the numbers infected in Norfolk are in the thousands, many of them unaware of their status, or even of the existence of the virus.

On testing, there is no routine antenatal hepatitis C screening, although it is actively encouraged when a pregnant woman reports past or current intravenous drug usage. It is often available on the request of general practitioners, and some of them encourage it. It is unlikely, however, to include significant counselling before or after the test, or to alter a client's risk behaviour. All local prisons offer some access to counselling and testing, and vaccination for, at least, hepatitis B.

On prevention, there is evidence, courtesy of the local Public Health Laboratory Service, that rates of new infection have slowed during the past few years. That may reflect a growing awareness of risk. The Bure centre is often approached by statutory and non-statutory agencies seeking training for staff and service users. That reflects the level of local concern and the increasing number of people considering the risk because of their occupation or lifestyle.

All work on hepatitis C in Norfolk is conducted within existing budgets. That point is strongly made and amplified by all those who carry out front-line work.

On treatment, I am indebted to my ex-colleague Dr. Hugh Kennedy for providing information about the gastroenterology unit at Norfolk and Norwich hospital and the problems in the hospital environment. NICE guidelines recommend funding for treatment, but whether it is provided seems to vary across the country, as is the case with funding for many drugs. I shall say a little more about the NICE recommendations in a minute.

The needle and syringe exchange scheme provides comprehensive coverage of Norfolk, on a rather nine-to-five basis. With some forethought it is possible to have a clean needle and syringe for every injection, but whether that happens is another matter. In the prison in Norwich, a course of training has been run for 50 staff, including a morning on viral infection. It highlighted clients' remarks on the availability of drugs in prisons and on the lack of injecting equipment. Sharing such equipment is a widespread practice in prisons, and must play a significant part in spreading hepatitis C. The prison gives inmates access to sterilising tablets, ostensibly for disinfecting cutlery, but they have not been demonstrated to inactivate the virus, even when soaked for the recommended 30 minutes—probably considerably longer than the average user is likely to wait. If virus transmission in prisons is not addressed, the overall infection rate is expected to remain high.

There are other routes of infection, although they are perhaps not as significant. Contact with contaminated blood and blood products, and non-hygienic tattooing or body piercing are among the myriad of ways in which bloodborne viruses can infect the population. They are detected only when patients present in general practice with obvious and often advanced liver disease.

[Dr. Ian Gibson]

The level of knowledge gained over the years by the Bure clinic means that most current intravenous opiate-dependent users have some idea of the risk of infection with the virus, although local myth and misinformation plays a part. The clinic also fosters knowledge among those working with or caring for intravenous drug users, although the demand for information is in danger of outstripping the supply of people to provide that information.

Confidential advice and testing is also available at the Bure centre, as advised by the young person's capacity to give informal consent—the so-called Gillick competency. Early reports that HCV infections frequently occur within the first year of injecting have been borne out only partly. Awareness of risk ordinarily postdates the commencement of injecting behaviour.

As my hon. Friend said, the true prevalence of hepatitis C in the United Kingdom is unknown and there is no accurate information about the infected population. Basic information relating to the age of those infected, the duration of the infection, the risk factors for infection and the distribution of infection in the different regions of the UK is not available. It is therefore impossible to determine what services are required, where they should be established and which client groups should be targeted. Appropriate epidemiological studies are urgently required to determine how best to tackle the hepatitis C problem.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence reviewed drug therapy for hepatitis C in the final quarter of 2000. As my hon. Friend said, it concluded that therapy with current drugs such as interferon and ribavirin cures up to 40 per cent. of infected individuals and that, although it is expensive, it is cost-effective and should be provided. At present, therapy for the virus is funded by local health authorities. I have already pointed out that a postcode lottery operates, and I hope that the Government will address that with all the other drug problems, including cancer.

Much concern has been expressed about funding, and many centres have featured in campaigns to try to obtain sufficient money to provide effective drug treatments. It is clear that the current system for implementing the NICE guidelines for hepatitis C is unsatisfactory, and that central, ring-fenced funding will be required to allow all patients to receive appropriate therapy. That is the only conclusion that one can draw from the available information.

A targeted testing and information campaign is needed. The Department's current policy is to test only those patients who ask to be tested for hepatitis C, but hepatitis C can, for many years, be a silent disease, and probably about 500,000 people in the UK have been infected. However, they are unaware that they are at risk, and are thus unlikely to ask to be tested. If they were aware of the diagnosis, many people could limit the progression of their disease—for example, simply by stopping drinking alcohol. Others could be prevented from developing serious disease by appropriate treatment.

A public information campaign could be undertaken at a cost equal to that of treating three or four people with interferon or ribavirin. Symptomatic illness and liver failure could be prevented in many people. Indeed, the correlation between hepatitis C and liver cancer is well proven. Every undergraduate medical student knows that, and it is one of the few cases where a virus is involved in the development of a cancer. Targeted testing and a public information campaign are essential.

There is evidence that some groups are disadvantaged. However, the subject has not been studied in detail, and only anecdotal evidence is available. It is common in patients of non-European descent, in those who misuse drugs and among prisoners. Those vulnerable groups have poor access to healthcare, and there are no plans to facilitate treatment for them. Unless services are developed to address their healthcare needs, a substantial reservoir of untreated hepatitis C will persist, which will place an increasing demand on healthcare services and cause new infections.

As my hon. Friend said, the costs of treating individuals with chronic hepatitis C are high, and it is disappointing to note that no cohesive policy is in place to prevent transmission. There is clear evidence that effective health promotion aimed at reducing needle sharing among those who inject drugs reduces the risk of infection with HCV.

The Medical Research Council facilitates research funding for medically related problems, but its strategies document does not mention hepatitis C. Priority is given to research into spongiform encephalopathies, such as BSE, and the epidemiology of HIV. Given the size of the current hepatitis C epidemic, those research priorities seem completely out of balance.

Mention has been made of compensation for haemophiliacs who have contracted HIV. It is perverse that many patients with haemophilia who are now dying as a result of infection with hepatitis C should be denied similar compensation. I suggest a possible solution. Current systems for dealing with the problems are clearly failing. The epidemic is not being properly monitored, patients are being denied the information needed to reduce the risk of infection and those who are infected are being denied therapy.

To resolve those problems, central funding is required to provide a full range of services for people who have chronic hepatitis C or who are at risk of being infected with it. Improving services for such patients will require the co-ordinated efforts of a large group of different healthcare groups. Regional anti-viral centres that are responsible for preventing, managing and monitoring the epidemic in their area need to be set up with central funding. Without some form of centralised funding, ad hoc arrangements will persist and the epidemic will continue to absorb precious healthcare resources for many years to come. We can take action now to forestall the consequences of the disease by reducing transmission, preventing deterioration and eliminating the virus from those who are currently infected.

11.26 am

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I shall raise the subject of those haemophiliacs who contracted hepatitis C as a result of blood transfusion and who suffer in many ways as a result. For example, they are unable to obtain life insurance, and many have had to give up their jobs. Such people require proper financial help. It is not simply a moral obligation; we have a financial obligation to

provide for them and their families, so that they can be financially secure and enjoy as full a life as possible. In that connection, I must point out that help has been provided for HIV sufferers. Hepatitis C is just as devastating a disease and it involves just as much loss and hardship. Why should the two be treated differently?

A step has been made in the right direction. In March, in a landmark High Court case, Mr. Justice Burton found that the national health service had a legal duty to supply clean blood for transfusion. Significant compensation was awarded to 114 non-haemophiliacs who had suffered blood transfusions and who had been infected as a result. That case was brought under the Consumer Protection Act 1987, but those provisions apply only to cases that arose after the Act came into force. However, if the principle of compensation was accepted in that case, it is surely grossly unfair to deny the same rights to haemophilia sufferers who have hepatitis C.

The Government have said that they are considering the implications of that verdict, but it seems that they will not provide further compensation. However, the Health and Community Care Committee of the Scottish Parliament recently recommended that financial assistance be given to haemophilia sufferers infected with hepatitis C as a result of having been given contaminated blood. If the Scottish Executive can do it, I hope that the Government will move in the same direction.

I asked the Minister a question on that subject on Monday 12 November. His response was that he would let me have a reply as soon as possible. I hope that the reason for the delay is that the Government are considering what to do. The Scottish Executive does not provide the only example. Many other countries, such as Ireland, have accepted responsibility and provide compensation for haemophiliacs.

Arguments have been advanced against compensation or financial help; there is concern that that would open the floodgates in respect of other issues. However, I do not accept that argument. The Government have said that benefit payments are the way to help. That is not enough. I hope that they will change their mind.

The matter was raised many years ago. When he was Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Security in 1974, David Owen—now Lord Owen—asked departmental officials to put money aside for that very purpose. It has been a tremendous shock to him and to others that that money was not, seemingly, put aside. Certainly it was not used, yet it was already an issue all those years ago.

The present and previous Labour Governments have not uniformly insisted on proof of medical negligence before compensating national health service patients. The Callaghan Government increased payments under the vaccine damage payment scheme, and payments have been increased by the present Labour Government under the Macfarlane trust fund.

Compensation is provided in other areas, such as for criminal injuries, but that is not dependent on the Government's being seen to be at fault. Financial assistance is required, and haemophilia victims want and deserve an inquiry into how their plight has been allowed to happen. There has been an internal inquiry, but it was not considered that it got to the root of the matter. Supporters have pointed out that haemophilia victims who received transfusions in the 1970s and 1980s did not have any of the risks that we now know exist explained to them, although scientific knowledge available to Whitehall at that time suggested that hepatitis C could be transmitted through blood. In addition, money has never been forthcoming, despite the fact that a previous Minister with responsibility for health—Lord Owen—considered the issue important enough to say that it was required.

A debate was initiated by Lord Morris in the other place. He made it clear that almost everyone with haemophilia who is now over the age of 15 was infected with HIV and HCV by unclean blood. Of some 6,000 haemophiliacs, about 1,000 have already died of one or both of those diseases. If there have been inquiries about the Marchioness and about Paddington, surely there can be one into this disaster.

I hope that this is a constructive contribution.

Dr. Iddon: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the Scottish Parliament. Is he aware that the Haemophilia Society petitioned it? Although most of the reasons for its petitioning were rejected, the Scottish Parliament's Health and Community Care Committee reached the following conclusion:

"financial and other practical assistance, awarded on a no-fault basis, is the clearest solution to the issues raised in these petitions."

Brian Cotter: I very much appreciate that contribution, which helps to advance the case that I have been trying to make. I hope that we are not putting up the ramparts on the issue, and that the Government are considering it and will shortly come forward with what is needed: an inquiry and financial support to put right this clear injustice.

11.35 am

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. It concerns a serious public health issue, on which discussion is long overdue. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) has spelled out questions about the levels of infection, the consequences for the people who are infected, the costs of treatment and the need for a national strategy to deal with hepatitis C. Work is being done on that, but rather belatedly.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) said about haemophilia. There is a need for compensation. We should recognise that need and act on it. We should also conduct an inquiry into what has gone on, so that we can be clear in our mind about the history, the causes and the problems. Without one, we can never be absolutely sure that we have dealt with all the problems, however much we might feel that we have.

The major route of transmission for hepatitis C has been injecting drugs. I suspect that that is one of the reasons why the issue has not received the attention that it should have received. Injecting drug users are not popular causes. It is not difficult to see a connection between the fact that that is the major route of transmission and the lack of attention that has been given to the subject, the feeling being perhaps that the

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victims of hepatitis C have brought it on themselves. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East said, the disease is transmitted not just through the sharing of syringes, but via other drug-injecting paraphernalia and possibly through household contacts such as shared razors.

There is no doubt that we are behind other countries when it comes to a national strategy to cope with hepatitis C. Most other European countries have one. The Australians have had one for several years and are on their second or third revision of it. If we do not have a national strategy, we shall not know the true prevalence of the disease, monitor the epidemic or be able to establish the most effective ways to deal with it. Nor shall we be able to ensure that all those who need treatment get it—the problem of prescription by postcode has been mentioned. There are questions about the accuracy of the data. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs said in one of its reports:

"It is regrettable that the country is encountering an immensely threatening public health problem without the data with which to monitor population trends and the effectiveness of policies."

That is the situation.

I am also concerned about treatment. What will happen when we move to commissioning by primary care trusts? My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East described clearly his views on the need for centralised funding. Two or three weeks ago, I was in this Chamber for a debate on HIV funding, and the same questions arose about what would happen when commissioning took place under primary care trusts.

Dr. Iddon: Does my hon. Friend agree that those questions apply to syringe exchange schemes, as well as to combination therapy? Such schemes would be low on the agenda of most primary care trusts.

Mr. Gerrard: I agree. There is a difference between what is happening in relation to hepatitis C and HIV. On HIV, many health authorities have a history of specialised commissioning and have people with expertise. I am worried about what will happen to that expertise when commissioning takes place at primary care trust level. On hepatitis C, we have not had specialised commissioning and no expertise has been developed in most health authorities.

Dr. Gibson: In Norfolk, money that was requested from the local health authority for a hepatitis C nurse was put towards a bowel cancer nurse. Priorities such as hepatitis C nurses are stuck low on the agenda time and again, which is why we need the money to be put towards what the Government mean it to be put towards and not diverted to other causes. Sometimes the money is even spent on car parks instead of staff to help the likes of drug abuse units.

Mr. Gerrard: My hon. Friend's example illustrates the problems, which I fear will worsen when the change is made and specialised commissioning takes place at primary care trust level. What happens to public health-related work generally, as a result of the change to primary care trust commissioning, is a serious issue. In many health authorities, only a few people have any expertise in public health. We must ensure that they continue their work. In my area, workers in the health authorities who are unsure about their future, especially those who work on narrow and specialised subjects, are disappearing as the change to primary care trusts occurs. They are taking the opportunity to find jobs elsewhere due to their uncertainty.

We certainly should consider public information campaigns. I have no doubt that such a campaign on hepatitis C could be cost-effective. The costs of treatment are so large that the prevention of even a small number of infections represents a significant saving. We must improve accessibility to treatment—a subject that has been covered by my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, South-East and for Norwich, North. Access to the treatment that one should receive for a hepatitis C infection must not continue to depend on where one lives. We need national guidelines for treatment and clear agreement on who should receive therapies.

We also need to tackle the subject of testing facilities. One can be tested at a drugs service or a genito-urinary medicine clinic, but many people do not like going to such places, so we must think about where testing should be provided and how people should be directed to it.

The subject is a major one in public health terms. The figures—the number of infections, the likely number of deaths—speak for themselves about what will happen if we do not get to grips with the problem. It has been ignored for far too long. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East for securing the debate. I hope that we shall hear proposals for action from the Government to start to tackle this public health issue.

11.45 am

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on securing the debate. He has been trying to do so for a considerable time; his e-mails requesting me to try to secure a debate on this important subject might now stop. I pay tribute to his work with the Haemophilia Society. My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) has spoken about haemophilia.

We should take note of the interesting comments made by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), as he has done plenty of work on HIV. He must have learned lessons from the way in which HIV has been tackled, and must have used that knowledge to highlight many of the problems of hepatitis C.

The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) stole my opening line. I was going to start by saying that hepatitis C was a medical time-bomb, so I agreed when he said something similar.

I should like to query the figures. We do not know the number of people infected with the disease. The Department of Health estimates that 300,000 people in the United Kingdom have a chronic infection, but its figures are flawed because they are based solely on mathematical projections. Those projections are based on known prevalence rates in antenatal clinics, and that information is patchy at best. The rate varies from 0.8 per cent. to 0.2 per cent., and is regarded as 0.5 per cent. of the population overall.

Hepatologists are concerned that that figure is falsely low. As we heard, 80 per cent. of hepatitis C transmission is associated with injecting drug use, but figures from antenatal clinics suggest that female drug users have reduced fertility. Comparison of drug users with non-drug users among females of childbearing age shows that drug users have half the normal fertility rate. That creates a significant flaw in the mathematics. Much evidence shows that fewer women inject drugs and consequently share equipment than men, so it is apparent that a sample of antenatal clinic attendees has a lower prevalence of hepatitis C than the general population.

A general population survey is urgently needed, to give us a clear idea of the scale of the problem and enable us to plan accordingly. A survey in the United States of America showed that the rate there was not 0.5 per cent., but 1.8 per cent. If the same rate occurred in the UK—there is doubt that it would—more than 1 million people would be infected, as opposed to 500,000. We urgently need information. The financial impact of the problem would differ considerably depending on whether 300,000, 500,000 or 1 million people were affected. Will the Minister, instead of relying on a poor estimate, make a commitment to fund a study so that a clear picture of prevalence is known?

A big problem of hepatitis C is that most people do not know that they have been infected until many years later—possibly, 20 or 30 years. Some people go to the doctor and their condition is diagnosed when the next step of their liver failure could be liver cancer.

Testing is not widely available in the UK. It has been said that people can go to genito-urinary medicine clinics, but they cannot always do so. Many such clinics do not regard hepatitis C as a sexually transmitted disease, so it does not fall within their remit. People have problems accessing such services. Although 80 per cent. of transmission is through injecting drug use, a significant proportion—about 15 per cent.—of those infected have probably acquired the infection via sexual intercourse, and they still cannot get tested. Many drug services are not allowed or cannot afford to provide testing, and accessibility varies widely around the country. The postcode element of testing has been mentioned many times.

Figures from the Public Health Laboratory Service show that in 1999, 13,272 cases were diagnosed. That shows that at least 95 per cent. of the people in this country who already carry the hepatitis C virus are unaware that they have the disease and that they are sitting on a medical time-bomb. I want to reaffirm that a widely publicised campaign is needed to make people aware of the issue. If they find that they are potentially at risk, they can be tested. We also need to make testing easier and more available, so that appropriate early treatment can be given. Will the Government commit to providing such testing? People may take the view that if they do not know that they are ill, they have no reason to worry, but I shall explain later why it is important to know.

Many people who suddenly find that they are living with the hepatitis C virus are from a generation who probably dabbled briefly with injecting drugs in their teenage years. Some 20 or 30 years ago, the need for clean needles and the dangers of sharing were still not widely known or acknowledged. If the problem was known, it was not being tackled. Injecting drug use was rare before the late 1960s but has increased steadily ever since. That is why the full effects of the epidemic have yet to hit us. Most people with hepatitis C have probably forgotten that they ever took drugs.

Needle exchange schemes have probably helped to reduce the incidence of infection, which probably accounts for the fact that the UK incidence will be lower than that of the United States. Such schemes are designed to limit the spread of HIV. However, HIV prevention advice is confined to not sharing needles and syringes. For HIV that is good enough, but for HCV it is not because, as has been outlined, there is much evidence to show that the sharing of other drug paraphernalia such as spoons and filters may ease transmission. It is thought that although people do not share syringes they do re-use their own syringe, and when they do so the contaminated blood is transferred to the paraphernalia, which may be used by someone else.

In Holland, needle exchange kits include single-use filters such as steri-cups. That would be a good move in the UK if we had the funding. However, it is currently illegal to supply such paraphernalia. Will the Minister consult the Home Secretary and push for the repeal of section 9 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971? That would go a long way to help with HCV strategy. That simple act would save lives, as studies have shown that sharing spoons and filters causes a fourfold increase in the risk of infection.

Dr. Iddon: Does not section 9 of that Act also preclude the provision of syringes with sterilising liquids of any kind, and would it not be sensible to provide the two things together in one pack?

Sandra Gidley: The hon. Gentleman is right. Also, sterilising liquids are currently prescription-only medicines, which is another problem that needs to be solved urgently.

To return to the disease itself, 85 per cent. of those infected develop chronic disease. If they remain untreated, 30 per cent. will die from the disease in 30 years. During the chronic phase, many people suffer from depression and fatigue. That has a significant impact on what society has to pay out—people may be unable to work, increasing the strain on the benefits system. There is a stage when drug treatment is appropriate. If people are tested at the right time, drug treatment can be given. As has been pointed out, the next step is a liver transplant. The difference in costs is clear. The drug costs vary from £12,000 to £15,000 a year, but a liver transplant costs roughly £36,000, so there are cost savings to be made by identifying the problem early.

I support the views expressed by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East. He has pointed out that the system discriminates against infected current drug users, who are simply denied treatment. There is now evidence that the exclusion of injecting drug users from treatment is ill-founded. There is no evidence that they go on to re-infect if a proper education programme is supplied.

As usual, Britain appears to be lagging behind the rest of the world. In the USA, concerted efforts are being made to highlight the problem. Information campaigns

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are being targeted at the casual drug users of the 1960s, so that those people can be tested and treated at the optimum stage. There are numerous websites and charities highlighting the issue, and activities include awareness rallies and something called a hepfest—I hate to think what that was, but it received a lot of publicity. A large quantity of public awareness material and plenty of medical information is being distributed, because parts of the medical profession are still not up to speed with the full implications of hepatitis C.

Prisons were mentioned. More prisoners are injecting drug users than are not. Will the Minister consult with the Home Secretary so that we have a proper trial of needle exchange facilities? Some things are being done on an ad hoc basis, but provision is patchy around the country. Pilots have been tried in Switzerland, Germany and Spain and many of the fears, such as the fear that inmates would tackle prison officers with syringes, have proved to be unfounded, provided an education programme is in place.

The problem is real and it is no good to adopt an ostrich-like stance—we must face reality. Will the Minister establish the true prevalence of HCV, monitor the epidemic and plan for the future, establish ways of preventing further infections—such as the repeal of the drug paraphernalia laws—and ensure timely, appropriate treatment for all? Like many hon. Members in the Chamber today, I am suggesting a national strategy.

11.58 am

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on securing this debate and on choosing this important subject. Almost every hon. Member who has taken part has described the problems facing us with regard to hepatitis C as a time-bomb ticking away. That is the most accurate description, given that hundreds of thousands of people in the country may carry the disease without even knowing it. No one quite knows how many people in the community are carrying the disease undiagnosed. It is clear from a number of contributions made this morning that there have been guesstimates and estimates, but the bottom line is that we do not know the exact or even the semi-precise figures on the extent of the problem, particularly as the incubation period of the disease is so long—in many cases up to 20 years.

We can expect an explosion in newly identified cases in the forthcoming decade. Even if all the routes of transmission were somehow blocked or closed today, there is still the prospect of a very large number of cases emerging over the next 10 to 20 years. Some medical authorities have suggested that hepatitis C has the potential to be an even greater killer in the long term than AIDS. That is extremely alarming. The fact that so many people are undiagnosed and unaware of the disease that they carry makes it even more alarming. Of the 80 per cent. of cases in which the virus makes itself felt, the vast majority will develop into a chronic illness. Some 20 per cent. of the people concerned will contract cirrhosis of the liver, and of those half will develop liver cancer.

Even among those less severely affected, the disease can be debilitating, with symptoms that include fatigue, depression, lethargy and a resultant poor quality of life. Furthermore, if as many people develop the illness as has been predicted, the number needing treatment for HCV in the next decade will dramatically increase. That will impose significant costs on the national health service. As several other hon. Members have pointed out, planning and preparation are necessary, so that the national health service will be able to do what is needed in the coming decade.

I would like reassurance from the Minister that the Government are prepared to tackle several issues that are significant for people suffering from the disease. The current lottery for treatment, dependent on where one lives, which has been mentioned by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber, must be grappled with and ended immediately. It is unacceptable that one's postcode or address should determine the standard of treatment that one receives.

Treatment for hepatitis C, a combination therapy involving interferon and ribavirin, costs £9,600 per annum per patient. However, although it can cure up to 40 per cent. of patients with HCV, the majority of health authorities either do not provide it or provide it on a limited and inadequate scale. In a survey conducted by the British Liver Trust in 1998, it was found that only a fifth of health authorities had any sort of strategy for tackling HCV and that fewer than one third had a budget for treating it.

Although the National Institute for Clinical Excellence recommended in October 2000 that patients suffering from moderate or severe hepatitis C should be given combination therapy—interferon alpha and ribavirin—I fear that that will not be enough to solve the postcode lottery. Health authorities will still have to prioritise funding to meet the cost of treatment. The costs have been estimated by NICE at £18 million per annum initially, yet that figure excludes the associated costs of pathology, virology, radiology and specialist nursing.

The verdict of every reputable HCV specialist is that spending money early will save a great deal of money later. However, it is questionable what incentive health authorities have to invest those considerable sums. I believe that the barrier to funding relatively expensive drug therapies such as the combination therapy in question could be largely eliminated by the creation of a central funding mechanism for such exceptional medicines, separate from health authority budgets. Such an initiative would go a long way towards ending the lottery that is blighting the distribution of treatment for those suffering from hepatitis C.

As many other hon. Members have mentioned, another fundamental problem is the lack of proper facilities in many areas for the testing and counselling of HCV patients. Moreover, there is no common protocol to which health authorities work in looking after and managing such patients, before and after testing. The way in which patients are presented with their test results is too often insensitive and ill thought out in the extreme. A great many receive no advance preparation for what they are to hear, and no advice about it afterwards.

According to a recommendation by NICE:

"Confidential HCV testing and counselling should be made available whether or not treatment is initiated."

The Government should urgently heed that advice. Confidential testing facilities of the type that exist for HIV would encourage many to undergo an HCV test. Presently, many people are deterred, partly through ignorance, but also, more worryingly and sadly, from fear that the information will feature on their medical records and, in turn, have a stigmatising effect on their prospects of obtaining employment, life insurance or a mortgage. It could also affect personal relationships. As a result, it is likely that many people whose condition could otherwise be treated are not even being diagnosed.

The far-reaching effects of stigmatisation of the disease are particularly worrying. Miss Sharon Moore is a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who wanted to attend the debate but was prevented from doing so by his duties as a member of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions. The tragedy for Miss Moore is not confined to the problems of suffering from the illness; it extends to problems in seeking employment. She applied for a job with Bedfordshire police, and when it became known to them that she suffered from hepatitis C they refused to employ her. Those attitudes should not be acceptable among employers and in society today.

More needs to be done to provide funding for research. Much about hepatitis C remains unknown. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) mentioned how he tried to discover the priorities in research into hepatitis. He was dismayed at the lack of such research. Sadly, he is right. We need more research to help us to cope with the problem. It is crucial, as there are apparently at least six strains of the virus, each with about 40 sub-strains. Over time those strains may change spontaneously. It is partly for that reason that no vaccine for hepatitis C has yet been developed.

Some aspects of the pathogenesis of HCV are still hidden and the precise mechanisms by which HCV causes liver cancer have not yet been identified. We therefore need a simple, cost-effective and reliable diagnostic test, both for the initial detection of HCV and for monitoring the disease as it progresses. There are still no firm data on the susceptibility of HCV to disinfecting agents, which is important bearing it in mind that the virus, unlike HIV, for example, can survive for many hours outside the body.

It is not only the treatment of hepatitis C that is a matter of concern. More needs to be done to tackle some of the problems of sufferers—not just haemophiliacs, although it is indeed tragic and appalling that those people have contracted HCV, but people who are not haemophiliacs and who have contracted it. I naturally feel deep horror at the fact that far too many people have been infected by the disease while giving medical treatment.

I urge the Minister to attend carefully to points that have been made repeatedly in this debate by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. Unanimity strengthens the case that has been put. I ask the Minister to take positive action to enhance and improve research, diagnosis and treatment, and to attend to the ancillary issues such as needle exchange that hon. Members have eloquently explained.

12.9 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I join hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on giving us the opportunity to discuss what are by common consent important public health issues, which affect many thousands of people. Like many hon. Members, I have constituents who have been caught up in this terrible tragedy. I am always struck by the dignity and forcefulness of the arguments that they present to me about how we can move on from the present situation.

This morning's contributions have been carefully presented and the arguments well marshalled. As the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) said, there is substantial consensus about some of the major issues with which the Government must deal. In the course of my remarks, I shall mention what the Government are doing to deal with some of the concerns that have been voiced. The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) accused the Government of taking an ostrich-like stance over hepatitis C, but that is absolutely untrue, and I shall explain why in a second.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East spoke eloquently about the scale of the problem that we must deal with, and I shall spell out precisely how we intend to take our work forward. I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) that we need to penetrate public consciousness as regards the danger of hepatitis C. I shall set out how we shall do that in a minute.

Hon. Members have referred to the problems of postcode prescribing. It is important that the Government tackle that issue, and we now have the means in place to do so. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is the first body in the world to advise advanced health care systems about the cost-effectiveness and value of new drug treatments. That approach is being widely mirrored, and many other countries are, as we speak, examining how to tackle such issues. Extra investment is going into the NHS to allow health authorities to take important steps in procuring new drug treatments, which are expensive, as all hon. Members have acknowledged.

It is entirely reasonable to express concern about postcode prescribing, but we should not lose sight of or fail to chalk up our successes in the battle against that problem. We tend to discount our successes as we move on to the next set of issues that hon. Members and people outside the House want us to deal with. It is important that we take stock of some of our successes, such as the availability of taxanes, of new drugs to treat Alzheimer's and of statins, the anti-cholesterol drugs.

We are making progress, although there is more to do. However, it ill behoves hon. Members—particularly those who were once responsible for dealing with such issues—to draw a polite veil over their record. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford conveniently failed to describe the measures that the last Conservative Government put in place to deal with the postcode prescribing against which he railed today. Perhaps other hon. Members share my impression that there is a dangerous tendency among some to suggest that the postcode prescribing that we are tackling appeared only on 1 May 1997 and that there was no such thing in the

[Mr. John Hutton]

NHS before then. I was a Member of Parliament during the last Conservative Administration and for the life of me I cannot remember them taking a single opportunity to outline a coherent strategy for dealing with the issue. We are putting a strategy in place.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford made some important points, and I shall deal with them. I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) that hepatitis C is a serious public health issue, which we must urgently address. I also agree with him that we need a national strategy, and I shall say more about our work to prepare and develop one in a second.

The hon. Member for Romsey wanted me to open a relationship with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to discuss several issues. I have a very good relationship with him. She asked me specifically about section 9 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East. She will be aware that the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has been considering the relevance of section 9 and is advising us on possible changes to deal with the concerns. She will understand that I cannot make a definitive statement about the future of section 9 today, but it is certainly being considered.

Dr. Iddon: Is the Minister prepared to ask NICE to reconsider its advice not to give injecting drug users combination therapy because of the problems of reinfection and compliance that I mentioned?

Mr. Hutton: I shall certainly deal with the issue, if my hon. Friend will be patient. The problem is that there has been some misunderstanding about NICE's recommendations, but it is the institute's job to deal with those, not mine. There is an appeals process, and decisions are subject to judicial review. There has, however, been a problem understanding NICE's comments on the issue, and I want to clear that up.

Hon. Members have referred throughout to three common elements: better prevention, better testing and better treatment for those who carry the virus. Those form the core of the Government's approach.

The virus was first identified in 1989, but the significance of its association with chronic liver disease and the number of people infected were not initially appreciated. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East rightly said, hepatitis C is now justly recognised as a global public health issue. As he and others said, the World Health Organisation estimates that there might be as many as 170 million chronic carriers around the world. Subject to the caveats that must be made about such data, studies suggest that England has a relatively low prevalence of hepatitis C. The best estimate of the number likely to have been infected and become chronic carriers is about 250,000. I accept what the hon. Member for Romsey said about the accuracy of that data, but it is a fact of life that we must work on the basis of best estimates. I shall say in a second how we might improve data collection systems.

I accept, as the hon. Member for West Chelmsford said, that there is likely to be an increase in the diagnosis of hepatitis C in the next 10 years as individuals who have carried the virus for some time without symptoms are identified through wider testing of groups that have been at risk. It is worth bearing it in mind that the figure is nearly 10 times that for people who have been infected with HIV. In contrast with HIV, however, we have an effective drug treatment for hepatitis C in many cases of infection. There is, however, no room for complacency.

In most cases, hepatitis C is spread by contact with the blood of someone who is infected. Injecting drug misusers and those who received blood transfusions or blood products before screening and viral inactivation processes were introduced have been the main at-risk groups. Data from the unlinked anonymous surveys show that the prevalence among injecting drug users in contact with treatment and support agencies is about 33 per cent. Hepatitis C may be spread to a much lesser extent between sexual partners and from mother to baby. As many hon. Members said, health care workers are at particular risk from occupational exposure.

Once transmitted, the virus can quickly cause inflammation of the liver. That may become apparent as jaundice, which is an acute illness, but, fortunately, one from which people recover. For about 80 per cent. of people, however, the infection becomes chronic and has longer-term health implications.

Unfortunately, there is evidence that some people with hepatitis C experience social prejudice and discrimination; the hon. Member for West Chelmsford referred to a particularly shocking case. It is not easy to deal with that issue, and I look forward to receiving advice about how we might do so from the national steering group that we set up. In part, such behaviour may represent a lack of public knowledge about the disease. It must be tackled as we improve patient care. The group that we set up earlier this year to develop a national strategy for hepatitis C will discuss the problem.

People with chronic HCV infection can remain virtually symptomless for many years. However, individuals may suffer more general debilitating effects that can affect their quality of life and, in a proportion of cases, the liver may become progressively inflamed and damaged. If not treated, that may eventually progress, over a number of years, to severe liver disease. Routine death statistics are difficult to interpret, and we have had some discussion about how many people are dying from hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C has been identified by the Public Health Laboratory Service as the contributory cause of around 200 deaths every year in the United Kingdom, so I cannot confirm the statistics given by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East. It is clear that hepatitis C infection contributes to deaths from the complications of chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis and hepatocellular cancer. I accept that there is likely to be some under-reporting—that is obviously the case. We need to improve the surveillance of serious liver disease associated with hepatitis C. I will say more about that in a moment.

Many hon. Members have referred to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which assessed the use of a drug combination therapy involving ribavirin and interferon for treating hepatitis C and published its recommendations last October. The therapy has been shown to be twice as effective as any previous treatment.

NICE's recommendations provide clear and authoritative advice for clinicians and health care providers, which should ensure that patients receive effective treatment, and were welcomed by patient groups, including the Haemophilia Society.

Sandra Gidley: The problem is not so much with NICE, whose guidance one may or may not question. We are all agreed that its guidance is timely, but the local health authorities are not given extra funding to afford those guidelines, and are forced to make decisions to stop giving other treatments. Authorities may have to ration patients on the basis that they can afford to take on only 10 a year for a particular treatment. Some hon. Members have called for a central budget. Would that not be a better way of tackling the problem, when we know the extent of it?

Mr. Hutton: I was just coming to that. The hon. Lady is not right in saying that health authorities and trusts are not given additional resources to manage the additional costs associated with implementing NICE recommendations. It is true that there is no dedicated pot of money for that, but we must bear in mind the unprecedented increase in overall NHS resources that has taken place this year and will take place in the next two years. In this financial year, for example, health authorities received an 8.9 per cent. increase in resources. Of course, decisions must then be made, and no one is disputing that authorities may have to make hard judgment calls.

Others have suggested that we should have a ring-fenced budget for hepatitis C treatment. I am not convinced about that, although I understand the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East and others. We all want patients to be properly supported and provided for, but the mainstreaming of funding ensures that local providers of care have more say in the priorities that they fix for their local populations. That is the underlying principle behind shifting the balance of power. Hypothecating funding for this treatment would raise obvious questions about consistency in the way we provide for people with other illnesses.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East asked me to consider the question of specialised commissioning of services for people with hepatitis C. I will come back to that question in a moment.

There are grounds for optimism that further improvements in treatment will follow. The modified slow-release form of interferon—pegylated interferon—became available this year and appears to be more effective than conventional interferon. I understand that NICE is considering that new drug as a topic of future appraisal. The Department is funding research to establish the effectiveness of the early treatment of chronic hepatitis C with interferon alpha, or a combination of interferon and ribavirin.

Several hon. Members referred generally to the issue of research; the hon. Member for West Chelmsford called for more research, as did others. I agree that that is necessary, which is why, last November, the Medical Research Council spent £1.8 million in developing new and further research proposals for hepatitis C. In the past four years, the Department has spent a further £1.5 million on hepatitis C research.

Concern has been expressed that NICE guidelines seem to exclude injecting drug users from hepatitis C treatment, but that is not the case. General advice recognises potential difficulties in treating injecting drug misusers, but NICE recommends that, if a prescribing clinician is reliably assured that reinfection, compliance and drug interactions pose no problems, a person in that group should be considered for combination therapy. In line with good medical practice, the emphasis should be on the clinician assessing each case in conjunction with the patient. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East said, some evidence exists that injecting drug users may be successfully treated for hepatitis C.

We also heard calls for new guidelines for hepatitis C treatment, to which we have tried to respond. The Royal College of Physicians, the British Society of Gastroenterology and the British Association for the Study of the Liver published evidence-based clinical guidelines in July that will provide a framework for patients with hepatitis C to receive high-quality treatment and care. That work has the full support of the Department of Health.

We recognise, too, the increasing importance of hepatology, not only for patients with hepatitis C but for those with other complex liver diseases, who should have access to specialist hepatology units with the necessary knowledge and expertise. We have worked on a commissioning framework to ensure that specialised hepatology services are developed to uniform standards throughout the country. That may go some way to meeting the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East. The Department is due to publish the national specialised services definition set later this month, which will be used as the basis for identifying those specialised services that require some form of collaborative commissioning. Hepatology, which includes specialised services for the treatment of patients with viral hepatitis, is part of that set. I will ensure that my hon. Friend and other hon. Members who have taken part in the debate are kept fully informed of developments.

Unfortunately, time always runs out during debates such as this. Hon. Members asked me to respond to several issues, which I will try to move on to quickly because time is of the essence.

The issue of compensation was raised. I, personally, found that the most difficult decision of all. We have listened carefully to arguments for a special payments scheme for people with haemophilia and hepatitis C similar to that in place for HIV. After a long and difficult consideration, we came to the same conclusion as the previous Government, that such a scheme should not be established. That was not a view we came to lightly. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East that every one of my colleagues who considered the issue and met individuals affected by this tragedy found it a difficult decision to make. As I said earlier, as soon as technology became available to render blood products safe, it was introduced. The policy of successive Governments has been that compensation, or other financial help to patients, is paid only when the NHS or individuals working in it are at fault. I do not believe that the NHS has been at fault in this case.

Brian Cotter: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hutton: With great respect, I will not, as I have only a couple more minutes left and want to respond to all the points that were made.

The issue of compensation has been widely debated in the House. I know that some hon. Members take a different view, which I respect, but it is not the view that the Government have come to. However, we intend to develop options for reforming the system for dealing with clinical negligence claims. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced on 10 July, we will produce a White Paper on that subject early next year. The chief medical officer is chairing an expert advisory committee to explore the issues and options, one of which is whether no-fault compensation for NHS patients may be appropriate in future.

The other issue that was discussed at some length today was the need for a national strategy, which I agree is necessary. We fully recognise the importance of hepatitis C as a public health issue and the need to have in place effective prevention, testing and treatment services. To assist us in developing our strategy, we recently established a multi-disciplinary steering group to consider the issues. The steering group is chaired by Professor Howard Thomas of Imperial College School of Medicine, who is a world authority in the field, and comprises health professionals, academics and voluntary and community sector members. I hope that hon. Members are reassured by the fact that the group not only is a collection of experienced medical practitioners but has a strong lay involvement, including Manlio Fahrni, chair of Re-act and vice-chair of the recently launched national forum, the UK Assembly on Hepatitis C; Lorraine Hewitt from Action on Hepatitis C and a member of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs; Tania Machell, head of the National Hepatitis C Resource Centre and Grant McNally of the National Drug Users Development Agency.

The steering group is considering the scope and effectiveness of current measures to tackle hepatitis C in several different settings, including the prison environment. It will advise us on any gaps or areas for improvement, including prevention activities and provision of needle exchange schemes—issues that were widely discussed today. The group has already identified that improvements in surveillance are necessary, which was a concern of the hon. Member for Romsey. It is also necessary to raise awareness for health professionals in general and to inform the public about hepatitis C.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I regret that time is up. I thank the Minister for his reply.

Water Supply (Ceredigion)

12.30 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I begin by seeking agreement with the Minister. We do not always see eye to eye on Welsh issues, but I should like his agreement regarding one basic fact. I do not want him to misinterpret what I am going to say. I hope that he will agree, without any caveats, that Wales is a wet country, and I will rest my case on that.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Even on Sundays.

Mr. Thomas: Yes, even on Sundays.

According to the excellent institute of geography and earth sciences at Aberystwyth university, the typical rainfall in Ceredigion varies from less than 1,000 mm per annum on the coast to 1,600 mm on the uplands. That compares with approximately 3,000 mm in Snowdonia. In the Welsh context, Ceredigion is not as wet as one might suppose. It is an excellent tourist destination, especially on the coast. The Minister may be aware that the coast receives considerable sunshine. Nevertheless, Ceredigion's rainfall is greater than the England and Wales average.

When I initiated the debate, I half expected a Minister from the Department of the Environment, Food and Regional Affairs to respond. I am, of course, pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales is present. When I tabled several questions on this matter, they were also transferred to the Wales Office, but I have not received a reply from the Minister. I am sure that I will soon. I thought that DEFRA might be responsible because the subject impacts on a whole range of environmental considerations about the public water supply, particularly the role of the Environment Agency.

In the context of the rainfall in Ceredigion and of Wales' reputation as a land of rain and reservoirs—though most of those do not provide water for Wales' needs—one can imagine the incredulity earlier this year when the Environment Agency announced that it would oppose Ceredigion county council's unitary development plan on grounds of insufficient water resources in the south of the county.

There are some good reasons for opposing Ceredigion county council's unitary development plan, not least the fact that 6,500 new homes—far too many for such a rural county—are proposed in it. Also contained within the plan are essential economic development projects, such as the Aberporth technology park, an objective 1 strategic site approved by the National Assembly for Wales, for which £2 million has already been topsliced in principle. When the Environment Agency made it clear that because of the lack of water it would oppose not only such large-scale developments but individual dwelling houses or infill developments in the planning process, the people of Ceredigion realised that there was a serious problem with the public water supply in the south of the county. Such a state of affairs in a water-rich county cannot be tolerated.

When I examined the background, it became clear that many agencies had been aware of this problem for several years. It had simply not been brought to the

public's attention, which is one of my reasons for initiating this debate. These matters must be out in the open and discussed. I understand from other sources that 17 other areas of Wales will shortly face similar problems to south Ceredigion, which is one of the two or three worst affected in Wales at present. One of the difficulties in Wales is that the water-zone areas are smaller than in England, which brings the problems to the fore more clearly than in other parts of the United Kingdom.

In the previous periodic review, Dwr Cymru, as it then was, approached the Office of Water Services with a view to including plans to remedy the problem in the next five-year period. To be fair to Dwr Cymru, it was aware of the problem a couple of years ago and came forward with plans to deal with it. Unfortunately, those plans were refused and it is interesting to reflect on the Ofwat response:

"While close attention has been paid to the detailed zonal analysis provided with your business plan... the Director does not believe that your plan demonstrated either a need, or customer support for this enhancement"—

the extra water into south Ceredigion.

"No allowance has been made in the Draft Determination."

It is not surprising that there was no customer support: customers did not know about it. I shall demonstrate, however, that the need is undoubtedly there. The refusal by Ofwat is driven by Government determination to cut prices to water consumers rather than to make environmental enhancements and it threatens to hold back economic development and environmental protection in south Ceredigion.

I shall briefly outline the current problems with water supply in the south of the county. No large-scale reservoirs provide for Ceredigion. Only 2 per cent. of the rainfall used in south Ceredigion can be stored in the Teifi pools—man-made and natural. Therefore, 98 per cent. of the water is extracted from the River Teifi at either Ystrad Fflur or Llechryd. That serves a huge area from the south of the river to Llanrhystud and includes some areas of north Caernarfonshire and even Pembrokeshire. Altogether that zonal area supplies 55,000 persons.

Ministerial guidance on maintaining public water supplies, issued in January 1999, requires that each water supply zone, such as south Ceredigion, have sufficient headroom between water availability and the projected demands based on critical dry years. No such headroom currently exists in Ceredigion and has not existed for several years. The existing deficit is projected to grow significantly over the next five to 25 years. In making those determinations, Ofwat may have observed those ministerial guidelines in the breach.

What is the size of the current deficit in the water-rich county of Ceredigion? Presently, the deficit between available supply and demand for water is 1.7 million litres a day—the equivalent of water for 2,800 domestic properties. One can well imagine what happens in the summer with the influx of tourists to caravan parks. Most caravans these days have plumbed-in water: their residents no longer go to a standpipe in the middle of the field. Dairy farms also take from the public water supply rather than from their own in the summer, so the increase in the deficit has grown—so much so that in 1995, water had to be tankered into south Ceredigion. That was probably when the deficit first became widely known.

It gets worse because the projected deficit by 2004-05 is 3.4 million litres a day, the equivalent of water for 5,600 domestic properties, and by 2025 8.5 million litres a day, the equivalent of water for 14,000 domestic properties. Those projections are based on past performance and do not take new developments, such as the Aberporth technology park or any other developments that objective 1 brings to the area, into account.

Remedies to date have been the traditional ones: reduce leakage, a new bore hole in the middle of the county in Aeron valley and water efficiency projects initiated by the Environment Agency and Glas Cymru. We are exploring objective 1's potential for water as well as energy efficiency projects on farms. Tankering contingency plans have also been considered, though it is odd to be tankering water to a place such as south Ceredigion. The abstraction licence at Llechryd on the lower Teifi has been extended to 2005—temporarily, at least.

I have serious environmental concerns about the increase in abstraction from the River Teifi. The Teifi is a glorious fishing river, which attracts huge tourism, as does Llandysul, the centre of excellence associated with white-water canoeing in Wales. The Teifi is an environmental treasure. It is a historical river with many castles and scenes of great interest along its banks. It is to become a special area of conservation. Plainly it would not be acceptable under European guidelines to continue to extract more and more water from the Teifi and not to remedy the deficit of water provision in the south of the county.

Taking more water from the Teifi would be disastrous for fishing, tourism and the ecology of the river. However, as the Minister no doubt recognises, it will be disastrous for the economy and social well-being of Ceredigion if we cannot get more water into the south of the county to support the need there. Although I cannot understand Ofwat's initial refusal, I appreciate that it had some concerns about the fact that Glas Cymru does not have a policy on hosepipe bans, for example. That may have coloured Ofwat's decision. We should not bring water in tankers to the south of the county again.

There is a way forward. Glas Cymru, the new Welsh water body, has considered 26 different options for increasing the water supply to the south of the county. Its favoured option, which it has now decided upon, is a water transfer from the Claerwen water shed directly to the water extraction facility in Ystrad Fflur, which is on the opposite side of the mountain.

That is a direct water transfer from one storage facility to an extraction facility. It will not transfer the water of one river to another river, which might cause ecological and environmental concerns. As a Plaid Cymru Member, I might be expected to look forward to water that was once flowing into England flowing once more into Wales, but there is a sad side to this, which the Minister may know about. The ability to extract more from the Wye valley is partly due to the run-down of Corus in Llanwern, which has lessened water need in the lower Wye valley considerably.

The cost of the pipeline would not be huge when one considers that it would serve 55,000 people; it is in the order of £8 million to £9 million. Funding has been difficult because the initial refusal by Ofwat to put the

[Mr. Thomas]

project in the approved programme meant that Glas Cymru would find it difficult to recoup the investment. There has been intensive lobbying over the past few weeks by Glas Cymru, Welsh Assembly Member Elin Jones and me. At a recent meeting, Ofwat's director general, Philip Fletcher, confirmed that Glas Cymru would be able to move ahead with that investment if it can be seen to deliver

"demonstrable outputs that are valued by customers".

I hope that the Minister will agree that that output would be valued by customers in south Ceredigion and should therefore be taken into consideration as an investment for the next periodic review. That investment by Glas Cymru can be recouped. The Minister will be aware that the new arrangements with Glas Cymru mean that it needs that security to show its bondholders that they can get their money back. The new model for Glas Cymru, which the Government are looking at for Railtrack, is one that we want to see working in Wales. I am sure that the Government agree that we need that underpinning.

Following a board meeting yesterday, Glas Cymru announced that it would move on with the new project in Ceredigion. I congratulate it on that. It will still be looking for partnership funding from bodies such as the Environment Agency, Ceredigion county council and the National Assembly for Wales, but it is a lesser issue than when I first applied for this debate. Yesterday's announcement has moved things along.

A couple of environmental concerns remain. The plan to transfer the water from the Claerwen water shed to the extraction at Ystrad Fflur has not yet been approved. It will need the approval of several different agencies: the Environment Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales and English Nature, because, of course, the River Wye runs into England and affects the English as well as the Welsh ecology. All those organisations need to approve the plans of Glas Cymru.

I do not want to see any degradation of the environment on the uplands of Ceredigion, and we cannot continue to extract directly from the River Teifi at the same level. We must consider further water conservation measures, particularly in respect of farming, industry and caravan parks along the coast. It is not sustainable either to take in water in tankers, which has a huge environmental cost—one should consider fuel consumption, for example—or to thwart economic opportunities in south Ceredigion when water resources are not scarce.

Will the Minister monitor the progress of Glas Cymru in its negotiations with Ofwat, to ensure that the public concerns and values that Ofwat represents come across clearly to the company? That will mean that Glas Cymru will be able to make available finance that can be recouped in the next periodic review. I would be grateful if the Minister talked to the various agencies, because he is in an excellent position to do so. There is a unique mixture of devolved, non-devolved and English bodies, which must come together and realise the importance of the project for the economic and social future and viability of south Ceredigion. He should also ensure that environmental concerns are met, and that progress is made to ensure that sufficient water is available to meet not only present needs, on which there is a deficit, but future needs, such as the Aberporth technology park.

I am sure that the Minister will join me in wishing that technology park every success. It is a vital objective 1 project, as the National Assembly has recognised. It will have to go through the planning process and meet all environmental guidelines, but a simple lack of water cannot be allowed to hold it back. I hope that, having brought the problem into the open and engaged the public in the issue of the lack of water supply in a water-rich environment such as Ceredigion, there will be much more urgent action to secure investment in time. Water delivery takes time to provide and if we are to meet the 2004-05 target, we must start now. Ofwat gave Glas Cymru the amber light this week. I want Glas Cymru to be given the green light on the environmental concerns. I would like the Minister to help me to achieve that.

12.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on securing the debate. He asked me at the outset to agree that Wales is wet. In all truth, I must do that, but it has shattered one of my attempts over the past six years to persuade my English colleagues that we have less rain in Wales because we are closer to the Caribbean. I pay tribute to his efforts as the hon. Member for Ceredigion, which is a beautiful county. It is a wonderful place in which to live and to visit, and has some fine wine produced around Aberaeron. I have tasted the wine and certainly found it wet and welcoming.

Outside Cardiff, Ceredigion has been the fastest growing county in Wales. In the past 10 years, the population has increased by about 8 per cent. As the hon. Gentleman knows, Ceredigion county council predicts that if that trends continues, a further 5,000 to 6,500 homes will be needed during the next 15 years. That will affect the water supply and provision, particularly in mid and south Ceredigion. It will be necessary to provide high-quality employment sites to sustain that growth and to support a viable local community. The Aberporth project is a positive and sympathetic way in which to introduce job and new skill opportunities into a community that would not perhaps have attracted them otherwise. Clearly, such a development will require a reliable water supply if it is to progress.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me in welcoming the recent decision on water supply to Ceredigion by means of a pipeline. I pay tribute to his efforts in securing that advance on behalf of his constituents. There has been debate on the way forward for water supply in mid and south Ceredigion, and concern has been expressed about increased abstraction from the River Teifi, which already provides some 98 per cent. of the water supply to that area.

I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the impact that greater abstraction would have on the environment and the river. The alternative, to which he has referred, is to transport water by pipeline from the Claerwen reservoir in the Elan valley. Dwr Cymru discussed that with Ofwat, the Environment Agency, and the Welsh Assembly. The pipeline will cost between £8 million and £9 million.

On 2 November, Ofwat's director general met representatives of Dwr Cymru, and told the company that Ofwat would agree to the proposed development, which would bring water from Elan valley to Ceredigion, if agreed outputs were met. The pipeline would be Dwr Cymru's concern, not Ofwat's. Ofwat has confirmed that the investment will be included in the company's regulatory capital value, so the investment will not be discounted at the next periodical review of water charges. Dwr Cymru is prepared to go ahead with the scheme on those conditions.

The Environment Agency supports the proposed pipeline transfer on water resource grounds. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the environment. The pipeline will cross or go under three sites of special scientific interest, although most of the land is owned by Dwr Cymru already. That may smooth discussions on how to proceed.

It will take time to construct a scheme on such a scale. Other factors, apart from the SSSIs that the pipeline will pass through, must be accounted for. Severn Trent Water and Dwr Cymru must agree on what additional water can be taken from the Claerwen reservoir. Dwr Cymru must obtain an abstraction licence from the Environment Agency, and may also need planning permission for a pumping station and an extension to the Strata Florida water treatment works. Those must all be in place before the scheme can go ahead.

I am pleased that the scheme has not been ruled out, although many steps have yet to be taken. We are making welcome progress on the solution. The hon. Gentleman asks me to continue to take an interest in the matter; I assure him that I shall. I will do all that I can to bring pressure on the agencies and other bodies involved in the scheme in order to bring about a favourable outcome. We have the opportunity for a sympathetic development scheme that will have a major impact on Ceredigion's economy in the early part of the century. That economy must not be stymied by problems with the water supply. We have a solution at hand. I hope that we pull together to ensure that it is realised.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): The hon. Member who has secured the next debate is present, but unfortunately the Minister is not, so I shall suspend the sitting until 1 o'clock.

12.53 pm

Sitting suspended.

Dormant Bank Accounts

1 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): I am delighted to have an opportunity to raise this issue. Right hon. and hon. Members may know that there are two types of dormant bank account. The British Bankers Association defines a dormant account as an account where

"there have been no transactions (withdrawals or deposits) on it, other than transactions initiated by the bank (such as interest and charges), for a set period (usually at least a year...)"

and where

"the bank hasn't heard from the customer during that time."

If both criteria apply, the bank may write to ask whether the customer wishes to keep the account open. If the bank does not receive a reply, the account may be considered dormant.

The second type of dormant account has its origins at the start of the second world war, when the Government introduced legislation that froze the bank accounts of residents from enemy countries to prevent the enemy from benefiting from any assets held in this country. After the war, when the accounts were unfrozen, some were, not surprisingly, never reclaimed by their owners, which remains the case even today.

I became interested in the subject because I decided to check my standing orders and direct debits, as a routine exercise. I discovered that one standing order was paying the Nationwide building society the princely sum of £1 a month and had been for years. I thought that that was for an insurance policy or something similar, but when I went to the building society, I discovered that the money was going to a fund-raising account for Wrexham Labour party, in a neighbouring constituency where I had lived 20 years previously. The party had benefited for all that time; except that it had not, because it did not know that the account existed. I had the delight of telling my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) that he would inherit some of my money.

I wondered what would happen if I stopped paying that pound. The Nationwide building society would be sitting on a couple of hundred pounds that did not belong to it, and no one would know where the money was. I thought that there must be many such accounts and decided to look into the issue.

Obviously, no one knows the exact amount of money residing in dormant accounts, but there are various estimates, ranging from a conservative £5 billion to the huge sum of £20 billion. When the Irish Government introduced legislation to deal with the problem, they found that the estimates were half the amount that turned up, so we are actually talking about £10 billion to £80 billion. I will be delighted if my hon. Friend the Minister has any figures on that.

Whatever the exact figure, that vast amount of money has become the focus of consumer watchdog and media interest over the years. It has also provoked criticism about the commitment of, and efforts made by, high street banks to marry up dormant account holders with their money. In fairness to banks and building societies, I should point out that they have speeded up their efforts

[Mr. Martyn Jones]

lately. The schemes run by the BBA and the Building Societies Association have made improvements, but things are still fairly laissez-faire.

I am concerned today about dormant accounts that are not married up with their owners and those instances in which the money remains the legal property of the account holder but the banks and building societies are entitled to use the funds for their own benefit. If the account appears to have been forgotten, does not receive interest and is unlikely to be withdrawn, it becomes in effect an asset of the bank and, therefore, part of its capital.

If the estimates that I have given are accurate, it is obvious that banks and building societies are sitting pretty with huge sums of money that do not belong to them at their disposal. I want the Government to pursue the progressive approach adopted by other countries in recent years and ensure that money from such accounts is used for the greater good, and not for the sole, and extremely profitable, benefit of the host bank or financial institution. The time has come for the Government to be empowered to take custody of dormant bank and building society accounts, and put the huge sums of money to good use throughout the UK.

A successful scheme is in operation not far away; in July, the Irish Parliament enacted the Dormant Accounts Act 2001, which provided for the transfer of money from dormant accounts and intestate estates to the newly established and independently managed dormant accounts fund. The Act stated that dormant deposits, share and current accounts, deposit receipts, petty balance accounts, savings certificates and savings bonds would be transferred to the new dormant accounts fund. I do not suggest to my hon. Friend that we set up a dormant accounts fund, as we already have one; the National Lottery Commission. The money could be put into the lottery system for the benefit of the good causes.

The Irish legislation stipulates that if owners of accounts that have been dormant for 15 years or more do not come forward to reclaim their moneys, the balance of those accounts will be transferred directly to the dormant accounts fund, which is managed by a Government-appointed board of trustees who distribute the money to local community and charitable groups and societal initiatives.

The legislation also places a statutory onus on banks, building societies, credit unions and the post office to try to contact dormant account owners. Following a 16-month investigation by the financial institution concerned, if the account and account holder are not matched-up, the money is transferred to the dormant accounts fund. Under the legislation, the financial institutions are required to maintain registers of dormant accounts, including owner name, address, the date on which the account was considered dormant, the date of transfer to the dormant accounts fund and the date of repayment if the owner is traced.

Irish legislation does not at any stage preclude dormant accounts being married up to their rightful owners. If the transfer of a dormant account to the fund has already taken place, the money can be returned to the rightful account holder if ownership is proven. The fund keeps some money back for that eventuality, which is eminently sensible. There has been a great deal of publicity about the legislation in Ireland, and many people have received surprise windfalls from accounts that they had forgotten about. I forgot about mine, but, unfortunately, I did not receive a windfall; Wrexham Labour party did.

The legislation prompted the banks to re-double their efforts to trace account holders in fear of losing the money to the dormant account fund. It gave the banks, building societies and financial institutions an incentive to trace owners of whom they had lost track. Those people may want to keep their money where it is, but the owners can have confidence that their money will not be lost.

Prior to the legislation, the Irish Government undertook a consultative process with the financial institutions to establish agreement about precisely which accounts would be seized. During that process, the Irish Bankers Federation participated actively and welcomed the Government's plan, I think belatedly. However, that was understandable in the circumstances.

The time has come for the Government to consider seriously how other countries have tackled the issue and to consider putting the huge sums of money currently sitting idly in dormant bank accounts to good use, rather than leaving it for the benefit of the banks' profits.

A recent development has been the creation of a new type of dormant account; those previously held by terrorist groups in the UK and elsewhere. Tens of millions of pounds are now effectively dormant because of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's swift and decisive action following the attacks in the United States. Legislation on the issue would also have a deterrent effect in preventing those funds from being set up in the first place, because terrorist funds placed in sleeper accounts would be brought to light.

The Government should initiate and publish a consultation paper on the issue of dormant accounts with a view to introducing a progressive and innovative scheme for the UK to redistribute this huge amount of money for the benefit of the wider community and not to boost the profits of the high street bank. An initiative by the Government to add into the equation the newly acquired money seized from terrorist networks operating in the UK would be extremely popular among the public.

I sincerely hope that the Minister and Government will look favourably on my suggestion. I believe that it would work successfully, as it has in other countries; not just Ireland, but the United States as well. Such legislation would benefit many people, both directly—through help for those who have forgotten about their bank accounts—and indirectly, through good causes.

1.10 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Winterton. I wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on securing the debate. He highlights an issue that is often overlooked by those who are dealing with the many other changes that are taking place in the financial sector. Clearly, the subject is interesting.

The United Kingdom has one of the most successful financial services industries in the world. The industry plays a significant role in our economy; London is by far Europe's largest international financial centre, and Scotland is one of the world's major fund management centres, with over £250 billion under management. It is vital that both domestic and international consumers and businesses have confidence in UK financial institutions.

The issue of dormant bank accounts is a relevant factor in building such confidence. Consumers need assurances that they can have access to their assets, even if they have not been in contact with the deposit-taking institution for some time. That is why the Government believe that there should be appropriate resources available to help reunite customers with their assets. My hon. Friend spoke from personal experience; I found his anecdote very interesting indeed. Not long ago, my husband learned that he had a similar standing order, dating back many years, which was going to a constituency Labour party of which he is no longer a member. Thus, I share my hon. Friend's experience.

However, not only my hon. Friend and I have had such experiences. Customers or benefactors of deceased customers can find it difficult to track down funds in accounts that have been left inactive for some time. Institutions may change their corporate name after a merger or after a conversion; for example, from a building society to a bank. In the meantime, the customer may move or lose their account details and, in the process, lose contact with the institution at which they have money deposited. If a bank is unable to contact a customer, it will eventually cease sending correspondence. The account is classed as dormant, although the money in the account will always remain the property of the account holder or, if the account holder has died, his or her legal heirs.

Until this year, customers who did not know the name of the institution that held their account had to complete a separate claim form and send it to each bank or building society at which the account might possibly be held. That was often time consuming, and it was more difficult if the customer had relatively little information about his or her account. However, several important initiatives to improve the process of reuniting customers with their deposits were launched this year.

In May, the British Bankers Association and the Building Societies Association each launched a new scheme to help customers trace old accounts, which involved establishing a dedicated dormant accounts unit to handle enquiries, and producing and making widely available one standard claim form. Under the British Bankers Association system, customers can get advice from the central unit and, if they wish, make a claim electronically. Their point of contact will remain with the unit. Information is then provided to the banks, and the unit will advise the customer on the outcome of the claim. Information on mergers is also available on the British Bankers Association website to help customers identify the bank that holds their account.

Since the launch of the centralised service in May, the British Bankers Association has received over 1,000 claims. So far, 200 claims have been fully processed, with nearly a quarter of those resulting in customers being reunited with their deposits.

The Building Societies Association also launched its own central tracing service, in which all building societies participate. The claim form used is similar to that of the British Bankers Association, so that information can be transferred more easily between the two schemes. Since the start of the building societies scheme, there have been about 10 inquiries each week for claim forms.

It is not just in the private sector that the Government believe that facilities should be available to help customers locate their deposits. The registrar's department at the Bank of England operates a system for searching the records of Government stock. I am pleased that, this week, the National Savings bank was able to announce the launch of its new tracing service. National Savings undertakes about 75,000 traces a year. Under the previous system, customers were asked to write to the particular National Savings office that administered the product type for which the search was required. National Savings has launched a more comprehensive and transparent system that will be easier to use. Customers will be able to track down more than one product at a time because they can use one standard form for all bonds, certificates and accounts, and deal with a single contact office.

I welcome those initiatives, which remain free and offer a better service to customers. I hope that over time, through publicity and word of mouth, customers will become increasingly willing and able to use those schemes and reconnect to the products that are rightly theirs.

My hon. Friend raised points concerning the size of assets placed in dormant accounts. As he mentioned, many figures have been quoted in the media; sometimes amounts as much as £20 billion or even £40 billion. Those figures exaggerate the real size of the issue. Although the Government do not have complete figures, an Inland Revenue study in 1997 suggested that the total amount could be between £2 billion and £4 billion. That is still a sizeable amount, but not as large as the figures that have been suggested. It is not possible to calculate an exact figure, because different institutions use their own definitions of dormant funds.

The example of the Irish system is interesting, as it includes a statutory duty for financial institutions to contact dormant account owners. However, it would be unfair to say that UK banks and building societies do not try and investigate dormant bank accounts. Once an account has been identified as inactive, banks will write to the customer to locate them. If the bank or building society believes it has lost contact, it will no longer send correspondence to the customer. That is sensible; it is important that searches for customers do not break customer confidentiality and do not allow account details to become public. That could lead to financial crime and attempts to defraud the banks.

Providing that confidentiality is not breached, I am willing to consider different ways to facilitate customers becoming reunited with their accounts. When considering the Irish system, we must be wary of the potential regulatory burdens that a statutory approach could place on institutions. We would need to define in law what constituted an effective search for dormant bank account owners and to design a system that was sensitive to the relative sums involved and the pertinent circumstances for each account. There are merits in

[Ruth Kelly]

considering solutions that need no recourse to legal action, such as centralised tracing services, for which we have yet to evaluate the impact.

My hon. Friend's proposals would entail the removal of dormant funds from banks and their use for charitable purposes or the national lottery. Those proposals raise practical issues; the biggest difficulty would be the liquidity issue for the banking sector, which would have to be handled extremely carefully. Across the financial sector, there is no uniform definition about what constitutes dormant funds. Safeguards are needed when people come forward to claim assets that were removed from the institution in which they were deposited.

We must also consider issues of principle. The funds are the property of the original depositor, not of the banks; nor are they the property of the Government or of charitable causes. We should first put the emphasis on reuniting customers with the assets that are rightfully theirs, and focus on promoting the schemes that were put into operation earlier this year, which I have outlined. The more successful those schemes are, the more customers will be reunited with their deposits. I will consider with interest the take-up of the schemes and the success of tracing them in the future.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I agree with everything that the Minister said about finding ways of uniting people with their dormant bank accounts. The one flaw, of course, is that if someone is dead, or does not know that a bank account exists, he or she will not put in a claim form.

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend makes an important point; the property still rightfully belongs to the deceased person's heirs, and it would be desirable in the first instance to reunite them with the funds if at all possible.

At this stage, however, it is probably too early to consider legislative changes when new procedures have just been put in place to help owners of dormant accounts to find their assets. We do not have any plans to introduce legislation to take dormant assets from banks, but we will keep the situation under review. I thank my hon. Friend for bringing to my attention the model that Ireland provides.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend recognises the urgent action that the Government are taking to ensure that terrorist assets have no safe haven in the United Kingdom. To date, we have frozen some £70 million in 38 bank accounts. However, these are not dormant accounts in any usual sense, nor would it be appropriate for the Government to redistribute such funds. Our powers of restraint come from the UN Security Council resolutions under the United Nations Act 1946, which imposes sanctions on individuals and organisations suspected of involvement with the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. We implement the UN sanctions regime with authority to freeze the funds of listed terrorist suspects. We have no powers of confiscation. If the United Nations eventually decided to remove a name from its list, we would release any funds held under that name.

In the wake of the tragic events of 11 September, international co-operation has taken on a more serious complexion, and the financial services industry has a role to play. Stable, efficient markets are the drivers of growth and productivity; they are not the playground for funding terrorists. The action that Britain has already taken under the UN sanctions regimes, and the further measures announced by the Chancellor a few weeks ago, mark our determination to block the funding streams that sustain terrorism.

We propose further powers to enhance anti-terrorism measures: legislation that will allow swifter, more targeted freezing of terrorist assets; a new regulatory regime for bureaux de change, which came into force on 12 November; the strengthening of the obligation on the regulated sector to report suspicions that funds are destined for terrorism; police powers to monitor accounts that may be used to facilitate terrorism; and law enforcement powers to seize terrorist cash anywhere in the UK. We are also working to establish new international standards on measures to combat terrorist financing. By working with the financial services industry and the international community, we can help to counter the threat from terrorists by cutting off their access to funds.

The Government want to get a fair deal for all consumers. That means that we must ensure that there is effective competition in the financial services industry. Don Cruickshank's report on banking suggested that there was a lack of competition and that consumers—businesses and individuals—were getting a raw deal. We are acting on his recommendations to reform the regulation of payment systems. Such a reform could lead to savings of £1 billion a year for businesses and consumers. Many will be aware that we have already consulted on our proposals for reform and that we are committed to legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows.

We are also acting on Don Cruickshank's recommendation to investigate possible competition problems in the banking markets for small and medium-sized enterprises. The Competition Commission is due to report shortly. We have reviewed the voluntary codes of banking and mortgage services. We reported in July 2001 and made a number of important recommendations, aimed at improving competition significantly and increasing the levels of customer service in banking. The Government have asked the financial services industry to respond positively to those challenges.

Work in other areas of the financial services industry is part of the same piece. Following the review carried out by Paul Myners, the Chancellor has asked Ron Sandler to investigate the efficiency and flexibility of the savings and investment industry. Ron Sandler is working closely with the FSA to investigate whether the £1.5 trillion of assets that the industry controls are being allocated efficiently and whether consumers are being well served.

We are working to obtain the right framework in the United Kingdom; that means the right framework for consumers and competition. We believe that competition decisions should be taken by strong, pro-active and independent competition authorities, free from political influence. To that end, the Government have announced that they will legislate to modernise the mergers regime and remove Ministers from the decision-making process in all cases, except when there are clearly defined exceptional public interest issues, such as

national security. More effective competition can only be good for all parties. Consumers will see costs fall and returns rise, and the industry will become leaner, meaner and better able to operate in the global marketplace.

I again thank my hon. Friend for instigating this debate and for raising an important issue that touches on the banking system and its liquidity, and the need to recognise the interests of consumers, charities and good causes in general. I note my hon. Friend's valuable points about intervention to help customers to locate dormant bank accounts and to transfer remaining dormant assets away from the banks. Important initiatives have been instigated this year to promote awareness of dormant bank accounts and to help customers to be reunited with their assets. I welcome those initiatives and encourage the finance industry to continue to find innovative and efficient ways to facilitate account-holders to find their dormant assets.

We should wait to see how efficient and effective the measures are before considering whether further changes are necessary, but we shall keep the situation under review. I thank my hon. Friend for bring to my attention the examples from other countries, such as the interesting example of Ireland where action has been taken already on these matters.

Gitanjali Shrestha

1.27 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Would you guide me, Mr. Winterton, on whether the debate may continue until 2 o'clock, notwithstanding that it is starting early?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I am happy to help the right hon. Gentleman. We may continue until 2 o'clock, so the right hon. Gentleman has achieved extra time for his Adjournment debate.

Sir John Stanley: I am grateful, Mr. Winterton.

I want to make it clear that, although I am chairman of the Britain-Nepal all-party parliamentary group, I am initiating this debate solely in my constituency capacity.

In 1997, my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Davey, were in Pokhara, Nepal, where Mr. Davey was taking part in the excellent British Executive Services Overseas scheme, under which retired business executives give their expertise and skills free to developing countries. During the course of that assignment, Mrs. Davey received an invitation to go to a nearby primary school to give the children some practice in speaking the English language. When she went there on the first day, she broke the ice by asking each child in the class what they wanted to do when they grew up. One boy wanted to be an airline pilot, a girl wanted to be a nurse, others wanted to be doctors and so on. She went round the class until she came to a very small girl in the front row. When Mrs. Davey asked that small girl what she wanted to be when she grew up, she replied that she wanted to grow like the other children. When the class ended and the children got up to go out, Mrs. Davey could see that this child was much smaller than the other children.

The little girl's name was Gitanjali Shrestha. At that time, she was aged 10 and had ceased growing at the age of five. I am glad to say that she is listening to this afternoon's debate, as are Mr. and Mrs. Davey. Mr. and Mrs. Davey made inquiries in Nepal with the school, with Gitanjali's parents and with local doctors, which revealed that there was no medical treatment available in Nepal for a child with Gitanjali's condition. Indeed, there was no possibility of making an accurate diagnosis in Nepal. If Gitanjali remained untreated, she would suffer serious social disadvantages as an adult in Nepal. Those disadvantages were already appearing in her relations with other children at her school.

Mr. and Mrs. Davey returned to the United Kingdom, where they got in touch with Great Ormond street hospital for sick children. They were referred to a leading British expert in the field, Professor Brook, who pointed out that under NHS provision rules, it would be impossible to provide free treatment for Gitanjali as a child citizen in Nepal. However, he said that if Gitanjali were brought to this country, he would make a diagnosis.

Mr. and Mrs. Davey, entirely at their own expense and with the full support of Gitanjali's family, brought Gitanjali to this country on a two-month medical visa in May 1998. Professor Brook saw her and diagnosed Turner syndrome, which is a growth-retarding disorder. He prescribed a complex medical regimen of tablets in a

[Sir John Stanley]

particular combination and dosage. The regimen required careful and accurate monitoring in the interests of the child. Mr. and Mrs. Davey initially thought and hoped that it would be possible for Gitanjali to return to Nepal with a suitable long-term dosage of tablets where she could continue with Professor Brook's regimen under medical supervision.

Gitanjali returned to Nepal but sadly the arrangements that Mr. and Mrs. Davey had carefully put in place to ensure that Gitanjali had the correct medical supervision broke down. The medication was not administered correctly and Professor Brook's good work was reversed. Mr. and Mrs. Davey concluded that if Gitanjali were to get the medical treatment she required, the only place she would get it was the United Kingdom. They brought Gitanjali back to the United Kingdom on a six-month medical visa in December 1998 at their own expense.

Since Gitanjali has been back in this country—her stay has not been entirely continuous for reasons to which I shall come in a moment—her care, treatment and education have cost the British taxpayer not one penny. Gitanjali's board and lodging is provided entirely by Mr. and Mrs. Davey, who are her adopted grandparents with the full knowledge and appreciation of her family back home. Her medication is financed partly by Mr. and Mrs. Davey and partly by a generous contribution from the Kadoorie Charitable Foundation in Hong Kong. Mr. and Mrs. Davey pay for all Gitanjali's education at the Beechwood Sacred Heart school in Tunbridge Wells. As hon. Members will understand, Mr. and Mrs. Davey are not people of limitless resources by any manner of means, but they are people of magnificent generosity and wonderful compassion.

Professor Brook informed the Home Office at an early stage that it was essential that Gitanjali's medical treatment was made continuous. In a letter dated 7 October 2000, he wrote:

"The patient returned to this country for further assessment and reinstitution of a proper medical regimen, which is now in place. It would be in her interest for this status to be maintained for the foreseeable future."

Despite the fact that Gitanjali has cost the British taxpayer not one penny, and despite the fact that there is the clearest possible medical advice that it is in her medical interest to remain in this country, the six-monthly medical visa renewal process in which Mr. and Mrs. Davey have been engaged with the Home Office has been an absolute nightmare. Home Office officials advised them that the visa would not be renewed, but it subsequently was renewed. Officials delayed issuing the renewal visas; so much so that, on two occasions, Mr. and Mrs. Davey had no alternative but to return Gitanjali to Nepal to enable it to be renewed there, causing stress and anxiety to Gitanjali and incurring hundreds of pounds of additional expenditure for no needful reason.

In desperation, Mr. and Mrs. Davey came to see me. On 9 February this year I took up Gitanjali's case in strong terms with the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), who was then a Home Office Minister. I subsequently received two letters from another former Minister, Lord Bassam, the second of which, dated 31 May, suggested that we were finding a way out of the nightmare of the six-monthly visa renewal. It stated:

"Further extensions of stay for private medical treatment will normally be granted provided the requirements of the Immigration Rules, which were outlined in my previous letter, continue to be met."

That was extremely helpful. Equally helpfully, he went on to point out that it was open to Mr. and Mrs. Davey to make a special application to the Secretary of State for Gitanjali to remain in the United Kingdom for longer than six months outside the immigration rules.

When Gitanjali's last medical six-monthly visa came up for renewal—the one that expired on the 30 June this year—Mrs. Davey sensibly applied for both the renewal of the visa and for the Secretary of State to exercise his discretion, under the circumstances, for Gitanjali to remain in the United Kingdom for longer. In her letter of 18 June, which I have with me today, Mrs. Davey made it absolutely clear in the final paragraph that if the application to the Secretary of State for leave to remain outside immigration rules was turned down, the application for the renewal of the six-monthly medical visa still stood and was definitely required.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): Did the application to remain outside immigration rules take the form of an application to stay for reasons of study, or was it in the form of another application?

Sir John Stanley: So that there is no misunderstanding between us, let me make it plain that the terms of the application are as set out in Mrs. Davey's letter of 18 June this year to the Minister's Department. I refer to the wording that is contained in that letter.

From my standpoint, and that of Mr. and Mrs. Davey and Gitanjali, the Home Office's handling of that double application was frankly shocking. Lord Bassam gave me a clear undertaking that the medical renewal visa would normally be granted, but we still await a decision from the Home Office on the application for renewal almost five months after the date of Mrs. Davey's letter.

Not only was the decision to turn down the application for leave to remain outside the immigration rules disappointing, but the terms in which it was explained, in a personally addressed letter to Gintanjali Strestha, were shameful. The final paragraph of the decision letter of 9 October reads as follows:

"You should leave the United Kingdom at the end of 10 working days from the date when you received this notice. If you fail to leave you may be prosecuted for an offence under the Immigration Act, the penalty for which is a fine of up to £2,500 and up to 6 months imprisonment and you will also be liable to be removed from the United Kingdom."

I must say to the Minister that to address a letter containing threats of fining and imprisonment to a 13-year-old girl who is suffering from a serious medical

disorder, has been in this country since December 1998 and is from Nepal—a country with which we have a special relationship—is scandalously and outrageously insensitive. I urge the Minister to review the practices of her Department when addressing such letters to children of Gitanjali's age.

I have two specific requests to put to the Minister. First, I hope that she will, perhaps in today's answer to the debate, state that the application for the renewal of the medical visa has been granted in accordance with the undertaking, given to me by Lord Bassam, that it would normally be granted given the medical circumstances. Secondly, I make a clear request to the Minister—I would like her complete attention because these points are profoundly important—that she and her right hon. Friend the Home Secretary give further consideration to putting aside immigration rules and enabling Gitanjali Shrestha to remain in this country for longer than six months. I do so on two grounds that have not been considered before by Ministers at least, and perhaps not even by officials.

The first ground is medically and personally sensitive, but I have the assent of Gitanjali and Mr. and Mrs. Davey to refer to it. As a result of Turner syndrome, Gitanjali will be unable to bear children. In Nepalese terms, she will therefore almost certainly be unable to marry and have a husband to support her financially through her adult life. The employment and financial security that she subsequently obtains in Nepal will depend wholly on the level of education she secures in this country while undergoing medical treatment. I put that key consideration in the Minister's mind as she contemplates whether the Secretary of State should grant, as I hope he will, Gitanjali leave to remain outside the immigration rules. That decision is fundamental to Gitanjali's educational opportunities and level of attainment, which will in turn be vital to her adult life in Nepal.

I turn to the second ground for the Minister's close consideration. Gitanjali now requires growth hormone treatment, and Professor Brook has confirmed that it will cost up to £50,000. As I have said, such treatment is not available to Gitanjali through the NHS. Mr. and Mr. Davey are trying to raise the money by approaching charities in the UK and elsewhere. However, the charities, understandably, will not contemplate making available such a sum unless they can be sure that Gitanjali will remain in the UK to receive treatment during the next few years; the period in which it must be administered. Gitanjali's visa status will prove critical in obtaining funding for growth hormone treatment through the charitable sector.

I ask the Minister to give the most careful consideration to the points that I have made. At certain times, and with some justification, my remarks have been somewhat critical of her Department's handling of a case in which she may be personally involved for the first time. I hope that she will bring a new look, a new sensitivity and a new compassion to the matter, and that she and her right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will agree to my requests concerning visas for Gitanjali Shrestha.

1.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): First, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) on securing this debate. This is a very difficult subject that has caused great distress to those who have acted with enormous generosity in assisting a little girl desperately in need of help when she was discovered in Nepal.

Miss Shrestha, who is only 12 years old and a national of Nepal, suffers from Turner syndrome, as the right hon. Gentleman said. He has given in great detail its effects on her and the medical treatment that she needs. I accept that she needs to remain in the United Kingdom for private medical treatment, under the supervision of Professor Brook at the Middlesex hospital, where the growth hormone that she needs can be properly monitored and the dose adjusted until she stops growing in a few years' time.

The right hon. Gentleman is correct in saying that a dual application was made, but only one aspect was determined; the application for student status, rather than the application to stay for medical treatment. I was, therefore, slightly puzzled when he said that an application had been made for leave to remain further, outside the immigration rules. I wonder whether there is a mix-up between the application for student status, which would grant a much longer-term right to stay, and a formal application outside the immigration rules. It will probably be better for the right hon. Gentleman and me to chat about that after the debate.

One part of the application was, in error, determined separately from the other by a caseworker who made a mistake that should not have been made. A standard letter is sent to people who have come into Britain under one regime and wish to switch to student status in order to stay. There is no leeway under immigration rules for that switch to be made in this country; the person must return to their country of origin and re-apply. I can understand the distress that receiving that letter caused.

I apologise on behalf of the caseworker, who saw the application, on an initial reading, as an application for student switching, came to an erroneous decision and sent the standard letter, which is clearly not meant for children. I take the opportunity to apologise publicly for that error, and let the right hon. Gentleman know that the caseworker concerned is distressed also by the mistake, and is being guided by retraining to ensure that such an error does not occur again.

Sir John Stanley: Would the Minister clarify the position? If I have understood her correctly, is it now open to Mr. and Mrs. Davey to make a new application to the Secretary of State, outside the immigration rules, for Gitanjali to remain in this country for longer than six months?

Angela Eagle: We have still not determined the medical application. The immigration rules in that area are strict, and we may need to examine the process; the right hon. Gentleman has certainly got me thinking about that. Under the way in which the rules work for medical applications, we must have re-confirmation that

[Angela Eagle]

the condition is persisting for the six-month visa to be re-issued. There is no reason why that should not happen as soon as we get that confirmation, perhaps in another letter from Dr. Brook.

The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's more important question is that yes, it is in order for an application outside the immigration rules to be made for Miss Shrestha to be allowed to remain in Britain for a period longer then six months. Unfortunately, we do not have a record of such an application being made, and I have been trying to clarify that point during the debate. I wonder if there has been a misunderstanding over the application made for student status, and that it has been assumed that the dual application was an application outside immigration rules. With a little liaison, the right hon. Gentleman and I should be able to sort the matter out. I am happy to confirm that it is possible for such an application to be made outside the immigration rules and looked at on compassionate grounds.

I hope that, with those clarifications, the right hon. Gentleman and I can work together to ensure that, in the future, we can do better than Mr. and Mrs. Davey's experience of the process as he described it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 15 November 2001

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Housing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. McNulty.*]

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I welcome the opportunity to spell out the Government's vision for housing. The number of people present shows how much interest there is in the subject, and suggests a level of commitment to improving housing standards. Housing is a basic human requirement that has, perhaps, a greater impact on quality of life than anything else, influencing our health, educational achievements and even employment prospects.

Housing is at the top of the Government's agenda; we are deeply committed to improving standards in the social and private sectors, and have already done much to deliver those improvements. However, far too many people still live in poor conditions or overcrowded housing; too many families spend months in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and too many homes are left empty and abandoned in areas of low demand. That is unacceptable, which is why we have set ourselves the objective of offering everyone the opportunity of a decent home. Last December, we published the housing policy statement "The Way Forward for Housing", which sets out our strategy. I want to focus on the measures that we are taking to deliver our key priorities, although it will be possible to touch only briefly on the issues of improving the quality of housing stock, tackling homelessness, providing more affordable housing, fighting problems of low demand and abandonment and bringing about a culture change in the delivery of housing services.

First, let me address the problem of improving the quality of housing stock. In a modern society such as ours, no household should have to live in less-than-decent housing, which is why we set a target to bring all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010. That is a challenging target, but we must and will deliver on it. We have significantly increased resources for housing to meet the target, with an extra £1.8 billion from 2001-02 to 2003-04 in addition to the extra £5 billion made available through the 1998 spending review and capital receipts initiative. However, delivering the target will require not only extra resources but a partnership between the Government and social housing providers, who are key to improving the standard of stock.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): First, I congratulate the Minister on her new post and wish her well.

On the provision of desperately needed homes, she will know that in 2000 only 137,000 new dwellings were completed and only 13,200 of those were for social housing. Can she give us hope that those numbers will increase not only in the future but this year?

Ms Keeble: We have made the commitment to provide extra affordable housing, which I shall deal with later. Obviously, problems exist in different parts of the country, especially London and the south-east, and I shall deal with those and with some of the means by which we hope to improve matters.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): The Minister referred to the Government's commitment to providing decent housing by 2010. Does she accept that a trade-off has to be made between providing housing of decent quality and houses in sufficient numbers? Does she further accept that a regional tension exists between the south, especially London, where there is a pressing need for more units, and the north, where there is a need for repair? Some of the houses in the north may be repaired and then never filled.

Ms Keeble: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, although I cannot accept it. Some of the worst conditions that I have seen since becoming a Minister have been in London. People's reasons for leaving their homes sometimes have nothing to do with the quality of their homes, but are to do with the quality of the environment. The Government are taking other measures to deal with that.

In terms of the quality of the stock, we are offering social landlords a range of alternative investment and ownership options, such as the new arm's-length management arrangements and the private finance initiative for housing, to help to improve both the quality and diversity of social housing. The transfer of housing from local authorities to registered social landlords remains one of the key routes to delivering decent homes.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): The Minister is being characteristically generous with interventions, given the number of people who wish to speak today.

My area faces a dilemma. The local authority, Stroud district council, has a well-run local housing authority, and I have always opposed externalisation of the stock. The authority is faced with the double whammy of increasing sales through the right-to-buy scheme and a corresponding reduction in central Government grant. It is being driven to consider the idea of the community gateway. Is that what the Government want, or is there an alternative?

Ms Keeble: I am grateful for that point. The central Government grant is being reduced because of loss of stock. The reduction should reflect the reduction in the number of units, and it is not possible to continue to pay the same level of grant if the authority has a reduced amount of stock. It is appropriate for some councils to consider stock transfer as an option. Such councils must consider it with their tenants and, ultimately, the tenants will make the decisions. However, there is a range of issues relating to improvements to the fabric of the stock

[Ms Keeble]

and the management structure. I shall try to make progress, otherwise my speech will eat into other Members' speaking time.

Stock transfer can bring much needed improvements to tenants' homes. It can also play an important part in securing regeneration—it has been particularly effective in areas of low demand. If tenants support proposals for this year's transfer programme, more than 300,000 dwellings could be transferred over the next two years, yielding more than £1.1 billion in capital receipts for authorities.

Of course, we must not ignore poor conditions in the private sector, which is where some of the worst stock is to be found. The Government have a responsibility to ensure that squalid conditions are not condoned simply because they are in the private sector. Some of our biggest commitments to future legislation on housing are therefore aimed at tackling problems in the private sector. That includes licensing of houses in multiple occupation and selective licensing of landlords in areas of low demand. I shall return to that issue later.

Whether to intervene in the private sector is for local authorities to consider as part of their strategic responsibility for housing across all tenures. That is why we plan to give them greater freedom over how they tackle poor-quality private housing. We shall propose secondary legislation to achieve that by Christmas. But it is not just the physical condition of housing that is important; the living environment is important, too. The current overcrowding standards have remained unchanged since 1935. Our understanding of people's need for space and privacy has come a long way since then, and we are reviewing the options for updating them.

I am well aware of the problems faced by many people, particularly in London and the south-east, in securing good-quality, affordable housing. We have significantly increased funding for new affordable housing—almost doubling funding for the Housing Corporation over the three years to 2003-04. That will help to deliver our target of providing 100,000 new affordable homes by the end of 2004.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am pleased that the Minister is talking about expanding the number of affordable rented homes. Will she say more about the difficulties faced by local authorities and the near impossibility of building new council homes in London? That is due to the need for capital repairs on existing properties and the impossibility, so far, of borrowing against existing stock to finance new developments.

Ms Keeble: The provision of new social housing for rent has been procured through the Housing Corporation. Affordable housing has also been provided through partnership arrangements with the private sector. That approach will enable us to achieve our target of 100,000 new units over the period in question.

It is not only those on the lowest incomes who have difficulty in securing affordable accommodation, particularly in London and the south-east. Public sector workers are among those who struggle to secure homes near their place of work, and that can have a devastating impact on the provision of local services. It also has implications for the need to regenerate very disadvantaged areas in inner London. The starter home initiative makes an important contribution to meeting the housing needs of some 10,000 key workers, and the bulk of the investment from that programme is being put into London.

We must consider other ways of increasing the supply of affordable housing, while also aiming to develop more mixed and sustainable communities. There is no doubt that a concentration of one type of housing or tenure can lead to problems, whether in the monolithic social housing estates of London or in the rows of pre-1919 terraces that are now so unpopular in parts of the north. We are therefore encouraging local authorities to make the best use of the planning system to secure more affordable homes as part of mixed developments. We must also ensure that we make the best use of existing stock. Bringing empty properties back into use is an important contribution to increasing the overall supply of housing.

Some parts of the country suffer the opposite problem, because properties are in low demand or, in extreme cases, abandoned. Hon. Members whose constituencies suffer similar problems will be all too aware of the misery of home owners whose homes have fallen drastically in value and who are trapped alongside rows of boarded-up and empty properties. There are no easy answers to that problem. The causes and consequences of low demand vary from area to area. Sometimes there is a link to crime and disorder and sometimes the need for more jobs is a major factor. For some areas, we are contemplating wholesale regeneration at a cost of tens of millions of pounds. For others that risk tipping over the edge into total market collapse, we need to take more immediate action—sharp intervention when decline starts.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Can the Minister relate the supply of housing in areas of low demand to the problem of low demand and abandonment? How many additional homes have been built in, say, Newcastle and surrounding towns in the past 10 years, leading to problems of abandonment in that city?

Ms Keeble: The factors that the hon. Gentleman has identified do not match up. Problems in lower demand areas are focused far more on large swathes of single tenure housing, all of one type, where the market completely collapses. Other housing attracting people away is not the issue. There is no way to get people into certain types of housing. The activity of private sector landlords is also relevant—I shall discuss that issue shortly—and control of those would be a major factor in dealing with some of the problems of low demand, particularly in the north of England.

We need to develop a better understanding of the scale and dynamics of the problem if we are to carry out the Government's commitment to turn it around by 2010. Some hon. Members may be aware of work done by Birmingham university on the subject. Its report has many lessons for all of us who are concerned about the quality and quantity of the housing stock.

The private sector renewal reforms that I mentioned earlier, and our recent proposals for licensing the private rented sector in low-demand areas, will go some way to

giving authorities the tools and freedoms they need to respond to local circumstances and develop strategies for lasting change. I have already mentioned the need to diversify the housing stock. It is clear that some stock—for example, some of the terraces that I mentioned—is obsolete. Local authorities must face some difficult decisions about the future of their stock if they are to ensure a supply of housing better suited to modern needs and aspirations.

Indeed, local authorities are key to the delivery of the Government's objectives for housing. That is why we are encouraging them to develop their strategic role and to work in partnership with other services, such as planning and regeneration, and with local stakeholders, including housing associations, tenants and the private sector. That is vital, not just to tackle market problems, but to ensure that they meet the needs of all local people and offer them a real choice about the type of housing and community that they have. Choice is an important part of the Government's housing policy. By offering social tenants choice as to where they live, we give them a greater interest in their homes and a stake in their community.

We are funding a number of pilot schemes to test out new approaches to letting social housing that treat tenants as customers rather than as people in receipt of a handout. The new choice-based approach is already up and running in a number of the pilot areas, and the pilot authorities are reporting a positive response from their local communities.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and apologise to her for having arrived a few minutes late. She talks about the pilot schemes. Does she accept that housing need must remain a priority in housing allocation policies?

Ms Keeble: Yes, but I do not accept that people in need should be forced to live in houses in which they do not want to live. The point of the choice-based lettings approach is to ensure that people still have some say about where they live, even in areas of very high demand. It is fundamental for local authorities and others to adopt that change of culture in their treatment of, and approach to, tenants and people in their local communities.

Mr. Drew: Does my hon. Friend accept that rural areas present a particular problem because the planning system's inability to deliver affordable housing means that people who wish to live in such areas have no choice?

Ms Keeble: Of course it is harder in some areas than in others. Some local authorities, in both rural areas and big cities, have been very creative in their use of the planning system to provide affordable housing. Whatever the circumstances, it is important that local authorities and others provide people with as much choice as possible over where they live. In the areas that run choice-based schemes, it is interesting to see the displays of photographs and property details that give people who are waiting for housing the opportunity to match the types of places on offer with their requirements and wishes. There is, of course, still assessment of need, but people are not forced to live in properties where they really do not want to live. That is an important principle.

It is also part of our drive to develop more customer-focused housing services that respond better to people's needs. I have highlighted our priorities and just some of the measures that we are introducing to address them. Clearly, those are not the only challenges that we face. Tackling the rising number who find themselves homeless each year is a key priority for the Government. My Department has recently consulted on proposals for a national strategic framework to set the broad context within which local authorities will prepare their homelessness reviews and strategies. It will also set the context for the requirements of the Homelessness Bill currently going through Parliament. That Bill places a new duty on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their areas and to develop a multi-agency strategy to tackle homelessness, with the emphasis on prevention. It also brings more people into the category of those regarded as homeless with a priority need for housing.

The response to homelessness has increasingly been to put families into unsuitable temporary accommodation, especially bed-and-breakfast hotels. That is unacceptable. We have established a new bed-and-breakfast unit to work with authorities to see what more can be done to reduce the use of such accommodation.

Mr. Love: I thank my hon. Friend for her forbearance in giving way so often. She mentioned that a new unit has been set up. Does she accept that the public service agreements should set tight targets on the numbers who use bed-and-breakfast accommodation, so that we can reduce and eventually eliminate its use, especially in high-demand areas such as London?

Ms Keeble: I accept my hon. Friend's point and I shall certainly take it back to my Department. The bed-and-breakfast unit is looking at how to set about its task. It will identify the various people placed in bed-and-breakfast units, the types of problem that they face and how best to reduce them. It will pay particular attention to families in such accommodation, as the pressures that they suffer are the worst.

Finally, we must provide better quality and more appropriate housing for vulnerable groups. It will be important to separate the strategic and provider functions of local authorities, so that they can identify the vulnerable groups that require different types of housing and ensure that that housing is provided. The key to that provision will be our "supporting people" programme, which will make a huge difference to meeting the needs of vulnerable people when it comes into operation in 2003. Support services can help stabilise vulnerable people, help them move out of institutions or prevent them from having to move into residential care.

Mr. Andrew Turner: On the housing of vulnerable people, will the Minister give some thought to enabling registered social landlords to have more information, particularly on housing those convicted of paedophile offences? Although local authorities are entitled to that information, that is not the case for all other registered

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

social landlords, who are therefore unable to make appropriate decisions about housing those people on estates where a lot of children live.

Ms Keeble: I think that the hon. Gentleman has particular concerns because of the number of prisons in his constituency. Many regulations surround the resettlement of paedophiles, and a lot of support and careful work goes into the management of that problem. I am confident about the provisions now in place, but we need to ensure that people are placed in the community where they can be monitored and that the proper precautions are in place. It is a hard balance to strike, but I am confident that, with the increased provision made by the Government, the public and especially children are better protected. The "supporting people" programme will be important in providing the sort of housing that is needed for ex-offenders, as well as for other groups who often fall through the safety net of current housing and social service provision.

The programme will also provide instant support when people hit a crisis, which might be due to homelessness or the need to flee domestic violence. It is about developing better, more flexible support services. Crucially, the new arrangements will increase quality and help local authorities to deliver the support that people want and need. It is a challenging programme and it will be difficult to put in place exactly the right services from day one. However, it will probably prove to be the most important development in securing the support, encouragement and welfare services that those who have slipped through existing safety nets need.

I have set out the Government's challenging agenda and touched on some of the controversial issues, and I am entirely confident that hon. Members will touch on many more. However difficult some issues might seem, it is vital that we face up to them and find ways through. Housing is fundamental to people's quality of life. We must strive to ensure access to a ready supply of affordable housing, but we must also ensure that the quality is right and that support services are in place for those who need them most. I look forward to hearing hon. Members' views during what will doubtless be a constructive and lively debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I should tell hon. Members that it is not necessary to touch their microphones. In fact, for the system to work properly it is essential that they go nowhere near them and leave them to the experts.

2.56 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am delighted to participate in this annual housing debate. It is clear from the numbers in attendance that housing is of great importance to many of our constituents. It is good to have the opportunity to discuss at length an issue that will be dealt with on many fronts. In the short time available to me, I shall touch on only a few matters, but I know that other hon. Members will want to raise others.

I welcome the housing Minister, whose speech contained some wide-ranging aspirations, many of which we share. In particular, I welcomed her comment—I hope that I have remembered it correctly—that the Government are committed to raising all social housing to a decent standard by 2010, and that they must, and will, deliver on that commitment. We will support the Government in that, and I hope that they do indeed deliver on that important pledge.

We must all hope that the housing market remains stable in what may prove a declining economy. Given the current interest rate, the housing market is very different from that of previous economic recessions. None of us wants a repeat of previous dips in the housing market, because they make it much more difficult to build new houses in the private and social sectors.

Before the 1997 election, the Prime Minister promised everyone the chance of a decent home, but in reality he has made getting a foot on the property ladder more difficult. The average cost of a first-time buyer's home has risen by 23 per cent. since the Government came to power. In London, the average first-time buyer needs to find an extra £40,000. Part of the explanation is that the Government have increased a number of stealth taxes—

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Oh!

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman says "Oh," but I will give examples of those stealth taxes and perhaps he will put them in his pipe and smoke them. The Government have abolished mortgage tax relief and raised stamp duty twice.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall give way in a moment, but let me finish with the taxes that the Government have increased.

Because the Government have raised the threshold for stamp duty, which has not kept pace with the increase in property value, the burden of stamp duty is now felt further down the property ladder than ever before. The Government have reduced the right-to-buy discounts. The maximum value of any discount was £50,000, but under Labour it has been reduced to £22,000 in the north-east and £38,000 in London, varying by region.

Perhaps the biggest indictment of the Government is that council tax has risen by three times the rate of inflation—an extra £212 a year on band E property. That affects virtually all our constituents, who I am sure do not find it very amusing, although many Labour Members seem to.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: No, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas), who asked first.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Has it escaped the hon. Gentleman's notice that interest rates for housing are at

their lowest level since 1955? Does he agree that that encourages more home ownership? We have certainly seen evidence of that in the north-west.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: It is thoroughly good that interest rates are as low as in 1955, when a Conservative Government were in power. It will also be good if those rates encourage more people to buy their own homes, something that our party wants to see.

Unfortunately, according to the Government's figures, the amount of social housing constructed under them has plummeted. From 1993 to 1996, local authorities and registered social landlords built 150,000 new social dwellings, but from 1996 to 2000, only 95,500 such units were constructed. That amounts to a 37 per cent. drop. One of the biggest issues that we can address today, and I say this in a spirit of non-partisanship—*[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) may laugh, but if he waits to hear what I have to say, he might agree with it.

One of the most significant factors in the housing sector are the 763,900 empty houses—the Minister gave me that total in an answer on 12 November. Yet we know—she gave me this figure as well—that, in the first six months of 2001, there were 59,530 homeless people. We should try to redress the balance, because every homeless person is a human tragedy. *[Interruption.]* If Labour Members think that that is funny, they can ask homeless people about it. I intend to talk to some of them at Crisis to find out precisely what their problems are. I do not know why Labour Members are making such a fuss.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran), who, I think, asked me first.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is going to see some of the charities that deal with the homeless, but does he accept that homelessness doubled during the last years of the Conservative Government? That period also saw massive disinvestment in housing, greater than that in any other sector or public service. Should he not, at least, have some humility at the consequences of the last Conservative Government's actions, when dealing with the matter and when meeting homelessness charities?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall give the hon. Lady an A for effort. The fact is that this Government are now in their fifth year, and they have not begun to sort the problem out. I shall make some criticisms of their approach to homelessness in a minute, but they have no proper homelessness strategy. They have a number of initiatives going round, but they have not tied them all together.

Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: No, because I am trying to make a little progress. I know that the hon. Gentleman is very good at intervening because I have seen him many times in the Chamber, but if he can contain himself a little longer, I will let him intervene later, although I know that he is mischief making.

I return to the subject of empty property. Under this Government, the amount of empty council housing in England has risen by 7 per cent., from 81,200 in April 1997 to 87,186 in April 2000. We are concerned not only about the total numbers of dwellings, the figures for which I have supplied, but about the number of empty council houses, which is rising. That is unacceptable and I believe that the ombudsman had something to say about it.

On the subject of the homelessness strategy, the Minister knows that we welcomed the Homelessness Bill, which we believe will play a major part in dealing with this tragic problem. However, that Bill arrives amid a host of Government initiatives. We do not know what the Government's homelessness strategy will be, nor do we yet have guidelines on vulnerable groups, which are being published. I raised that with the Minister during the homelessness debate and have done so since. Many people outside this place are anxious to see the guidelines to which my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) referred. They deal with critical groups: 16 to 18-year-olds who are being abused; 18 to 20-year-olds; and those who have left institutions. Will the Minister let us see those guidelines as soon as possible?

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I will give way to the one and only Liberal in the Chamber.

Mr. Sanders: I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's comments because there has obviously been a sea change in Conservative attitudes towards homelessness. Does he disagree with the Conservative leader of Torbay unitary authority, who said last week that we should have zero tolerance towards rough sleepers and sweep them off the streets?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall deal with rough sleepers in a moment. If the hon. Gentleman can be patient, he will hear exactly what I have to say on that subject and about our policy.

The Bill includes policies for priority groups, but we have yet to see them or the proposals for rogue landlords in the private sector. The bed-and-breakfast unit is also a problem, as the hon. Member for Edmonton said. I probed the Minister on that in a written question, and she answered on 9 November with some shocking figures. She told me that in the first quarter of 1997, 4,100 were in bed and breakfast, whereas in the first quarter of 2001, a staggering 10,830 were. According to my maths, that is an increase of over 150 per cent., which suggests that this is the sharp end of the homelessness problem. It is incumbent upon us all to consider that problem carefully, and I hope that the Minister and her Department will be in constant touch with the bed-and-breakfast unit to watch progress. The Minister told me that the unit would host a conference on 20 November to consult on targets and actions for reducing bed-and-breakfast units, but I hope that it will concentrate on actions rather than targets. I also asked her about the conditions in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, much of which—particularly in London, but also in other big

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cities—is pretty grim. It might be marginally better than sleeping rough on the street, but only just. We must ensure that there are common standards.

Housing benefit is a great difficulty for those at the lower end of the income scale and for those who have to administer it, and I am highly critical of the Government on that. Since Labour came to power in 1997, more than 100 changes have been made to the housing benefit regulations. That makes things almost impossible for any council, or any company to which a council might have contracted out.

Jeremy Corbyn: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that a Conservative Government changed the rules on local authority spending, which forced local authorities to put their housing benefit services out to tender? As a result, several appalling companies were brought in, such as IT Net, with which the people of Islington have the misfortune to deal if they try to claim housing benefit. The failure of IT Net in my borough has been repeated in borough after borough across the country. Does the hon. Gentleman support the principle of bringing housing benefit back in house to be run directly by local authorities, so that the service would be better run and more accountable than it is under those ghastly companies that are causing mayhem for many people?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Member for Islington, North has a nice way of trying to twist the facts. As I recall, each council was required to examine the cost of administering housing benefit to see whether it could be done more cheaply in the private sector. However, councils such as my local authority were allowed to continue to administer housing benefit if they could prove that their costs were lower than in the private sector. That is not to say that I do not sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's position, but the remedy is in his and the Government's hands. If the job is not being done properly in the private sector—nobody would condone that—it should return to local authority administration. In view of this serious problem, a Conservative Government would consider whether housing benefit should be taken from local authority control and handed to the Benefits Agency to be administered with other benefits. The Benefits Agency ultimately controls housing benefit because it operates the income support mechanisms that are the gateway to it.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Is there not a question mark over the wisdom and capacity of local authorities that signed contracts to outsource housing benefit, but included insufficient break clauses or penalties for companies that were incapable of delivering? Those authorities were mostly run by people of the same persuasion as the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn).

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend raises a pertinent and important point. Some authorities are making waste disposal contracts for 15 or 20 years, which is extremely worrying. When public services are let there should be break clauses to cover situations in which contract conditions are not met.

Jeremy Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall give way to the hon. Lady, because the hon. Gentleman has already had one go.

Ms Buck: Will the hon. Gentleman convey to Westminster city council, which is a Conservative flagship council, the interesting sentiments that he has just expressed? It outsourced its housing benefit to Capita a year and a half ago, and it ended up with 27,000 items of unanswered post and hundreds of notices seeking possession. That provides a perfect example of the incompetent managing authorities to which he referred.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am unable to confirm those figures. I hope that the hon. Lady will press her local authority carefully to examine the contract to see whether it is being adhered to, whether there are break clauses and whether there are penalties for sub-standard contractors. It causes suffering when private companies that are not up to standard engage in contract work. We all know the problems that arise when housing benefit is not paid on time: arrears build up and evictions can occur. Even in my local authority, such situations have occurred, which is an unsatisfactory state of affairs.

I should like to move on because time is short and hon. Members want to raise other matters. I should like to raise the important issue of key workers. We all know that the housing market has put the price of houses at the bottom end of the scale out of the reach of many key workers in the public sector. That is a problem in London, the south-east and in my area, the Cotswolds. We must carefully consider schemes for key workers—not only those who are currently listed, but others who need to be included. In my constituency, the Fosseway housing association is undertaking an experiment with a key workers scheme in Swindon, and I hope shortly to have the results. I recently heard about a local post for a maths teacher for which nobody applied. The head teacher told me that one reason cited by some of those who had thought of applying was the price of housing in the Cotswolds. The same must be true of many other areas in the south-east.

Mr. Drew: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall give way for the last time, because I must conclude.

Mr. Drew: As a near neighbour of the hon. Gentleman, I sympathise because I have the same problem. However, it affects not only people in public service, but care workers. Villages must be able to restore some element of social housing so that people can live and work in their communities rather than being imported from miles away.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I entirely agree with my neighbour. My council undertook a large-scale voluntary transfer. It has money in the bank; the problem is that it cannot find the sites. I have been prodding and cajoling it into building more social

housing units in villages. The hon. Member for Stroud is right: unless we maintain the social balance in such villages—especially those in our constituencies, which tend to be unique in character—they will continue to die. The vital services that people need—the village shop, the pub, the health centre—will be threatened unless we can maintain a proper social mix.

I want to ask the Minister about the original Homes Bill. Do the Government intend to revive the proposals for seller's packs, contained in part I, or are they finally dead? I recently attended a meeting with the Council of Mortgage Lenders, where I was strongly lobbied to the effect that such added bureaucracy was not needed in the present precarious housing market, and that the advent of new technology such as e-conveyancing and e-local authority searches would eventually overtake the need for it. I ask the Government, in a spirit of bipartisanship, to drop that completely unnecessary—

Mr. Love: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I said that I would not. Many hon. Members want to speak, and it is only fair to them that I should conclude.

I have a final point for the Minister. On 9 November, I tabled the following question:

"what recent research has been carried out by his Department on the causes of homelessness in relation to (a) violence in the home and (b) drug abuse."

The Minister gave an astonishing answer:

"This Department has carried out no research recently on the causes of homelessness in relation to violence in the home or drug abuse."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 462W.]

That is an extraordinary state of affairs, especially given that Crisis tells us that those suffering from drug abuse are one of the most difficult groups to deal with. If the Government are not carrying out research, they must be either commissioning it or relying on that carried out by others. If they are living in a vacuum and do not know how trends are developing in two key causes of homelessness, no wonder the figures for homelessness are rising. Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. For the guidance of hon. Members, I point out that I should be referred to as Mr. Pike, not Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that many hon. Members find that confusing, but I want to avoid it happening again.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Mr. Pike, I did not see you creep in. A Deputy Speaker started the debate, and you are so stealthy and sylph-like that you crept in without my seeing you. We are delighted to see you here this afternoon.

There are many other issues to do with housing targets, greenfield and brownfield sites and planning law that I am sure my hon. Friends will raise this afternoon. The debate has been important, particularly in relation to homelessness and the most vulnerable in our society. Public sector housing is changing and by 2004 the majority will be provided by the social housing sector, not by the local authority sector. The Government should ensure that public sector tenants are properly looked after, and that they have a proper say in how their houses are run. At the moment it is felt that those in the local authority sector have greater rights of consultation, through their councillors, than those in the social housing sector. The Government must introduce proper tenant participation and, above all, look after the most vulnerable in society. Those at the bottom end of the scale must be helped and, in the words of the Prime Minister, given a little lift up.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the next speaker, hon. Members should note that a considerable number of people wish to speak. If they want to ensure that everybody gets the opportunity to do so, they should take note of the time factor.

3.21 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr. Pike. With your encyclopaedic knowledge of housing law, we shall be careful to mind our Ps and Qs.

The Minister faces many challenges, and she expects to hear us recount some of them this afternoon. Personally, I would place the provision of an adequate supply of affordable housing at the top of my "to do" list. Nevertheless, I shall not assail the Minister with problems; most of my speech will be brimful of unremittingly good news, as I am sure she will be pleased to hear.

I would like to start with the Government's changes to planning policy. The changes to planning policy guidance No. 3—PPG3—are intended to help local authorities to use planning law to secure the provision of more affordable local housing. In some parts of the country, that is working tolerably well. I saw a good local example at a recent parish council meeting where the councillors were poring over a set of plans for a new housing development of 120 units. About a quarter of the units were affordable housing.

In some parts of the country the strategy is working well, but in others it is not. Last week, other hon. Members and I went to the launch of a report jointly produced by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Housing Corporation, called "Delivering Affordable Housing through the Planning System". I accept that the report will never be a best seller, but it makes a number of practical recommendations to help standardise the successes of PPG3 across the country. I shall not read the whole list, but it includes, for example, a recommendation that local authorities should have clearly based policies for achieving planning-led affordable housing, and that their policies should be underpinned by robust research and data. It also recommends that they select more specific targets for the amount, nature and timing of affordable housing. The Government do not escape. The report recommends that they set up an industry standard for an approach to affordable housing demand forecasting, and that they promote model clauses for documents such as section 106 agreements.

The report does not stop there. It also makes recommendations for developers and registered social landlords. Members who have not yet read the report should do so. The Minister had a representative in the

[Mr. David Kidney]

audience for the launch, and I hope that she has examined the report and is willing to make use of it to review Government guidance and promote more consistency nationally.

I was pleased to see that a local authority in my constituency, Stafford borough council, was one of those praised in the report for the clarity of its affordable housing policies.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I have followed the hon. Gentleman's arguments with considerable interest. In south Staffordshire, the number of homeless people doubled between 1997 and 2001, the period for which figures are available. Does he believe that the Government's new policy will have an impact on that and decrease the number of homeless in our county?

Mr. Kidney: I made my position clear at the start; affordable homes should be a priority. Investment, too, must be a priority. I do not run away from that. Planning-led achievement of more affordable housing is another useful tool for local authorities, and they should use it willingly. The hon. Gentleman mentioned south Staffordshire, but it is a bad choice because the district council, which is Conservative-controlled, has turned its back on PPG3, and I often urged it to do otherwise.

Michael Fabricant: On a point of order. The hon. Gentleman may be unaware that I was talking about southern Staffordshire, which includes Lichfield, Burton, the constituency of South Staffordshire—

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. Members do not raise points of order with another Member; they should be raised with the Chair. In any case, it did not seem to be a point of order. I call Mr. Kidney.

Mr. Kidney: Let me move on to the subject of empty homes. As the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) pointed out, it is not necessarily a good news story. More than 750,000 properties still stand empty, and six out of every seven are in the private sector. It is important that people in the private sector accept their responsibility to help to reduce the number. It would have been better news if the Minister had accepted my amendment to the Homelessness Bill, which would have required local authorities to set targets for reducing the number of empty homes.

Nevertheless, there is some good news. The Government recently reduced VAT for some parts of the sector in order to regenerate empty properties. Members are welcome to sign early-day motions to urge the Government to make further VAT reductions and to reduce and eventually end the 50 per cent. council tax discount for long-term empty homes, if not universally at least in some circumstances. I would welcome that; it was one feature of the Empty Homes Bill that I introduced in the previous Parliament.

I urge the Minister to go further and to amend the Homelessness Bill to provide guidance to local authorities on their duty to act strategically to reduce the number of empty houses. Local authorities should be better able to use compulsory purchase powers for empty properties that could be put to good social use.

Geraint Davies: Would my hon. Friend be interested in a scheme that I introduced in Croydon when I chaired housing? The council would act as a letting agent for empty private-sector houses and would guarantee the return of the house intact, refurbished and in good condition after a set time. That resulted in 600 empty houses being made available for affordable use by families.

Mr. Kidney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I commend the Empty Homes Agency, which promotes co-operative work of that sort between local authorities and the private sector throughout the country. In some areas, the local authority or the private sector do not listen, but I shall mention in a moment an example in my area of the local authority and the private sector working well together.

It is not good news that the Government have not yet met their 1997 manifesto commitment to legislate to ensure the registration of housing in multiple occupation? We shall have an early opportunity to put that right with a private Member's Bill, the Home Energy Conservation Bill, which would provide a registration scheme. I should be interested to hear from the Minister whether the Government will support it.

I came under a lot of pressure about the registration of houses in multiple occupation when I attended a Folgate residents' association meeting in Stafford a couple of years ago. It is an old estate, with narrow streets and large, terraced houses with no gardens. Many of the houses had been purchased by developers, who converted them into bed-sit accommodation. There was much social conflict between the long-stay residents—families who have more than one car—and the newcomers. They would certainly have welcomed a system for registering houses in multiple occupation because they were worried about social conflict and the safety of the property for its given use, especially as the properties were packed so closely together.

I have received representations from the student union of Staffordshire university. Stafford is fast becoming a university town, and many students occupy property in the private sector. On behalf of those students, the union is keen for acceptable standards to prevail. I can give an example of good local co-operative working in Stafford, where there is a robust three-way partnership between the university accommodation office, Stafford borough council and the private landlords. Between them, they agree minimum standards for the properties that the students will occupy, and the private landlords allow environmental health officers to inspect to ensure that standards are maintained. That shows a marvellous commitment on both sides. Meanwhile the accommodation office solves problems that arise between private sector landlords and their student tenants. The three groups work well together. As an offshoot, the borough council and private landlords work well in a forum and have developed a rent guarantee scheme. I would not anticipate much local objection to a statutory registration scheme for houses in multiple occupation, given the level of co-operation in the sector.

Anti-social behaviour affects issues wider than housing. The Government introduced an ability for councils and police to apply for anti-social behaviour orders as a quick way of stepping in when problems occur, but that has not happened often in my constituency. The council would rather the police spent

their money and the police would rather the council spent its money, so neither has done anything. In Stafford, some of the registered social landlords are a little impatient that neither the council nor the police will help them. They want the power to apply for anti-social behaviour orders themselves. They say, "In many parts of the country we and not the local council are the big housing providers. Why should the council have preferential treatment in being allowed to apply for orders when we may not?" It is interesting that they should be willing to take that on.

I can cite another development in Stafford. A bunch of enterprising women set up a company called ASBO, which offers a service to local authorities and police to tackle the problems of anti-social behaviour. The company offers a complete service, including gathering evidence of sufficient quality, relevance and rigour to satisfy legal requirements, and winning the active participation of residents as witnesses through the process of witness support. The company employees are experienced and work effectively with agencies such as social services, youth offending, education and probation. They offer 24-hour-a-day availability and even provide training to council staff, police officers and residents.

The partnership between that private company and the local authority has made an amazing difference to Stafford in a short time, as I have seen at first hand by attending one of their witness support meetings. From a standing start—their first meeting was attended by five people with an interest in the subject—the meeting that I attended had 50 witnesses present. We heard a superb report of all the injunctions, repossession proceedings and anti-social behaviour order applications that had gone to court and shown a result. At present, the company manages 24 cases in Stafford.

The most important point is that the local community feels that it has won back control from the small minority who disrupted it. Through the publicity that those achievements have attracted locally, people see that anti-social behaviour is unacceptable and do not go on with it. That has created a good mood, whereas previously there was one of despair.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am sorry to disturb the hon. Gentleman, who is making a thoughtful speech. Anti-social behaviour is, sadly, becoming a bigger problem for all areas. Ten years ago, when I became a Member of Parliament, it was almost unheard of, but it is now a common problem. Does he accept that the system of anti-social behaviour orders simply does not work, as very few are made, and that the Government need to have a completely new look at that system?

Mr. Kidney: My answer is, absolutely not. Anti-social behaviour orders are working, although not enough local authorities and police apply for them. The point of being able to apply and being successful in applying is that people get the message, which is the important message that I am trying to deliver to hon. Members today. Claire Castle, who heads the company that I mentioned, said that she and her colleagues want a national witness support group to be created, because anti-social behaviour is a problem not only for local authorities, the Government, the police and housing associations but for the community as a whole. The community must take back control of its streets.

There are interesting debates in Stafford and, I am sure, elsewhere, about the use of CCTV in residential areas, policing of the streets and whether neighbourhood watch is a middle-class activity or one for everybody. In Staffordshire, the police have been excellent in trying to make neighbourhood watch effective, without regard to the kinds of property in an area or the backgrounds of the people who run them. Being a member of a neighbourhood watch scheme in Stafford is a socially inclusive activity.

My final good news is that, two weeks ago, I launched a care-and-repair scheme for the Stafford area. That came about because, instead of scrapping care-and-repair, as was on the cards under the previous Conservative Government—I state that as a matter of fact, not as a political point—the Government rescued it and put extra money into it. Stafford's is one of the new schemes that have been developed as a result of that commitment. It is superb to see the practical assistance being offered to elderly and disabled people: advice, help with filling in forms, or someone to tell them how to get their hands on the money and to give them support while their properties undergo the necessary renovation, repairs or adaptation. It is a marvellous scheme. Since I launched it two weeks ago, there have been hundreds of inquiries and I have already referred two constituents to it.

In another two weeks' time, it will be national warm homes week 2001. That is sponsored by the warm homes campaigner, National Energy Action, and British Gas. I shall launch the health through warmth in Staffordshire scheme, part of the £10 million health through warmth partnership between NPower, the national health service and National Energy Action. That is especially relevant in the month in which we are waiting for the publication of the Government's fuel poverty strategy.

The Minister should not let all this good news go to her head. There are still plenty of problems: too many empty homes, repossessions and evictions; too many homeless; too few affordable homes; and too little trust of local authorities. I ask the Minister to invest in housing with conviction and to give her trust to local authorities. There is nothing to be ashamed of or shy about in the work that she is doing. She should work positively and proactively with her social partners, with confidence, as she has a good story to tell and an important job to do.

3.37 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney). I very much agree with his final comments and will go into some of them.

A decent, comfortable and secure home should not be a luxury item, but more than 111,000 households lack that basic necessity. The effects of that housing deficit on society are far-reaching and costly. It is estimated that the national health service spends £2.4 billion annually treating health problems that are caused by homelessness or by poor housing conditions. Crime and drug use escalate dramatically among the homeless and those who are inadequately housed, as do calls upon social services and special educational services. Poor or inadequate housing directly affects the quality of life of those who experience it. Overcrowding, lack of heating,

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poor ventilation, condensation, inadequate insulation from noise and poor repair inevitably increase the risk of stress, family breakdown, illness—particularly mental illness—low educational attainment and contact with the criminal justice system.

If stable housing is such a fundamental need that it affects people's lives so strongly and adds to demands on the taxpayer, why are more and more people doing without? There is not enough affordable housing to meet demand. Last year in my constituency, which has 1,400 families on the waiting list, less than 200 units of accommodation were allocated. Each year, more people join the list than there are units to allocate. That situation is repeated across the country.

It does not have to be like that. At the beginning of the financial year 2000-01, 763,900 homes were standing empty. It is surely a duty of government to ensure that the supply of housing is related to demand, and that no one is left out in the cold because they cannot afford housing. However, Government policies have run counter to that duty for 20 years: council houses have been sold but lost stock has not been replaced; local authorities have been denied the ability to meet local housing needs; and the ability of social housing providers to meet existing demand—let alone to offer a choice of accommodation—has been underfunded.

Most damaging perhaps has been the fact that Governments, including the present one, have resisted intervening in the market processes that result in the scandal of taxpayers' money being used to demolish inhabitable housing in parts of the country where there is infrastructure, while taxpayers are asked to fund new infrastructure to support privately developed housing in other parts of the country. Furthermore, that housing is often in developments of so-called executive houses that do not meet local housing need. Some developments in the south-west have had to be marketed in national papers to attract buyers.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I thank the hon. Gentleman for identifying the need for market intervention and for blaming Governments of both parties for failing to intervene. What kind of market intervention does he have in mind to solve the problem?

Mr. Sanders: I shall come to that later.

The market is in chaos and Government housing policy does not even begin to recognise the problem, which is a legacy of two decades of the same approach. Because of the different housing markets around the country, it makes sense for planning, fiscal and allocation responsibilities to be as localised as possible. That would require a radical rethink in Whitehall and acceptance of the fact that our centralised system of government has outlived its usefulness. It would require the creation of a pluralistic system of alternative centres of political power across the United Kingdom, in which local government was granted fiscal independence and a power of general competence to meet community needs, including local housing needs.

Giving local authorities more control over housing, planning and policy would make the system more accountable to the people and make it possible to tailor solutions to local demand. As things stand, councils are restricted in their ability to replace their diminishing housing stock using the proceeds of the right-to-buy scheme. That is like shooting someone in the foot and asking them to walk to hospital. Councils have been so hampered in their efforts to accomplish anything that they completed only 400 homes last year. In 1990-91, by contrast, 16,500 dwellings were completed. *[Interruption.]* I accept that that was under a Conservative Government.

Will the Minister tell us how much more money, as a percentage of GDP, is being spent on housing today than was spent under the last Conservative Government? I have a feeling that it is less. We should encourage councils to expand their stock as much as possible rather than placing obstacles in their path.

Mr. Love: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the right to buy. The logic unfolding in his speech appeared to support a suspension of that right in areas of high demand. Is that what he suggests?

Mr. Sanders: Each local area, if given power over the relevant area of policy, should take that decision. I do not think that the solution should be imposed from the centre. I am not opposed to the right to buy. In my view it should be possible to use the proceeds from such sales to replace lost stock.

Although the right to buy certainly puts a strain on the provision of social housing, it is not the only culprit in the reduction in affordable housing.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman will have heard me say that by 2004 more than half of all public sector housing will be in the registered social landlord sector. Do the Liberal Democrats approve or disapprove of large-scale voluntary transfers, which give local authorities considerable additional cash to build more social housing units?

Mr. Sanders: I was going to discuss stock transfer in a moment. Again, that is a matter on which each local authority must decide. The question of whether tenants would be better off with stock transfer under existing centralised rules depends on the level of debt, which can differ greatly from authority to authority. Ultimately, tenants have to vote according to the circumstances in their area. I do not approach the matter from an ideological position; I am interested in what works best for tenants in a given area.

As the quality of life in some of our inner cities and urban areas declines, more and more people aspire to living outside, particularly in rural areas. Consequently, they push up prices and price out local people, who then increase the demand for social housing in the very areas with the least of it. In addition, the demand for second homes or weekend retreats inflates house prices still further and sometimes undermines the viability of local schools, shops and bus services. In some west country villages, a majority of homes are occupied only when their owners grace the area with their presence. They do not use local services, which struggle to survive with fewer permanent customers.

Not only do second homes inflate local housing prices and undermine businesses and public services, but their owners are also given a tax break. Abolishing the 50 per

cent. council tax rebate on second homes will make the system more equitable, but the extra revenue raised must be given back to the local authorities concerned to allow them to subsidise threatened services or to contribute to new social housing stock.

If the Government will not free up local government, perhaps they could at least make the system fairer by introducing a level playing field for social housing providers. Why not allow councils to borrow to build, repair or renovate on the same terms as non-statutory housing providers? Are the Government frightened that such competition might give tenants a real choice between stock transfer and remaining with their local authority? If all types of housing providers could compete to meet local housing needs, would we not see a reduction in waiting lists and more choice for those in need of such housing?

The Government's priority must be to provide more homes, which means increasing investment. An investment in housing is an investment in communities, areas and neighbourhoods, not just in bricks and mortar. However, the homes must be affordable, which means changing the housing benefit system. Affordable rents are a key component in any plan to tackle poverty. If left to the market alone, housing costs would exacerbate poverty. Affordable rents can be achieved in only two ways, or through a mix of both. The first is to regulate rent levels, although the risk is that the private sector will pull out as market suppliers. The second is to provide public grant or subsidy through cash payments to landlord or tenant, thereby funding the difference between a market rent and an affordable one. Whatever the reform, housing support should not be restricted by housing tenure. Assistance should also be available to those who wish to buy or part-buy housing.

Society pays dearly for poor housing. Decent, affordable housing brings more than economic benefits. Social housing providers make a long-term investment in the areas in which they operate, and are well placed to support neighbourhood renewal. The Government are not serious about tackling the housing crisis—they merely tinker at the edges of the problem—and the Conservative Opposition seem obsessed with the number, rather than the type, of homes that need to be built. A radical rethink on where decisions are taken and a commitment to invest in social housing are long overdue.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I should point out that 10 more hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate. Time is getting on, and I am not quite sure when Front-Bench Members want to speak. If I am not to disappoint many hon. Members, common sense and courtesy must be shown to those who want to contribute to this important debate.

3.49 pm

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I shall endeavour to lose half of my speech as I proceed.

As ever, I am pleased to contribute to a debate on housing, which remains the most pressing problem in my constituency. I have often described my constituency as a tale of two cities, because the affluence of the City and riverside living in glass penthouses in docklands contrasts with poverty, deprivation and hopelessness in the borough that ranks first on the deprivation index. When Charles Dickens wrote "A Tale of Two Cities" in 1859, he opened it with lines that apply to today:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times".

One could say that about housing in east London. It is the best of times: the Government have tripled the amount of money we have to spend on social housing. It is the worst of times: some families in east London, and elsewhere around the country, live in housing as bad as any seen in this country in the past 50 years.

I am pleased that the provisions in part II of the Homes Bill have been quickly brought back in this Parliament in the Homelessness Bill, which fulfils our 1997 manifesto commitment. It will put right the appalling injustice heaped upon people who are homeless by the previous Conservative Administration. This debate will allow hon. Members to reflect on concerns that we had during the early stages of the Homelessness Bill, and to highlight wider policy issues.

I tabled an amendment to the Homes Bill to introduce greater protection for those experiencing racial harassment, so I am pleased that that issue has been dealt with comprehensively in the Homelessness Bill. I am equally pleased to hear about the progress that has been made on the bed-and-breakfast targets following the establishment of the bed-and-breakfast taskforce. Families should not live in what are often appalling conditions in bed and breakfasts for anything other than a short initial assessment period.

The Government have placed on a statutory footing an applicant's right to accept an offer and simultaneously request a review of its suitability. The court judgment in March on this issue was enormously disappointing. It particularly affects applicants in Tower Hamlets because they get only 24 hours to decide whether to accept an offer. The Homelessness Bill will make the position clear, and I am glad that there has been no dissent about that provision coming into effect as soon as the Bill receives Royal Assent.

I am disappointed that we could not persuade Ministers to give applicants a statutory three-day period to decide whether to accept an offer. The homeless have a right to seek independent advice, and as legislators we have an obligation to ensure that they receive the time that they need to get that advice. It would benefit my constituents if, in the Minister's closing remarks, she would make it plain that she regards a three-day period as the bare minimum to which the homeless should be entitled. In the absence of legislation, such a statement is the only thing that gives me any prospect of convincing the London borough of Tower Hamlets that its current 24-hour period is insufficient.

Similarly, I hope that the Minister will continue to press her colleagues in the Department of Health to close the loophole thrown open by the High Court ruling in May that social services have no obligation to intentionally homeless parents of children assessed as vulnerable and in need. We are forcing homeless parents to choose between having their children sleep on the streets or having them taken into care, which is no choice at all. Ministers have a chance, which they must

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take, to end that practice by amending the Adoption and Children Bill, which is currently in Special Standing Committee.

I hope that the Minister will give a commitment that the extra costs that local authorities will incur in meeting their new duties will be fully funded. I have raised that matter with her before. The Government mentioned a figure of £8 million to help with those costs, but that may fall short of what is needed. Some authorities have estimated substantial extra costs resulting from the requirement to examine the applications of 16 and 17-year-olds. The Government were right to give 16 and 17-year-olds extra protection, but would be wrong to put the cost on to local authority housing budgets, which are already stretched to breaking point.

The Minister will have received a copy of the response by the London group of Labour MPs to the public consultation on the forthcoming national homelessness strategy. The strategy must address two key priorities: first, the use of temporary accommodation must be reduced, especially by families with children; secondly, homelessness among those not eligible for priority need under the new legislation must be tackled and prevented.

Skipping several pages of my speech, I move on to the Government's commitment to a decent home for all by 2010. Everyone must remember that that commitment is not just to those picked up by the homelessness safety net. It is also to parents sharing a bedroom with their young children, or sleeping in the living room. It is a commitment to teenage brothers and sisters who have to share a bedroom. I met a 19-year-old girl who had been sharing a bedroom with her father for most of her life. It is a commitment to teachers, nurses and police officers who cannot afford to live in the areas where their services are desperately needed. It is a commitment to all the young people in London who cannot afford to rent or buy a place to live in the area where they were born and grew up. It is a commitment to disabled tenants stuck at the top of tower blocks with lifts that do not work, and to the many young mothers with toddlers who are stuck with prams on the eighth or twelfth floor and cannot get in or out of their accommodation. Finally, it is a commitment to pensioners left isolated and afraid in unsuitable and dilapidated accommodation.

To fulfil that commitment, we must have the funding. It is imperative for London to retain its existing share of approved development programme funding. I hope that, even at this late stage, a forward-looking household growth indicator can be included in the formula. That would guarantee ADP funding for the tens of thousands of new affordable homes that London needs.

I shall skip more pages to enable other hon. Members to contribute, but I will mention the transfer process. I pay tribute to one-stop transfer that has taken place in Tower Hamlets. Tower Hamlets Community Housing, under the determined leadership of Mike Tyrrell, is already ahead of the planned estate redevelopment schedule. It is important, however, to recognise that the stock transfer process in general needs support. I give it unreserved support in Tower Hamlets, but Shelter's recent report "Out of Stock" makes it clear that other local authorities have not been so good in ensuring that their contracts give people who transfer the greatest possible protection. That has had a detrimental effect on housing outcomes for homeless applicants.

We should accept Shelter's recommendations, which are: first, that the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions review its current guidelines on stock transfer; secondly, that changes be made to the regulations governing the contracting out of homelessness and housing functions; and, thirdly, that greater emphasis be placed on meeting need in the Housing Corporation's regulatory code and statutory housing management guidance.

My final remarks are on the funding needed for affordable housing. We are not funding the building of enough social houses. The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) mentioned the right-to-buy scheme. I have an astonishing statistic: in London last year, more than 11,000 council properties were sold off but only 3,000 new units were built to replace them.

In my experience, right to buy has been the single most disastrous policy. Although I agree that people should have the right to buy, we must safeguard the amount of stock that is available for social housing and consider other ways of doing so—for example, through the right to acquire. An extra £1.25 billion a year is needed in the housing budget. I urge the Minister to do everything in her power to persuade our colleagues in the Treasury that that money must be invested in socially affordable housing.

4 pm

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate. The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) shortened her speech, as shall I. I thank her for taking that bipartisan action to try to ensure that all hon. Members who want to contribute can do so.

I shall focus on just one of the matters that I wanted to raise. I fully accept the great need to discuss homelessness and provision for those people who require homes, but I want to talk about the house-building targets that are issued to councils by central Government. It is wrong for central Government to dictate to local communities how many houses they are to build over the next 15 years. In my county of Essex, we have been told that 5,200 houses a year must be built over that period. That worries me, principally for reasons of local democracy.

Mr. Love: Picking up on the sentiments voiced by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), will not the "not in my backyard" attitude that the hon. Gentleman is about to express lead to house price inflation and increased homelessness in his area?

Mr. Baron: No, not at all. It is only right and fair to give local communities a say in whether, and to what extent, new houses are built in their environment, and absolutely wrong to impose targets against the will of local communities in which new homes are to be sited.

That smacks of bureaucrats, politicians and civil servants in Whitehall riding roughshod over the wishes of local people.

Mr. Love: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baron: No. I have given way once. I want to make some progress, as other hon. Members want to speak.

The imposition of targets is yet another example of central Government infringing the rights and freedoms of individuals. The imposition of mobile phone masts on local communities and the increasing burden of regulation and red tape on small businesses are other such infringements. I, like my party, believe that elected representatives in local councils are better placed to make decisions about local planning, because they are democratically accountable and better informed about its impact on their community. The Government should recognise that.

The other implication of imposing housing targets is the effect on infrastructure. In my constituency, the local hospital, police force, schools and doctors' surgeries suffer tremendous strain in trying to cope with the increasing demands that are placed on them. However, the Government want to impose more houses on local communities, which will only add to the strain on the infrastructure, not only in my constituency, but in many others, particularly in the south-east. For example, in the area surrounding the Wick housing development there is a clear shortage of school places and GP facilities, and the bus services are inadequate, but although that is recognised, there remains a proposal to build even more houses without putting in adequate infrastructure.

Ms Buck: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but in my constituency, as in many other high-demand areas, about 200 children of primary school age were without a primary school place. In areas of high demand, such as central London, we are also coping with a cracking infrastructure, about which we can do little. The only answer is to consider solutions that deal with more than simply our backyard. The problems that he raises must be seen in a wider context because to consider each one in isolation will not work.

Mr. Baron: Point taken, but that is not my argument. If we start imposing housing targets on local areas, we must make sure that the infrastructure is in place, and the simple fact is that it is not. That is the case not only in my constituency, but in the country as a whole. We know of the waiting lists for hospitals and that the number of pupils waiting to get into classes is rising, but there is also tremendous strain on the infrastructure generally, and we need only look at the roads to see that.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I hope to raise this issue in my speech, but it is directly relevant to the point made by the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck). People who live in city centres are not the sort of people who want to live in rural communities. It is ridiculous to impose housing targets on rural areas outside London on the assumption that people from the inner city will want to live in villages and in executive homes, which are what invariably spring up all over the place. We must concentrate on the regeneration of inner cities and brownfield sights, not build on the greenfield sites of the south-east.

Mr. Baron: I agree 100 per cent. with my hon. Friend. We must ensure that we have the right houses for the right areas, but that can only happen if local communities make those decisions, and are not forced to suffer centrally imposed targets.

Government plans to build on vast swathes of our countryside will have a huge and damaging impact on the environment. The visual landscape will be ruined, and the impact of new developments on traffic growth has not been properly assessed. Building new homes in areas away from existing towns and cities will mean more people using their cars to go to work, to take children to school and even to visit their GPs. Without new roads, tremendous traffic congestion will be created and will add to the woes already suffered by communities, particularly in the south-east.

I believe that the Government population forecasts and estimates submitted by various Departments are surrounded by uncertainty. The rise in the number of single-person households is fuelling household growth. According to the Government's figures, seven out of 10 households that will be formed over the next 20 years will be single-person households—I appreciate that that is a difficult figure to estimate, but those are the Government statistics. However, Labour's proposals for new building are more likely to result in premium, luxury and executive family homes on greenfield sites, as they will generate the biggest returns. We are discussing the problem of homelessness and the number of empty houses in our country. Those proposals are a prime example of a Government-led strategy, dictated from the centre, failing to help with the problem of homelessness and empty houses. Such a strategy disregards the reason for the general growth in demand for houses. I hope that the Minister will carefully consider that fundamental issue, because if it were attended to, it could help to ease an awful lot of the pain that the Government will inflict on councils in the south-east.

Single, elderly or young people will not want to live in the new developments. Too often they are devoid of local transport links, making it difficult for people without cars to go shopping, to go to work or even to visit the local doctor's surgery. Labour is building the wrong houses in the wrong places.

For the reasons that I have outlined, I oppose centrally imposed targets, which tend to ignore the wishes of local communities about the extent and nature of new housing. The issue needs careful scrutiny.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Local authority housing targets are handed down by the regional development agencies. Does my hon. Friend believe that, with the advent of regional assemblies, which may remove a tier of local government, local people may no longer have any say, which would be even more undemocratic?

Mr. Baron: I could not agree more. Regional assemblies would place at a further remove any say that local people had in the siting of new developments. That would do nothing to ensure that the nature and extent of housing provision was appropriate to the community involved.

[Mr. Baron]

I ask the Government to reconsider their entire approach to the subject, in the hope that local people may be given a greater say in the future of their environment, and to ensure that the implications of their policy for infrastructure are properly thought through.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. For the guidance of hon. Members I should point out that the replies to the debate will begin at about 5.10 pm. Seven hon. Members want to speak, so perhaps they would keep their speeches to about eight minutes each. I have no power to impose a time limit and my advice is for guidance only.

4.12 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): I want to discuss the job opportunities and serious skill shortages in the house-building sector. It is proving increasingly difficult to attract young people to train in craft skills such as bricklaying, plumbing and carpentry. Current Government education policy is geared towards encouraging school leavers to stay on for further education, whereas many would probably be better trained as apprentices in skills such as those I have mentioned.

It is a matter of deep concern in most of the crafts that, even though apprenticeships are now more readily available, the number of people seeking them is falling each year. Of particular note is the number of women entering the construction industry. That was already low, but it has fallen dramatically in the past two to three years. What are the Government doing to help industry overcome the shortage of craft skills in the house-building industry? Without those crafts we shall not fulfil our pledges to improve housing stock or build new houses.

We have heard today about the poor state of some accommodation. About 1.5 million dwellings are classified as unfit for human habitation. I am aware that the Government have announced a commitment to ensure that all social housing is of a decent standard by the end of the decade. That is an extremely tall order. However, in the private sector greater incentives are needed for people to improve their properties and, critically, not to use cowboy builders for that work. Hon. Members receive numerous letters from people afflicted by cowboy builders.

What progress are the Government making towards their target of bringing all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010? It is important that social landlords and others should improve housing stock. Will the Minister try to persuade the Treasury of the benefit of reducing VAT on domestic repair and maintenance to 5 per cent., as other countries have done? It would encourage more householders to improve the condition of their homes, and make life more difficult for the cash-in-hand cowboy builders, whose activities are one of the most frequent subjects raised in our postbags.

4.15 pm

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I am grateful to hon. Members from all parties who have generously curtailed their thoughtful speeches. My speech will be brief, not least because many of the points that I wished to make have already been forcefully put by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron).

I am fortunate to represent the constituency of Bexhill and Battle. It is a large constituency in the south-east, but very unlike the constituency of the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King). It includes the Edwardian seaside town of Bexhill and a large rural hinterland. More than 70 per cent. of my constituency is designated an area of outstanding natural beauty, as most of it is on the High Weald.

What unites Bexhill and the small rural villages that lie inland is the across-the-board horror and anger at the Government's housing policy and their intention arbitrarily to impose a large number of houses on an area that is unable to take further housing because it lacks the necessary services or infrastructure. It is also environmentally inappropriate to have those houses imposed upon us. The Government insist on 2,290 new homes being built in East Sussex each year until 2016 in order to meet their regional target of 39,000 a year. The Council for the Protection of Rural England said that such an excessive level of housing development would damage the countryside, undermine urban renewal and generate local controversy for years to come.

Ms Oona King: What would the hon. Gentleman's alternative be? Does he think that new houses should all be built in areas such as mine?

Mr. Barker: I shall say later what I think the alternative should be. We need targeted housing in rural areas, but it must be done more thoughtfully and in conjunction with improvements in the social and environmental infrastructure.

More importance should be placed on brownfield development, on which the Government's record is lamentable. If the Minister wants to help, she should ask her colleagues in the Treasury to reverse the perverse tax policy that encourages development on greenfield but not brownfield sites. The Government have no reason to be proud of their record of regenerating our inner cities and brownfield areas. They continue to allow the south-east and other countryside areas to be paved over, with one Barratts home development after another springing up like carbuncles, yet the inner-city problems, of which we have heard a great deal today, continue unaddressed and unabated.

Mr. Love: Brownfield development under the Conservative Government was about 45 per cent. of new build. The present Government have set a figure of 60 per cent., which is a significant increase. I return to the question that I asked earlier about the not-in-my-backyard lobby. If all authorities like Bexhill ask for something much lower than the suggested target, the number of houses required will not be built. That will lead to inflation in house prices and an increase in homelessness.

Mr. Barker: That is absolute and total rubbish. Labour Members are obsessed with crawling over the

political history of the previous century, but have no interest in finding solutions to housing problems in the 21st century. The hon. Gentleman seems to think that fuelling the housing boom in the south-east by building yet more houses is the way forward in the 21st century, but I cannot even begin to imagine the logic of that. We need to encourage greater regeneration not just in inner London but in the north-west and the north-east where huge amounts of housing stock sit empty. When I stood for election in Eccles, I saw row after row of houses lying empty. It would be neither sensible nor just to the people up there to ignore them and, instead, fuel the housing boom in the south-east.

Ms Buck: In an intervention, the hon. Gentleman made the point that we cannot simply translate housing demand in inner cities to developments in rural areas, whatever their type and location. There is some sense in that argument. However, by the same logic, one cannot claim that the housing demand in the inner-city areas of London and the south-east can be matched with the low demand for the empty properties in the north of England. That will not work. We must develop regional solutions, which means that areas such as his must be part of the solution.

Mr. Barker: I do not accept that we are a divided nation of regions. If we build more houses, we shall fuel housing demand. In the south-east, the more we build, the more insatiable that demand will become. What we need is sustainable, economic development in the north and the preservation of greenfield areas in the south. I am not proposing a blanket ban on housing in the south-east, but I totally reject the Serplan targets for my area, which are supported both by Labour and by the Liberal Democrats. Under the Serplan guidelines, 224,000 houses have already been earmarked for greenfield sites. At the current average density of 23 dwellings per hectare, those homes would cover an area of 98 sq km, which is more than twice the size of Crawley. That would be madness.

In my own area, we have good reason for not wanting more housing imposed from the centre, as the infrastructure is lacking to provide for it. The Government had an opportunity to put that infrastructure into place last summer when, after years of delay and dodging, they finally vetoed the Hastings bypass. That bypass would have provided a major arterial route, bringing economic development to Hastings, which is an area of high social exclusion. It would also have released land behind Bexhill that would have been appropriate for housing. Although the road is not now to go ahead, the housing target is still in situ. As a result, many of my constituents are extremely worried that the Government will insist on houses being built inappropriately in ribbon developments in areas of outstanding natural beauty in our Wealden villages or, even worse, on the flood plains. In Robertsbridge in my constituency, houses have been built in inappropriate areas that are now subject to ruinous flooding. Our area cannot take any more houses.

I also want to discuss the design and quality of housing. There would be less resistance to new housing developments in my area—and across the country—if the quality of design were higher. New housing developments, particularly those in rural areas, are often uniform, drab and of low quality. If there were greater emphasis on better design, more sympathy with vernacular architecture and greater thought given to the tastes and demands of local people, we might see the erection of buildings that pleased local communities instead of inciting their hostility.

Next Monday, I shall take a group of planners, councillors and council officials from all parties in my area to see the Prince of Wales development in Poundbury, Dorchester. We should learn some good lessons about building sustainable communities with a mix of social and other types of housing, and with buildings for work and leisure, that are built in a way that is sympathetic to that part of the world. I am not seeking to prescribe any one particular design or architectural style for my area, although I have a great deal of sympathy for the use of traditional vernacular architecture in rural areas. However, I believe that quality of design matters a great deal. Insufficient attention is paid to it, whether in social or executive housing. I hope that the housing that must be built to meet the needs of local communities in my area in the years to come will be of a high quality, and will reflect the architectural traditions of those communities.

4.25 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I agree with the hon. Members for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) and for Billericay (Mr. Baron) that infrastructure is essential. However, those of us who represent areas with very high demand face many of the same problems. In the past week I have met residents of the Dalgarno estate in north Kensington and the Warwick and Brindley estate in north Westminster, which consists of six 20-storey tower blocks and a low-rise estate. They are currently arguing with the council and registered social landlords about the building of additional infill accommodation. Those residents point to a level of density and a pressure on housing, particularly for those on low incomes and with high levels of social need.

I am not a popular person with those residents because I am prepared to say to them that we must tackle the issue of additional housing provision. I understand all their reasons for not wanting to do that, but housing demand and the problems that it causes are so acute and intense that we cannot hold out against such provision. We must concentrate our arguments on the problem of infrastructure. We need a regional solution for London, and that must be set in a wider context. In the old days of the Greater London council, its seaside housing initiative was one of the most successful housing policies ever run by a public organisation. It made a positive contribution to the problem of housing need, and I would like such an initiative to be revived.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle picked up on the reference to regional policy in my intervention. There is no flood of housing demand from the north of England that must be turned around. We are not dealing with that kind of population growth in London. My constituency contains two local authority areas—Kensington and Westminster—with the highest population growth in the country, but there is no huge influx of people from other regions with low housing demand. The problem in London arises from several

[Ms Karen Buck]

factors, including the decline in social lettings during recent years, much of which is attributable to the impact of high house prices leading to people not moving out of social accommodation. Household formation and international migration, including asylum seekers—although that is a smaller and often overrated aspect of the problem—have also caused some rise in demand. A large part of the problem is the collapse of the private rented sector for people on low incomes. That must be dealt with.

My major point, which I have made a thousand and one times to the Minister and others, is about London, its problems and the need for assistance in dealing with them. London now has 52,000 households in temporary accommodation—the highest number on record. London's boroughs are accommodating a homeless population the size of Reading. There are nearly 3,500 homeless people in my constituency alone, including 450 in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. London has two thirds of the homeless households and three quarters of the total number of families in bed and breakfast in the country. Yet the funding formula is skewed against the capital, despite the extra investment allocated to us through the comprehensive spending review, which I recognise and warmly welcome.

The distribution formula is about to cause us serious problems. Those problems are relative. I accept that there is still growth, but that growth is not adequate to deal with the trend of housing need. Factors relating to low demand are included in the general needs index formula, but issues of affordability and household population growth, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), are not. The relative loss to London—taking into account what we should receive—is £128 million, which is equivalent to around 1,300 additional housing units. It is unacceptable and inexplicable that areas with high housing demand, which are in housing crisis, should be penalised by the funding formula. That is counter-intuitive, contrary to the objectives of the housing Green Paper and will make the work of the bed-and-breakfast unit much harder.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I support what the hon. Lady says. Is she aware that in the past four years the standard spending assessment formula has disadvantaged London by £400 million and rural areas by £700 million? Whatever the problem in the hon. Lady's area, the problem in rural areas is even worse.

Ms Buck: The hon. Gentleman can make his own case, which I am sure he is more than capable of doing. My job is to make my case.

There is an urgent need for the housing needs formula—the general needs index—to be revised and for the relative loss to London to be redressed. I welcome the Minister's comments on overcrowding and the revision of the statutory overcrowding formula. We have understandably concentrated on the high visibility housing issues of rough sleeping and bed and breakfast. I am delighted with the establishment of the bed-and-breakfast unit, and wish it well, but we must not forget the hidden homelessness that afflicts my area and the constituencies of a number of hon. Members.

I shall refer to some of my constituents to highlight the problem. The Koudrai family, which consists of the parents and four children aged seven, six, three and one, share two bedrooms. Under the space standards element of the statutory overcrowding legislation, they are not overcrowded because the living room is of sufficient size to allow the adults to use it as a bedroom. The Bowen family, on the other hand, which consists of one adult and six children aged 13, 11, 10, eight, four and 18 months, are now officially overcrowded as the 10-year-old has become a person for the purpose of the rules. However, they remain between 8th and 17th on the list for four-bedroomed accommodation. That raises the question of what conditions other households have to cope with, but we know nothing about those conditions because for many years local authorities have not kept adequate records of statutory overcrowding or other overcrowding needs, because the legislation was so out of date.

I also cite the case of the Hassan family in Kensington, which consists of two adults and three children who live in a very small two-bedroomed flat on the third floor. Two of the children are disabled and statemented with autism. The family has the most medical points available to them but still only has 30 points in total, and the council explained that people with most priority have around 200 housing points. Some hon. Members may be able imagine what it is like to share a small two-bedroomed flat with three children, two of whom are autistic, but I certainly cannot. I find it hard enough to live with one child.

The demand for housing represented by those examples, and the stress and the physical and mental damage that living in such conditions causes those households, is almost impossible to contemplate. We urgently need to update the overcrowding standards. When considering allocation of resources, we should consider not only the visible and dramatic end of the housing spectrum, however hideous it is for families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, but housing need in the round.

Like the rough sleepers initiative, the bed-and-breakfast unit will do a great deal of good, because it will have high visibility. A strong case exists for numerical targets for a reduction in demand, although Ashley Horsley said in *The Guardian* yesterday that he was not sympathetic. I believe that there is no alternative. Unless we have numerical targets to reduce the numbers living in bed and breakfast accommodation, we will not be able to monitor progress. I urge the Minister to consider that point.

The bed-and-breakfast unit could consider not simply how quickly people can be moved out of bed-and-breakfast accommodation but how to create a better package of support services. The Minister has done good work in that area already, but the Victoria Climbié inquiry highlighted how easy it is for vulnerable families to fall through the net, especially if they do not have English as a first language, or have other communication problems, and are highly mobile. The Bayswater families unit told me that there must be hundreds of other Climbié cases waiting to happen. We hope that they do not, but the risk exists because of mobility in the temporary accommodation sector. There is a strong case for targeting the next wave of the sure

start programme on wards with a great deal of bed-and-breakfast accommodation, as they tend not to be highly ranked on the index of multiple deprivation.

As for family accommodation, the private rented sector does not provide a desirable long-term alternative to the social rented sector or to affordable homes for purchase, but it is an essential transitional stage and can help those who, for example, are moving to seek employment. I commend to the Minister the work of the Brent private tenants rights group, which has produced an excellent document—entitled "The Private Rented Sector: Problem or Solution?"—that contains a good analysis of the difficulties. The problem is that the supply of private rented sector accommodation in London has halved in the past five years. The quality is very variable, and because of housing benefit restrictions the relationship between the private rented sector, families on low income and poverty is highly significant. The Government have recognised that in their "market of despair" research in Brent, and the matter is now a priority.

The document sets out a number of solutions. It suggests bringing the needs of landlords and tenants together in a proper package of measures that include ending tax discrimination in respect of landlords who let properties, promoting adequate management standards—that ties in with the licensing of homes in multiple occupation—and abolishing local reference rents and allowing rent officers to take away from rent assessment committees the role of rent termination. Rent officers are closer to the ground, and such a move would increase transparency and allow greater flexibility in meeting tenants' needs.

As an added incentive for renting to low-income households, the document also recommends the excellent idea of a 5 per cent. supplement for landlords who set rents for tenants on housing benefit. That idea is worthy of analysis and I commend it to the Minister. Research by Cambridge Housing and Planning Research, which was commissioned by Shelter, shows that contraction of the private rented sector's contribution to housing need could be adding 10,000 people to the annual affordable housing requirement. Put another way, investing in returning the sector to its mid-1990s position is the equivalent of spending £700 million on new housing.

The reform of housing benefit cannot wait until we have achieved rent convergence. The Minister is aware of my deep reservations about the implications of rent restructuring. I am particularly worried about capital values and the possibility of high target rents in London and other high-value areas. We must urgently consider measures such as setting a cap of no more than £100 a week and allowing a high degree of local variation in respect of landlords who let properties that will be affected by high-target rents. Time is of the essence, as the proposals will come into force next April. This complex pattern of rent restructuring could blow up in our faces, and I urge the Minister to ensure that we do not run into serious problems.

Before we achieve the admirable objective of greater coherence and consistency between local authority social landlords and the private rented sector, we should make rapid progress by improving administration. For example, we could put pensioners into a separate housing benefit strand, set fixed terms for housing benefit claims and improve work incentives. Those suggestions are set out in two recent documents: the Audit Commission's review of the administration of housing benefit, and an excellent policy document by Pivot, entitled "Hope for Housing Benefit". The latter document makes the important point that if we do not seize the moment and integrate housing benefit more effectively as we enter a new phase of tackling poverty through tax credits and increased work incentives, it will not work as effectively in London and other areas of high housing cost as it does in the rest of the country. As a result, it will not be as successful as it should be in helping to tackle poverty.

As many hon. Members have stressed, the main issue in dealing with these problems is supply, supply, supply. We will not deal with any of them in the long term without a major increase in housing investment in areas of housing need. Under planning guidance, 50 per cent. of new build in London should be affordable homes through developments under section 106 agreements. That was recommended by the Mayor's housing commission, of which I was a member, and I strongly support that. I welcome the Secretary of State's indication that he might consider allowing councils to demand affordable homes from commercial developments as well. There is a lack of logic in insisting on affordable housing in those housing developments, and not in commercial ones. We should level that playing field.

The Government's commitment to public services and to tackling poverty is not in doubt, and has been demonstrated during the past few years. Without a decent home over people's heads, however, it will be hard to realise all the objectives and to make the best use of the new wave of anti-poverty measures and public sector investment being introduced.

4.40 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), because she demonstrates not only her knowledge but her obvious commitment and independence of thought on this important issue. I thank those who curtailed their speeches, in particular the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), whom I could see skipping elegantly, gazelle-like, through the key points in her speech and avoiding the swampy lowlands occupied by the detailed recommendations of the London Labour group of MPs.

What a contrast that was with the remarks of the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), who was more like an elephant trying to remain on a tightrope. He tried to avoid falling off on one side with a policy that might offend urban constituents, and on the other with policies that might offend rural constituents. I did not hear him explain what market interventions he thought would deal appropriately with the problem of abandonment of housing in northern cities. Nor did I hear him respond—I may have missed it—to the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) about the exact details of the Liberal Democrats' policy on voluntary stock transfer, except to say that it could be done at local level.

The problem is that Liberal Democrat answers are different in every constituency. It is no good the hon. Member for Torbay saying that he wants to give local

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

government the power to intervene in the market, to have new planning and fiscal powers and to have a general power of competence, if at the same time he wants regional government, with his constituents being run from Bristol and mine, heaven forbid, from Woking.

The problem that we have not faced is how to deal with abandonment. I have not yet heard a single answer to the problem of abandonment of properties in areas of high supply and obvious lack of demand. Will the Minister explain why additional housing is permitted in large rural areas in the south and the north of the country, when there is clearly a surplus of supply in some urban areas? Why is a house in Salford inappropriate for occupation when an exactly equivalent house in Newport in the Isle of Wight is not only appropriate, but one that people want to buy? The dimensions of those who live in Salford cannot be different from those of people who live on the Isle of Wight.

Dr. Iddon: They have yachts in the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Turner: I must tell the hon. Gentleman that not everyone who lives in Newport has a yacht.

We need to deal with the planning problem at national level, but it will not be solved through national intervention and the setting of targets that are inappropriate for local areas. I will not go over the ground that has been covered so ably by my hon. Friends the Members for Billericay (Mr. Baron) and for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker), except to point out that my local authority—I do not usually attack the Isle of Wight council in this place, although I often do at home—sent someone to Serplan who voted in favour of the Government's target of 8,000 new houses on the Isle of Wight. That may not sound much compared with Essex, but it is enough for a small area. Of those 8,000 houses, 40 per cent. are to be built on greenfield sites—a target that is being implemented through the unitary development plan. I welcome the Government's publication of PPG3 with its 60 per cent. target for brownfield sites, but that document has no teeth as far as Isle of Wight council is concerned. It is happily giving its approval for building on greenfield sites, and the brownfield sites will never catch up.

I criticise the approval in the unitary development plan for more houses without adequate parking space in both rural and urban areas. It is not good enough to take away car parks, and especially commuter car parks, from towns, because if people are to use public transport they must have somewhere to park at the end of their public transport journey. People can no longer drive their cars into Cowes on their way to work, because the Government have taken out of the unitary development plan some of the already limited parking space in the town centre.

The other problem with which we must deal is housing quality. I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle. His comments also apply to social housing. Some of the social housing that is being built is frankly tat. It is poor quality: it is of a poor standard; its common areas are little more than deserts; and it has inadequate parking spaces, which is a problem because people who live in social housing also want to own cars. It also has inadequate private space. People who live in social housing want private space because they do not want to bring up children in flats, which admittedly are not as high in my area as some in London.

Mr. Love: I have spent many enjoyable evenings, and indeed weeks, in the Isle of Wight over many years. However, would the hon. Gentleman do what he cajoled the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) to do, and say how he would solve the housing problems that he has identified?

Mr. Turner: I am happy to say that we should set higher standards for social housing. People who need or desire to live in social housing have a right to live in decent houses with adequate private spaces and places to park their cars.

I welcome the remarks made by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on anti-social behaviour orders. They should be implemented not only by the sometimes reluctant local authorities—my local authority has not implemented one—but by both registered social landlords and the private sector. Why should people not apply for a private anti-social behaviour order to see whether the courts will uphold it? We should allow people to bring forward traffic orders to deal with problems of parking for residents, which many local authorities relegate to the end of their programme. The problem of inadequate parking should be dealt with so that residents do not concrete over their front gardens in sheer despair at their inability to park. Such problems reduce people's quality of life.

Who pays for the social housing element of private development? There is a distinct difference between the prices that can be obtained in London for private sector housing, to the obvious detriment of many of London's people, and the prices that can be obtained in other parts of the country, including my constituency. In London, the profits made from building private housing are so great that the cost of social housing is, in effect, met by the developer. If the cost is 10 per cent. or whatever, the developer reduces his profit accordingly to provide space for social housing. However, it is difficult to develop a site on the Isle of Wight, or any rural area, where prices are low, because it is hard for the developer to make a significant profit. He will make sufficient profit, but he will not make a significant profit, and he will not necessarily be willing to lose that profit as a result of providing for 10 per cent. social housing.

Ultimately, the purchaser pays. In some areas, social housing is a tax on the developer, as is right and proper, but in other areas it is a tax on the first-time buyer. I hope that the Government will consider that when they make their housing allocations to registered social landlords, so that they do not have to depend to the same extent on taxing the first-time buyer.

4.50 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I begin with a topic that is dear to your heart, Mr. Pike—the condition of private sector stock.

Let me tell Conservative Members exactly why private sector stock is in such a bad condition. They talk about terraces of houses that are completely empty.

Those houses are more than 120 years old. Unlike houses in the rest of the country, they were built on the cheap by factory owners within walking distance of the mills. They were built with brick-on-end foundations, with inner and outer skins touching, and with attics that were common to the entire terrace, which presents a real hazard when one of the properties catches fire.

The reason why tens of thousands of those properties are empty in your constituency of Burnley, Mr. Pike, in Eccles, in Salford and in Bolton is that nobody wants to live in them any more. During 18 years of Conservative government, no money was made available either to improve them or to clear and replace them. Now we are stuck with the problem. The Government are wrestling with it and I am sorry to say that they will be doing so for a long time.

The densely populated inner parts of Salford, Bolton and Burnley need places for children to play. When houses are cleared, more houses should not be put back on the sites: we need green lungs, as in London. Wherever I go in London, I walk past a park. That is not true of many of the old wool towns in Yorkshire, or the cotton towns in Lancashire.

The figures for Bolton are staggering. According to environmental health officers, we have 22,000 unfit properties, 5,000 to 6,000 of which are considered to be irredeemably unfit, yet people still live in them. I agree with the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) that we need more living space. If he were to visit Bolton, I would show him the two-up, two-downs with small backyards. None of his constituents would like to live in those properties, or in similar ones in Bradford, Burnley and Eccles.

Mr. Barker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Iddon: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

If urban regeneration is to mean anything in towns and constituencies like mine, we must have the money to deal with such properties. They cannot be allowed to stand derelict and empty. Drug addicts inherit privately owned properties because private landlords buy them one by one for a few quid and reap large amounts of housing benefit by letting them to desperate people. Next door may live elderly people who are frightened of going out. Yards have rubbish dumped in them, which attracts vermin. None of our constituents wants to live in such conditions.

I plead with the Government to help constituencies like mine to deal with those mega housing problems. We need to clear properties that are beyond repair. The Government have been excellent at releasing capital receipts and working on neighbourhood renewal, but they are not getting to the heart of the problem.

Cutting my speech short, as have all other hon. Members, I turn briefly to the public sector. I have long argued that we should try to move away from the public sector borrowing requirement model of supporting public sector housing. At one stage, I thought that the general Government financial deficit model would be put into operation. Can the Minister confirm that? I understand that, of all the countries in the European Union, only this country and the Netherlands operate the public sector borrowing requirement model. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong on that.

I was not present at the Labour party conference, so did not hear the Secretary of State announce possible alternative financing of public sector housing, which has caused so much excitement in the housing arena. Will the Minister tell me about that? We need to borrow against our considerable assets because it makes sense and is done elsewhere in Europe. Why cannot public authorities borrow not only against the tenanted value of their properties, but against considerable rent streams. Will she clarify what the Secretary of State said in Brighton, which appears to have been denied by the housing press?

Will the Minister also look at the model, called a community regeneration company, presented to her by the director of housing in Bolton? If tenants must choose an alternative form of housing management, I ask her seriously to consider that model, which is not in the housing Green Paper but is recognised by people as a satisfactory alternative to proposals in it and has now been submitted to the Department. Best-value considerations have shown that the model is better than the options that the Government have suggested for Bolton and other authorities. Will she please consider it?

I am not against tenants having a choice of an alternative landlord, particularly if they have a bad one, which could even be a local authority. However, under successive Governments, Bolton has been one of the few north-west towns to have been given all the brownie points for housing management for, I think, nine out of 10 successive years. That is an incredible performance. If the tenants, local government and national Government are happy with the management, why should local authorities be put under extreme pressure to transfer either management or the ownership of their stock to an alternative landlord? That does not make sense to me. Surely, we can leave a few well-managed local authorities with their own stock to look after, because an awful lot of people are now in the queue for stock transfer.

Finally, has the Minister seriously considered securitisation as an alternative means of financing housing in the public sector? That is a hot topic in the housing press.

4.58 pm

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): The events of the past few months are a timely reminder that the Government's commitment to the delivery of public services must be underpinned by the provision of good-quality housing. The crisis in recruitment, spoken about earlier, is a reminder that healthy housing markets and good-quality housing are essential to achieving many of the Government's key priorities, especially neighbourhood renewal. The improvement of public services could otherwise be undermined by an acute shortage of affordable housing, with intermediate housing being lost in some areas and problems of market failure and local deprivation in others.

We should take note of the unrest in areas such as Bradford, which in terms of demography, ethnicity and housing conditions, is similar to my constituency. I was told by our local police that, had it not rained on the Saturday subsequent to the riot, a similar event would have occurred in Luton. That is hardly conducive to building a healthy community.

[Margaret Moran]

It is important to recognise that in areas such as mine, and in Bradford, there is overcrowding and an acute shortage of social housing. Owner-occupied housing is in poor condition with few resources to upgrade it because they are focused elsewhere. As a result, areas such as Bury park perform badly in all the indices of deprivation, including child mortality, high levels of heart disease and a horrifying rise in cases of tuberculosis, which is usually thought of as the disease of the poor. Homelessness, overcrowding and lack of investment must be tackled now through urgent intervention in such areas.

Although Luton generally has an acute housing crisis in areas such as Stopsley and Farley, special attention needs to be paid to areas where the housing crisis is magnified because of a multiplicity of deprivation. In Luton, the general and black and minority ethnic housing needs survey has shown the council the worrying levels of current and projected need in the town. According to data, in excess of 6,500 households are currently in need, and that will rise over the next five years to nearly 10,000. Half of those people will be looking to the council to provide affordable housing.

In the Bangladeshi and Pakistani community, households are four times as likely to be living in unsuitable housing as white households, and the average income of Bangladeshi households is around £5,000, compared with £17,000 in white households. The survey found that about 5 per cent. of white households were in need, whereas the comparative figures were 37 per cent. of Bangladeshi households and 30 per cent. of Pakistani households in need. There is therefore acute need in particular areas, which we must address.

As for the private rented sector and owner-occupation, demand and supply difficulties are exacerbated by the results of the private rented housing stock condition survey that was recently undertaken by the council, which shows high levels of disrepair in the town. More than 7,000 households in Luton are already in unsuitable housing, which is more than 10 per cent. of all households. It therefore has a bigger problem of disrepair than other comparable areas.

What needs to be done to tackle those problems? Greater priority must be given to investment in renovation of existing dilapidated stock. Greater focus should also be given to a strategy for empty housing. In Luton, for every one homeless family, there are seven empty private rented sector properties. I therefore ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consult the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the need to review VAT on refurbishment, to enable us to bring those urgently needed properties back into use.

In respect of social housing, for which there is acute need across the town, there is even more pressing need for family-sized accommodation with four bedrooms and a bathroom. However, there is no opportunity in areas such as mine to new build our way out of that problem. We are landlocked. We must therefore focus more on increasing Housing Corporation funding for acquisition and refurbishment, which I know from my experience as a chief executive of a housing association is inevitably more expensive than new build. That needs to be reflected in the financing of that part of the programme.

We welcome the doubling of the approved development programme for housing associations. However, we must also recognise that we must build on brownfield sites that are contaminated, which are inevitably of higher cost than new-build sites. We must ensure that those higher costs are reflected in the Housing Corporation allocations so that we can achieve our brownfield targets.

The vision for healthy communities in the urban and rural White Paper depends critically on healthier housing markets. Greater and more strategic investment in housing is necessary, as well as much more effective co-ordination with economic and neighbourhood renewal strategies at national, regional and sub-regional level.

As we approach the next spending round, I want my hon. Friend the Minister to make certain requests in her discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As many other hon. Members have said, we urgently need an increase in the supply of new social housing. In some areas, there is an acute housing need, especially in the south-east. We have heard about the problems in London, but they are not exclusive to London. East Anglia has similar problems. We need a programme for an extra 20,000 units to tackle the problem of key workers and to keep our households out of bed-and-breakfast accommodation, which is more expensive. It is estimated that, in 2003-04, that would cost an extra £6 million. I hope that Ministers will be calling on the Chancellor of the Exchequer for that added investment.

There also needs to be increased investment in existing regeneration programmes so that they can be maintained at their present value. There is a distinct query about how much of the existing regeneration programmes are concentrating on housing. Given that many of them are time limited, there is a severe question mark over the level of housing resources in the future. That needs to be examined. We must maintain investment in existing housing stock in order for the 10-year target to be met. I hope that the Minister will be dealing with such problems when she discusses matters with the Chancellor.

As other hon. Members have said, we do not need a shift of resources away from areas of acute housing need, such as London and the south-east, to areas of low demand. That conflicts with the overall objective of the review set by the housing Green Paper to focus investment resources in areas of greatest housing need. It also conflicts with the Government's recently announced objective to reduce the use of temporary and bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Will the Minister reconsider such issues?

During the next 10 years, we must set targets for overcoming the backlog of need in affordable housing to parallel the targets that have already been set to tackle the problem of rough sleepers, and that we should have to tackle the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We need to set an annual target for reducing the number of homeless people who are placed in bed-and-breakfast and other forms of temporary accommodation. The Government must set out an emergency programme for enacting and achieving those targets. We have already

said that we need urgently to enact the Bill that deals with houses in multiple occupation and several issues related to the private rented sector, which my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) outlined, and which have been set out in the Brent private rented sector housing survey.

The Government should also introduce legislation to remove rent rebates from housing revenue accounts of local authorities to enable the full introduction of resource accounting. Local authorities' housing targets need to be put on a statutory basis. If we are to achieve an increase in affordable housing, we must give local authorities full powers and make it mandatory within their housing strategies so that they can work effectively in partnership with registered social landlords in their areas and the private rented sector to carry out the full range of duties in relation to all aspects of housing provision. That will require a strengthening of the obligations placed on RSLs and other housing providers to assist local authorities to meet their housing duties. That will be all the more important because, by 2004, more than 50 per cent. of all social housing will be managed and owned by residential social landlords. The strategic role of local authorities needs to be put more firmly on a statutory basis.

I make a final plea for the self-build movement, which makes a small but significant contribution to tackling the enormity of the housing problem that many of us experience. It is a movement that I espoused in my former life as leader of Lewisham council. In those small in-fill areas where we have a desperate shortage of land, such as in my constituency, self-build housing can be of moderate assistance in tackling the problem. We must re-examine the way in which the funding rules of housing corporations apply, so that we can enable unemployed and young people to build their own homes, thus providing them with a roof over their heads and empowering and training them. That is in the spirit of the Government's policy of regeneration and neighbourhood renewal.

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): I apologise for the fact that I have been unable to call the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love). He has attended the debate, but sometimes it is impossible to call everyone. I know that he has a great interest in housing.

5.10 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I can sum up the whole of this largely good-natured debate in terms of investment. Everything that hon. Members have mentioned has come down to increased investment in both the public and private sectors. Other hon. Members mentioned that, and I hope that the Minister will respond to the point. Renovation grants in the private sector are vital for improving the housing stock. That applies not only to the north of England, but to all hon. Members' constituencies. Lack of local funds is at the heart of the problem. Few councils offer renovation grants because of constraints on local government finance.

The debate has been wide-ranging and I wish to give the Minister as much time as possible to respond, although I know that she will not be able to cover all our points. The debate has been excellent and a joy to hear.

5.11 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Billericay (Mr. Baron), for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) for their excellent speeches that related, pertinently, to the Government's targets for housing in their areas. I have to say to the Minister—I hope in a non-partisan manner—that we cannot continue to build on our greenfield sites at the rate that those targets suggest. After we have built over the sites, we cannot get them back.

Pertinent points have also been made about building on brownfield sites. Yesterday, I was in Ipswich where the council is inhibiting a major development on a brownfield site because it will not allow a new road to be built although it has received private finance and will not cost the taxpayer a penny. Such political dogma against the car is unacceptable. We ask the Government to ensure that we meet brownfield housing targets.

I am a chartered surveyor—that is a registered interest—and I endorse the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle. We need well-designed social housing. We know the mistakes that were made in the 1960s, and some housing that was built then must be pulled down because the designs are so bad. I remember visiting a block of flats in Glasgow with a Select Committee. A poor woman on housing benefit was paying £20 a week for her electricity bill and, during the winter, the flat was colder inside than outside.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) mentioned investment. That is what this problem is all about. If we do not have investment, we will not get the quantity of social housing units that we want. The Chartered Institute of Housing calculated that the Government must transfer a further 1 million homes in order to meet their 10-year renovation target. That represents a critical sum of money, and the money that is generated from stock transfers will depend on the rent strategy. There is little point in trying artificially to hold down rents in the private sector, and then complaining that the private sector produces insufficient housing units.

One of the comments made by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) caught my attention. He seemed to suggest that no urban regeneration occurred under the last Conservative Administration. That is absolute nonsense. We saw excellent regeneration in areas such as Docklands and the centres of Glasgow and Leeds.

Mr. Love *rose—*

Mr. Clifton-Brown: No, I will not take any interventions because I know that the Minister will want to wind up the debate.

I do not know about the local authority of the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East which he complained about. However, I suspect that the way in which the authority was run in the past has something to do with the housing stock. Hon. Members should examine the difference between the housing stock in Wandsworth and neighbouring Lambeth.

I sympathise with the problems of Labour Members, particularly those in London. I tell the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) that if

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

the Mayor pushes higher targets on the amount of social housing that will be built, it will have one of two effects: either the housing will not be built or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle said, it will impact on the price of starter homes, making it even more difficult for people to get on the housing ladder.

The Minister has a highly complex task this evening. She has a huge number of points to answer. I hope that she can answer many of them; if not, perhaps she will write to hon. Members. I wish her luck in her winding-up speech, because she has a difficult job.

5.14 pm

Ms Keeble: I am grateful to all hon. Members who have taken part in this excellent debate. Many issues have been raised. I am sure that the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) means it when he says that he is trying to be non-partisan, but nothing demonstrates more the chasm between this Government and the Conservative party—both now and when it was in power—than our approaches to housing.

Mr. Love: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Keeble: No, I will not because I do not have long.

The hon. Member for Cotswold talked about the awful things that the Government have done to private home owners, but one of our great achievements has been to provide a stable economy with high employment and low interest rates. As a result, the majority of people, as never before, are in an excellent position to own and maintain their own homes and have a good quality of life. That has been a priority for this Government, and rightly so.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the problem of homelessness, which is a blight on any civilised society. Our priority should be to house the homeless and to ensure that they have the necessary support so that they do not become homeless again. What a contrast there is between the approach of the Conservatives when they were in power and our approach, which involves the rough sleepers unit, the bed-and-breakfast unit and the work being done with the Army and Prison Service on the symptoms and causes of homelessness.

I was delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman is going to Crisis this year. I am astonished that he has been in public life for so long and seems not yet to have met a homeless person.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Keeble: No.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister referred to me.

Ms Keeble: No, I will not give way.

I remember the council of which I was leader and other councils struggling against an intransigent Conservative Government to ensure that we could include homeless 16 and 17-year-olds among the ranks of vulnerable people who were entitled to housing. To be able to include those people under the homelessness regulations is a defining difference between Labour and the Conservatives.

The contributions from the hon. Members for Billericay (Mr. Baron), for Bexhill and Battle, and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) showed not only that the Opposition have no housing policies, but that they either do not know or do not understand what the Government are doing. It is inconsistent, to say the least, to castigate the Government for not providing enough housing, and then to say that houses should be built anywhere but in their own constituencies. The best way to deal with their points is to send them the planning policy guidance notes, so that they can know and understand the Government's actions on brownfield and greenfield land, and on improving standards and design.

Mr. Barker: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Keeble: No.

Mr. Barker: It is on that point.

Ms Keeble: No, I have said that I will not give way.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) presented the Liberal Democrats' wish list. That may be want they want, but it would be the economics of utter madness. He said how awful it was for homeless people, and suggested using all the empty houses for them. For the reasons that my hon. Friends have set out, I reject the idea of simply matching up homeless people and empty houses. The hon. Gentleman mentioned building council housing and subsidising rents, but there is more to a good housing policy than just the building of houses and the paying of rents. Of course we must deal with those issues, but a host of others must also be addressed, such as those raised by my hon. Friends. I shall quickly go through the issues, and then try to respond to them in turn. I shall write to hon. Members about any points that I cannot deal with.

Hon. Members referred to affordable housing, bed and breakfast and homelessness, empty homes, houses in multiple occupation, housing allocations and time scales for acceptance, finance for homelessness, issues raised by Shelter, working with the Housing Corporation, skills shortages, women and black and ethnic minority communities and building, problems of housing in London, the detailed workings of the Children Act 1989, overcrowding regulations, health and children in bed and breakfast, the private rented sector, rent restructuring, housing benefit reform, affordable housing and commercial development, low demand, the Secretary of State's statement about housing finance, the Bolton model, securitisation, the need to link housing to wider regeneration, the need to deal with racial disadvantage in housing and private sector renewal. That long list shows the complexity of the issues surrounding housing. We need detailed policies to deal with all those problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) raised the issue of planning and affordable housing. He is absolutely right. The planning system helps to provide better housing and better communities.

He was also right to highlight the importance of dealing with empty homes. We need a range of strategies to deal with the different types of empty homes and what has caused them to be empty. He also spoke about houses in multiple occupation. My officials have been working closely with my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) on his Home Energy Conservation Bill. We welcome the fact that it has helped to push the problems of houses in multiple occupation right up the political agenda.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) talked about time scales for responses. The Homelessness Bill says that local authorities must act reasonably. Reasonableness is open to many interpretations, but it provides local authorities with the flexibility that they need. Clearly, if they do not act reasonably, they can be challenged through the courts. She also mentioned the impact of recent court cases on social services obligations under the Children Act 1989. We are currently looking into that and it has been the subject of extensive discussions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow also raised the issue of finance for homelessness. We have provided £8 million. Obviously we shall see the extent of that as new categories come into the ranks of the homeless. It would be as wrong to exclude 16 and 17-year-olds from qualifying for housing as it would to exclude care leavers or other vulnerable groups. She also referred to Shelter. I have had meetings with the chair of the Housing Corporation and the Department, and Housing Corporation officials are working closely with us to ensure that we provide a seamless service for the general public.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) was right to raise the issue of skills shortages. In some parts of the country, particularly the north-west, the biggest barrier to housing renewal and regeneration in inner city areas is a shortage not of Government funds but of skilled labour. She was right to highlight the particular shortage of women entering the construction industry. Women represent only 9 per cent. of the work force in the building industry, and only 2 per cent. come from black and minority ethnic groups. The Government are working through the "rethinking construction" programme to tackle some of those issues. Clearly we are missing out on a huge range of the population who could help us to overcome that skills shortage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) talked about the need to examine closely the concentrations of disadvantage in otherwise affluent areas—which we are doing—to ensure that the housing problems of those communities are addressed. She said that there was a need for a sure start scheme for children in temporary accommodation. We are considering producing guidance to deal with some of the health problems of children in bed and breakfast. I take her point that those children are some of the most needy and vulnerable. She also clearly set out why we must examine the problems of overcrowding.

I completely endorse the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), who highlighted the problem of abandonment.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Keeble: No.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Pike. I think that the basic courtesies of this House are not being observed. I did not intervene once on the Minister in her opening speech. She made a personal attack on me and would not give way. Will you use your role as protector of Back Benchers to ensure that the issues that my hon. Friends and I have raised are addressed during the last five minutes of this three-hour debate?

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Under the normal conventions of the House, the Minister can decide whether she wishes to give way. She is trying to reply to a comprehensive debate. I accept that she is trying to respond to all points, and has made it clear that she will write to hon. Members if she is not able to respond during the debate.

Ms Keeble: Thank you, Mr. Pike. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Cotswold feels that he needs to be protected from me. I did not intervene on him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East, after his interesting comments on abandonment, asked about the Secretary of State's statement. The prudential code on possible new borrowing arrangements is currently under consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) mentioned multiple disadvantage. That is one reason why it is so important that the Government's housing strategy is seen alongside the wider neighbourhood renewal strategies. She raised the subject of racial disadvantage. The Department is working closely on that with the Housing Corporation, which is trying to overcome the appalling fact that, in this day and age, people still suffer housing disadvantage because of their ethnicity.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Pike. Every one in this Chamber has kept their speeches short to enable the Minister to answer all points. She has not answered a single point made by my hon. Friends and me, and that is a disgrace.

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): The debate does not finish till 5.30 and there are still three minutes to go. Depending on when the Minister sits down, other Members will have the opportunity to be called.

Ms Keeble: I have said that I will send hon. Members the detailed policy guidance so that they can clearly understand how the planning system works, and see that the Government have taken action on the brownfield-greenfield issue. We have also taken action on design, density and parking spaces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford gave me very good advice about being confident in the Government's record. Nothing gives me greater confidence than the bare-faced exhibition of

[Ms Keeble]

exclusiveness and mean-minded nimbyism that we have seen from the Conservative Opposition this afternoon. It is in stark contrast with the Government's commitment to supporting private home owners, including providing the seller's pack to which we are committed. We are committed to bringing all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010, to renewing the private sector, to dealing with racial disadvantage in housing, to increasing the supply of affordable housing and to tackling the appalling problems of homelessness and overcrowding. We are committed to ensuring that people have decent homes at prices that they can afford, to overcoming the legacy that we inherited and to making sure not only that people have a decent home of their own choice but that it is in a sustainable, safe and sound community.

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): The question is that the sitting be now adjourned.

I think the ayes have it. However, the hon. Member for Cotswold wishes to speak again.

5.29 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister's winding-up speech was disgracefully partisan.

Dr. Iddon: On a point of order, Mr. Pike. I thought that the ayes on this side of the Chamber were far louder than the noes on that side of the Chamber. I suggest that we put it to the vote.

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): The hon. Gentleman is challenging the Chair's view on that point. I made it clear that hon. Members could speak again if the debate had not concluded.

Question agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Five o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 5 November 2001

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Cluster Bombs

Lynne Jones: To ask the Solicitor-General if she has been consulted on the legality of the use of cluster bombs. [11844]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General and Solicitor-General, as chief legal advisers to Her Majesty's Government, are available to advise the Government on all questions of international and domestic law. In this capacity, the Law Officers have been asked to advise, from time to time, on legal issues relating to the use of force, including international humanitarian law. There is a long-standing convention that neither the substance of the Law Officers' advice, nor the fact that they have been consulted, is disclosed outside Government.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ambassadors (Ethnic Origin)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to appoint the first *(a)* black and *(b)* Asian ambassador. [11431]

Mr. Bradshaw: The first minority ethnic ambassador was appointed in 1993. Mr. Noel Jones served as ambassador to Kazakhstan from 1993 to 1995.

The Diplomatic Service is committed to reflecting the modern face of Britain and to attracting talent from all ethnic groups. To this end, we are continually working to encourage minority ethnic people to apply to join the service.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by his Department; if he will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans he has to sell further such assets over the period of the current comprehensive spending review; and if he will make a statement. [10834]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* A description of the antiques and paintings in FCO properties appears in the FCO part of the national asset register. The Government wine cellar contains substantial stocks of fine wines for use at home. The FCO manages the cellar on behalf of the Government as a whole, and not exclusively for the FCO. The FCO owns no wine stocks overseas. No antiques, paintings or wines have been sold over the past three years and there are no plans to sell such items over the period of the current comprehensive spending review.

Cuba

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed with the US Secretary of State the inclusion of Cuba on the US list of nations that sponsor terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [12056]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign Secretary has not discussed the US list of nations that sponsor terrorism with the US Secretary of State. The Government do not subscribe to the list; it is a US list and a matter for the US authorities.

Indonesia

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Sulawesi, Indonesia, with particular reference to attacks on the Christian minority by Muslim extremists. [12246]

Mr. Bradshaw: The sentencing to death of three Christian militia leaders on 5 April provoked civil disturbances in Poso, central Sulawesi. Following the deployment of an additional Infantry Battalion in August, the situation in Poso itself has been calm. However, some low-level violence between Muslims and Christians has continued in remoter areas of Sulawesi.

We will continue to monitor cases of inter-communal violence closely and raise our concerns with the Indonesian Government at every appropriate opportunity.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further discussions he plans to have with the Indonesian authorities on the subject of inter-religious violence. [12247]

Mr. Bradshaw: I most recently raised this issue with the Indonesian Vice President Hamzah Haz, when we met in Jakarta in August.

We will continue to monitor the situation carefully and raise our concerns with the Indonesian Government at every appropriate opportunity.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Part-time Employment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from employers following the passage of the Part-Time Employees (Prevention of Less Favourite Treatment) Regulations 2000. [11831]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has received no representations from employers on the regulations themselves since they came into force. However, we worked closely with employer representatives during and following the passage of the regulations to develop appropriate guidance for business, and we continue to discuss issues relating to part-time work with employers and employer groups from time to time.

Information and Consultation Directive

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the sanctions proposed for firms that fail to comply with the information and consultation directive. [11004]

Alan Johnson: The proposed directive requires member states to determine the provisions for enforcement of the obligations provided they are effective, proportionate and dissuasive. This part of the text was not the subject of amendment by the European Parliament. The Government will consult fully in due course on the implementation of the directive, including the question of sanctions.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the European Parliament amendments to the draft information and consultation directive which were passed on 23 October and the Government's policy in respect of the draft directive as amended. [10996]

Alan Johnson: The Government believe it is unnecessary and unhelpful to try to change the text of the proposed directive agreed at the Council of Ministers in June. We will be strongly defending the Council's common position. The UK is not alone in this view. Several other member states are also opposed to changing the flexible measures previously agreed. We expect the Council to stick closely to the common position text.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make an assessment of the impact of the changes to the information and consultation directive which were agreed in the European Parliament on 23 October on the regulatory burden on small business in the UK. [10985]

Alan Johnson: The proposed directive will not affect small businesses and the European Parliament's proposed amendments do not alter this fact. In the UK the directive will apply to undertakings with 50 or more employees and will, therefore, only affect about 1 per cent. of UK businesses.

WORK AND PENSIONS

International Labour Conference

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library the instruments adopted at the 88th session of the International Labour Conference. [13104]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The 88th session of the International Labour Conference adopted a new convention revising the Maternity Protection Convention 1952 and a Recommendation supplementing the convention. The texts of the instruments have been placed in the Library.

Child Support

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much the CSA is owed in unpaid maintenance. [11584]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Colin Pickthall, dated 1 November 2001:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the Child Support Agency.

You asked how much the CSA is owed in unpaid maintenance.

The amount of maintenance that is owed as at year ending March 2001 is £527.80million.

In the year 2000/2001 our target was to reduce the amount of outstanding debt by 25%. We met that target and have set ourselves the same challenge for 2001/2002.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if new benefit claimants living in the postcode areas laid out in Schedule 1 of the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001 will be required to visit a new Jobcentre Plus office rather than an existing Benefits Agency or Employment Service office; [12452]

(2) at which office new benefit claimants residing in SW14 will have to attend for compulsory work-focused interviews with reference to Schedule 1 of the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001. [12453]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus will start to roll out nationally next year. At present, only people of working age living within the postcode areas that are served by Jobcentre Plus pathfinders or work-focused interview sites will be required to visit those offices to claim benefits. Other people will continue to make their claims through their local Benefits Agency office or Employment Service Jobcentre. These regulations are not being applied to people who live within the postcode area SW14.

Sign Language

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what help is available for those who wish to pursue signing courses to help with the advancement of an understanding of sign language. [8903]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

Sign language courses are currently available through a range of FE colleges, universities and schools. There are currently four registered centres for the provision of British sign language training in Gloucestershire. Information about the availability of these courses can be obtained from Careers Services, Connexions Services and providers of information, advice and guidance for adult learners.

The Learning and Skills Council has access to funds to meet or stimulate demand for learning, including signing. For provision that is not publicly funded, my Department can provide individuals with a career development loan covering up to 80 per cent. of the cost of their training.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

St. Barnabas Reading

38. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners,

if he will make a statement on the financial consequences of the actions of the Diocese of Oxford with regard to St. Barnabas church in Reading. [10059]

Mr. Bell: The Diocese of Oxford is considering proposals for the pastoral reorganisation of the benefice and parish in which St. Barnabas is situated, but has not yet taken any action with respect to this church which has financial consequences.

The Church Commissioners have a quasi-judicial role which they might have to exercise in respect of any proposals made by the diocese, so I am not able to take the matter further on the Floor of the House.

Inter-faith Dialogue

39. **Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what spending the Commission has allocated for policies designed to encourage inter-faith dialogue. [10060]

Mr. Bell: None. The Church Commissioners' primary legal responsibility is to manage their assets for the support of the Church of England's serving and retired ministry.

Inter-faith policy is not directly a matter for the commissioners.

Works of Art

40. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what his policy is on the sale of works of art owned by the Church of England. [10061]

Mr. Bell: The majority of such works of art are owned by parish churches and cathedrals. Their disposal is governed by legislation.

The commissioners own relatively few of the Church of England's works of art. They would consider any sale on its merits, in the light of their wider legal duties, and in consultation with interested parties.

Child Care

41. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what money the commissioners have received for child care related matters in the last 12 months; and how it is used. [10062]

Mr. Bell: The commissioners' primary legal responsibility is the financial support of the Church of England's serving and retired ministry. They receive no funds for child care related matters.

Historic Buildings (VAT)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what representations the Commissioners have made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about remission of VAT on repairs and conservation work to historic churches and chapels since 7 March. [10057]

Mr. Bell: The Church of England and other faiths have welcomed the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that churches would be eligible to receive reimbursement equivalent to a reduction in VAT payable on the repair and maintenance of listed buildings from 17.5 per cent. to 5 per cent.

The Church has been included in consultation over the implementation of the scheme. We understand this is imminent and that eligible claims will be considered for all work undertaken from 1 April 2001.

PRIME MINISTER

Tibet

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Prime Minister when he will meet the Chinese Vice-President during his visit to the UK this month; and if he will raise the issue of Tibet. [11153]

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he and other Ministers had with the Vice-President of China about the position of Tibet during his recent visit; and if he will make a statement. [12196]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I met Vice-President Hu Jintao on 29 October. The main focus of our discussion was the international coalition against terrorism, but we also discussed a range of other issues including Tibet. Tibet was discussed in detail in a meeting on 30 October between the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing, who was accompanying the Vice-President.

Anthrax

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the holdings of anthrax by the Iraqi Government, with special reference to the particular strains held. [12583]

The Prime Minister: After years of denial, Iraq eventually declared to UNSCOM in 1995 that it had produced anthrax as a biological weapon fill for ballistic missile warheads and bombs. It declared it had possessed a number of different strains of the micro-organism. At the time, Iraq claimed to have already destroyed all of its BW weapons and agents. However, it did not provide the evidence, then or subsequently, to enable UNSCOM to verify this.

Contingency Planning

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Prime Minister what sub-committees he has constituted to support the Civil Contingencies Committee in its review of the country's contingency planning arrangements. [12962]

The Prime Minister: I have directed that three new sub-committees be constituted to make recommendations within the remit of the Civil Contingencies Committee.

The Civil Contingencies Committee is a long-standing committee. Its composition and terms of reference are set out together with those of three new sub-committees.

Civil Contingencies Committee

Composition:

Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chairman);

Others, including HM Treasury and the devolved Administrations, will be invited to attend, depending on the contingency.

Terms of Reference:

"To co-ordinate the preparation of plans for ensuring in an emergency the supplies and services essential to the life of the community; to keep these plans under regular review; and to supervise their prompt and effective implementation in specific emergencies."

Sub committee on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear consequence management—CCC(CBRN)

Composition:

Minister of State with responsibility for crime reduction, policing and community safety—the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham)—(Chairman).

Officials from:

HM Treasury

Home Office

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Ministry of Defence

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Department of Trade and Industry

Department of Health

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Northern Ireland Office

Scotland Office

Wales Office.

The devolved Administrations are invited to attend as are others in accordance with their expertise, experience and responsibilities.

Terms of reference:

"To review contingency and other arrangements to protect the UK against the effects of a terrorist attack using chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear means, particularly in the light of the terrorist attacks of 11 September."

Sub committee on London resilience—CCC(LR)

Composition:

Minister for Local Government (Chairman)

Officials from:

HM Treasury

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Home Office

Government Office for London.

Others, including the Mayor of London, are invited to attend in accordance with their experience and expertise and in order to engage all responsible organisations in London.

Terms of reference:

"To review contingency arrangements for London, particularly in the light of the terrorist attacks of 11 September."

Sub committee on UK resilience—CCC(UKR)

Composition:

Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chairman)

Officials from:

HM Treasury

Home Office

Ministry of Defence

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Department of Trade and Industry

Department of Health

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Northern Ireland Office

Scotland Office

Wales Office.

Others, including the devolved Administrations, are invited to attend in accordance with their expertise, experience and responsibilities.

Terms of reference:

"To review contingency arrangements for key suppliers, services and other systems which support the life of the community, particularly in the light of the terrorist attacks of 11 September."

Downing Street

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister how many people are employed at *(a)* No. 10 Downing street and *(b)* the Cabinet Office; and how many were employed there on 1 May 1997. [7134]

The Prime Minister: On 1 September, there were 5,284 staff employed by the Cabinet Office, of whom 175 staff were on the payroll of No. 10. Of these Cabinet Office staff, 2,458 worked in the Government Offices for the Regions.

Staff numbers of 1 May 1997 are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Assassination

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what the Government's policy is on the assassination of enemy leaders. [11645]

The Prime Minister: Our policy is to act in accordance with UK and international law. One of our key objectives in the on-going military action in Afghanistan is to bring Osama bin Laden to justice.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes in implementation date he anticipates for the following projects owing to the change of ownership of Railtrack, *(a)* west coast main line in Scotland (i) overhead line equipment, (ii) electrical distribution systems, (iii) power supply systems and (iv) supervisory control and date acquisition system, *(b)* Edinburgh Waverley, *(c)* Glasgow Central, *(d)* Scottish Express routes, *(e)* automatic warning systems on Girvan to Stranraer, *(f)* Mossend interlocking renewal, *(g)* signal interlocking renewal at Glasgow Central, *(h)* service improvements throughout the Edinburgh urban routes, *(i)* new station at Beauly, *(j)* train protection on routes currently signalled using RETB in the Highland rural route and *(k)* Edinburgh Crossrail. [10396]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack's administration should not itself affect project implementation. The administrator has taken over Railtrack's contractual commitments and the Government will ensure that he has sufficient funds to maintain the full operation of the network. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would expect any changes to contracts commitments to be agreed with the parties to the contracts and with the Strategic Rail Authority.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the decision to place Railtrack in administration on the value of local authority pension funds; [12239]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with local authorities on the impact of the Government's intervention in Railtrack on the value of local authority pensions funds. [12238]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* My Department is in regular touch with all the interested parties on the effectiveness of the regulations that govern local authorities' responsibility for the management and investment of their pension funds. The regulations are designed to ensure that pension fund portfolios are adequately diversified and so be able to withstand changes in market conditions.

London Underground

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) at which discount rate used for the sensitivity analyses of the effect of changing discount rates on the relative levels of the public sector comparator and the bids for the London Underground PPPs a switching point or switching points were found; and if he will make a statement; [10464]

(2) which discount rates were used for sensitivity analysis of the effect of changing discount rates on the relative levels of the public sector comparator and the bids for the London Underground PPPs; and if he will make a statement. [10472]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's plans for a publicly run, privately built tube will deliver around £13 billion of investment to improve the underground's infrastructure over the next 15 years. London Transport has yet to receive final bids on these plans. Consequently, it is too early to say whether changing the discount rate will lead to a switching point.

When final bids are received they will be evaluated for value for money on a variety of financing and discounting scenarios.

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many lines on the London Underground were subject to delayed or cancelled services on Tuesday 23 October; what the cause and length of the subsequent delay was for each line; and if more than one line was affected at any one time. [11559]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for London Underground, which confirms that 10 lines (Central, Circle, District, East London, Hammersmith & City, Jubilee, Metropolitan, Northern, Piccadilly, Waterloo & City) were affected by delays (of at least 15 minutes) and/or cancellations. They have provided details of delays, their cause and duration as follows:

Incidents, which were a cause of significant train delays and cancellations on Tuesday, 23 October 2001

Time	*Location*	*Nature of incident*	*Delay (minutes)*
04.24	Royal Oak	Late engineering work. Hammersmith & City Line suspended between Edgware Road to Hammersmith. Circle Line stock was prevented from reaching the service area from Hammersmith depot.	59
04.59	Rayners Lane	No signalman. Service suspended on the Piccadilly Line between South Harrow to Uxbridge and Metropolitan Line between Harrow-on-the-Hill and Uxbridge.	66
05.18	Blackfriars	Late engineering work. District Line suspended between South Kensington and Whitechapel.	28
06.08	Watford	Alleged (subsequently unfounded) signal irregularity. Metropolitan Line suspended between Northwood and Watford.	85
08.06	Canary Wharf	Jubilee Line suspended between Canary Wharf and Stratford due to security alert (white powder found).	65
09.01	Whitechapel	Security alert. Suspensions on the District (Tower Hill to Whitechapel), Hammersmith & City (Plaistow to Liverpool Street) and East London Lines (Shoreditch to Canada Water), due to a suspected World War II bomb (found to be a pipe).	75
10.45	Mansion House	Fire alert. Westbound service on the Circle and District Lines delayed.	20
11.23	Gloucester Road	Fire alert. Westbound service on the Circle and District and Lines delayed.	25
11.48	High Street Kensington	Fire alert. Service suspended between High Street Kensington and Edgware Road on the Circle and District Lines.	47
15.24	High Street Kensington	Report of persons on track. District Line suspended between Earls Court and Edgware Road. Circle Line suspended.	68
16.50	Stratford	Signal failure. Eastbound service on Jubilee Line delayed.	16
17.23	Moorgate	Signal failure. Metropolitan, Circle and Hammersmith & City Lines suspended between Edgware Road and Aldgate.	45
18.09	North Greenwich	Signal failure. Jubilee Line suspended between London Bridge and Stratford.	203
18.19	Ealing Broadway	Security alert. Services suspended to North Acton (Central Line) and Turnham Green (District Line).	34
22.19	London Bridge	Security alert. Northern Line suspended between Kennington to Camden Town.	22
23.31	Royal Oak	Obstruction on track. Hammersmith & City Line suspended between Edgware Road and Hammersmith.	45

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to replace the current fixed block signalling system on London Underground lines with more modern systems; if the moving block computerised system has been considered as an alternative; and when new systems are likely to be implemented. [11561]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for London Underground Ltd. to consider.

London Underground has undertaken £84 million of signalling improvements since the Government announced plans for the modernisation of the tube on 20 May 1998. A further £27 million of improvements are being undertaken in this financial year.

The tube modernisation plans will deliver a massive increase in the level of investment across the underground. Examples of signalling improvements to be delivered in the first period of the contracts include new signals on the Northern line to get the full benefit from the new trains; replacement of the Victoria line signals as part of a complete modernisation package; an upgrade of the Jubilee line signalling; a new signalling control centre on the Piccadilly line; improved signal reliability on the Bakerloo line; and greater signal capacity for the Waterloo and City line. In addition, all the signalling on the Circle, District and Metropolitan lines will be renewed in the next 10 years.

The signalling improvements to be delivered are specified in terms of the outputs required; it is for bidders to decide what type of technology will best achieve the necessary results.

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many delays on London Underground were reported to have been caused by problems with *(a)* track and signalling and *(b)* rolling stock in the latest year that figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [11560]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for London Underground, which defines delays as intervals of 15 minutes or more, which is the threshold for granting refunds to passengers under the customer charter. In 2000–01, the latest complete year for which data on delays are available, delays were attributed as follows: *(a)* track on 236 occasions, and signals on 662 occasions; *(b)* rolling stock on 569 occasions.

Rail Upgrades (North-East)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans and programmes there were for *(a)* the upgrade of the east coast main line and *(b)* for upgrades and extensions of rail lines in the north-east of England as at 1 October. [10924]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) announced on 14 September that they had allocated £17.5 million for development work for phase two of the project to upgrade the east coast main line. The SRA is also considering a number of applications for funding from the rail passengers partnership scheme including provision of passenger services over the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line and to reopen the Leamside line.

The SRA intends to submit its strategic plan to Ministers by the end of November which will set out its priorities for enhancement to the network.

Local Parks

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to ensure everyone has access to local parks. [10774]

Ms Keeble: We have established the urban green spaces task force to assist my Department in developing policies and proposals for the future of parks, play areas and green spaces. Ensuring that people have easy access to their local parks and other green spaces is an issue which is being considered and for which we will develop proposals.

County Hall

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what amount is outstanding from the sale of County hall, London SE1 to the Shiryam group; how long it has been outstanding; if interest is being charged, and when the balance will be paid in full. [11199]

Dr. Whitehead: The contract for the sale of County hall provided for a deferred sum of £10 million to be paid to the London residuary body from April 1996, subject to the full sum being paid by 2012. Following the winding up of the London residuary body on 29 March 1996, the London borough of Bromley inherited the remaining rights and liabilities in respect of County hall, including those in relation to the payment of this sum. I understand that, in line with the contractual terms, no interest is due and no amount has yet been paid to Bromley.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what salary the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority will receive. [11220]

Mr. Spellar: This information is set out in the press release issued by my Department on 24 October about this appointment, a copy of which is in the House Library.

Jubilee Line

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many signal failures were reported on the Jubilee line for the five days from Monday 22 October to Friday 26 October inclusive. [11558]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand from London Underground Ltd. that there were seven signal failures during this period. The recurring problem has been identified and corrected. Its cause is under investigation. Recovery from signal failures on Monday 22 and Tuesday 23 was hampered by a passenger taken ill on a train and a security alert respectively.

Local Government (City of Westminster)

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to publish the research into public attitudes to local government structures in the City of Westminster. [11644]

Dr. Whitehead: We are currently editing the report of this research for publication, and will issue it in due course. I will write to the hon. Member when the report is published, and place a copy in the Libraries of the House.

Crossrail

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what his latest estimate is of the total cost of completing the Crossrail project; [11654]

(2) what proportion of funding for Crossrail will be required from the private sector. [11653]

Mr. Jamieson: The assumption in the 10-year plan is that construction of Crossrail is to be fully financed by the private sector. In advance of detailed economic appraisal of the options it is difficult to provide an accurate estimate of the cost of the project. Almost £3.5 billion was included in the 10-year-plan as a broad indication of the cost of the infrastructure and new rolling stock. Public support is assumed to be provided in the form of subsequent revenue support, but will depend on the precise project and on negotiations with the rail industry.

A total of £154 million of public funding has been allocated, jointly to the Strategic Rail Authority and Transport for London, for preparation costs of the project in 2001–02 to 2003–04.

White Horse (Folkestone)

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from English Nature on the proposal for a white horse on the downs above Folkestone since the end of the inquiry into the proposal. [12866]

Ms Keeble: We have received no further representations on this case from English Nature since the inquiry.

Greater London Authority

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what was the *(a)* percentage real-terms increase in the precept on average domestic rates by the Greater London Council in each year from 1975 to its abolition and *(b)* real-terms increase in the precept on band D council tax by the Greater London Authority since its creation; and if he will make a statement; [12579]

(2) what was *(a)* the percentage increase in the precept on average domestic rates by the Greater London Council in each year from 1975 to its abolition and *(b)* the increase in the precept on band D council tax by the Greater London Authority since is creation; and if he will make a statement. [12578]

Mr. Byers: The available information is given in the tables. We shall this week be laying regulations to ensure that percentage cash increases in precepts, including the Greater London Authority's, will be shown clearly on council tax bills from next year.

Greater London Council

	Total rate levied pence in the £	*Cash increase percentage*	*Real terms[1] percentage*
1974–75	8.90	[3]—	[3]—
1975–76	16.20	82.0	45.4
1976–77	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
1977–78[2]	16.10	[3]—	[3]—
1978–79	16.10	0.0	–9.9
1979–80	17.80	10.6	–5.3
1980–81	19.40	9.0	–7.8
1981–82	22.90	18.0	7.8
1982–83	32.70	42.8	33.5
1983–84	37.66	15.2	10.2
1984–85	34.69	–7.9	–12.5
1985–86	33.74	–2.7	–7.8

[1] Adjusted using the GDP deflator at market prices
[2] Figures for 1977–78 onwards are taken from a different publication from those for earlier years and so may be on a slightly different basis
[3] Not available
[4] Not applicable, as the Greater London Authority did not exist in 1999–2000
Sources:
DOE and Welsh Office "Rates and Rateable Values in England and Wales", 1974–75 and 1975–76 editions
CIPFA "Financial, General & Rating Statistics", 1977–78 to 1981–82 editions
CIPFA "Financial and General Statistics" 1982–83 to 1985–86 editions
BR returns for 2000–01 and 2001–02

Greater London Authority

	Council tax per band D property (£)	*Cash increase (percentage)*	*Real terms[1] (percentage)*
2000–01	122.98	[2]—	[2]—
2001–02	150.88	22.7	19.7

[1] Adjusted using the GDP deflator at market prices
[2] Figures for 1977–78 onwards are taken from a different publication from those for earlier years and so may be on a slightly different basis
Sources:
DOE and Welsh Office "Rates and Rateable Values in England and Wales", 1974–75 and 1975–76 editions
CIPFA "Financial, General & Rating Statistics", 1977–78 to 1981–82 editions
CIPFA "Financial and General Statistics", 1982–83 to 1985–86 editions
BR returns for 2000–01 and 2001–02

Regional Planning

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) further to the publication of PPG 11, what plans his Department has to increase the scope of regional planning; and if he will make a statement; [12572]

(2) what plans his Department has to issue new or revised national planning policy guidance in the next 12 months; if he will list the new guidance notes; and if he will make a statement. [12573]

Mr. Byers: I shall be issuing a Green Paper shortly setting out proposals for comprehensive reform of the planning system.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to issue new or revised regional planning policy guidance in the next 12 months; if he will list the new guidance notes; and if he will make a statement. [12574]

Mr. Byers: Regional planning guidance is issued by the Government offices. Since November 2000, revised regional planning policy guidance has been issued for East Anglia (RPG 6), the south-east (RPG 9), the

south-west (RPG 10) and Yorkshire and the Humber (RPG 12). Over the next 12 months, new or revised regional planning policy guidance is due to be issued for the east midlands (RPG 8), the north-east (RPG 1) and the north-west (RPG 13). Draft revised regional planning guidance (RPG 11) for the west midlands, as prepared by the west midlands local government association, will be published for consultation very shortly.

Elections

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to increase turnout in *(a)* London Assembly and mayoral elections and *(b)* European parliamentary elections. [12581]

Mr. Byers: As the Electoral Commission stated in its report on the 2001 general election:

> "responsibility for re-engaging the electorate with the democratic process must rest in large part with the political parties".

However, our programme for modernising electoral processes is aimed at improving access to electoral services for all elections. As a first step in October, we, in conjunction with the Electoral Commission and the Local Government Association, invited local authorities to apply to run innovative electoral pilot projects—including all-postal voting and online voting—at next May's local elections. We will consider how to take forward any lessons learned from those pilots in the London Assembly and mayoral elections and in the European parliamentary elections. The Electoral Commission is also examining the underlying reasons for low turnout and we will consider any conclusions they reach very carefully.

3G Technology

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the *(a)* Treasury and *(b)* Department of Trade and Industry concerning 3G mobile phone licences. [12570]

Mr. Byers: This Department had no discussion with either the Treasury or the Department of Trade and Industry over the awarding of the 3G mobile phone licences to the five successful bidders. Officials in this Department liaised with officials in the Department of Trade and Industry over the production of the information memorandum sent to prospective participants in the 3G auction to ensure that it contained accurate details of the planning regime as it applied to telecommunications apparatus.

From time to time, officials in this Department liaise with officials in the Department of Trade and Industry on specific licence conditions, such as conditions requiring operators to explore the possibility of mast sharing.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimates his Department has made of the increase in demand for additional mobile phone masts that will result from the implementation of 3G technology; and if he will make a statement. [12569]

Mr. Byers: This is a matter for the individual telecommunications operators. However, the operators are fully aware of the importance we attach to keeping the number of masts to the minimum practicable, for example through mast sharing, and to ensuring that those which are needed are designed and sited with sensitivity and care.

Schooling (Hackney)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what role he has played in the provision of schooling in the London borough of Hackney. [12580]

Mr. Byers: The provision of schooling is a matter for the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. My Department pays revenue and capital grants to local authorities for a range of local services including the provision of schooling.

Loft Conversions

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to require planning permission to be obtained for loft conversions; and if he will make a statement. [12457]

Ms Keeble: Currently, loft conversions may or may not require planning applications depending on the circumstances of the case and the relevant permitted development rights. We will set out proposals for the future in our planning Green Paper.

Park Homes

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation in relation to park homes; and if he will make a statement. [12454]

Ms Keeble: Changes to the legislation relating to park homes were included in the recommendations of the park homes working party. We have consulted on, and are considering, the working party's recommendations. We hope to be able to announce our conclusions on this shortly.

Motorcyclists

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what restrictions apply to the wearing of black visors by motorcyclists. [12249]

Mr. Jamieson: Visors worn by motorcyclists on a road must either comply with British Standard BS4110:1979 (as amended) or with UN ECE Regulation 22.05. These standards allow visors to have a moderate tint which allows at least 50 per cent. of the light to pass through.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many publications were issued by her Department in each of the last four years. [11833]

Clare Short: Since 1997 we have published all our major strategy documents, including all country and institutional strategy papers, as well as major consultation papers and speeches. Our publishing output has therefore expanded considerably.

Due to the disproportionate cost involved we are not able to provide the full level of details requested. However within the main categories we have produced:

Category	*2001–02*	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*Total*
White papers	—	1	—	—	1
Country strategy papers	4	10	12	18	44
Institutional strategy papers	5	9	6	2	22
Consultation papers (IDTs)	—	1	8	—	9
Target strategy papers (TSPs)	1	8	—	—	9
Background briefings	15	6	3	3	27
Speech booklets	1	8	11	8	28
Issues of Developments magazine	2	4	4	4	14

We also produce a publications catalogue which is updated every six months and lists the majority of departmental publications produced since 1997, together with information on how to obtain copies. A copy of the latest edition (October 2001) has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Belize

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 41–42W, on Belize, if she will place in the Library copies of the documents which recorded the conversation between her Permanent Secretary and the senior partner of KPMG on 18 May. [11615]

Clare Short: The conversation was confidential to the parties concerned.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what date her Department obtained legal advice on the validity and applicability of the 1982 Britain-Belize Investor Protection Treaty for the Public Investment Companies with regard to the study commissioned by her Department to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes; what the conclusion of this legal advice was; on what date this advice was passed to the Government of Belize; and if she will place in the Library a copy of this advice. [11602]

Clare Short: Counsel's advice was received on 7 September and passed to the Government of Belize on 13 September. The advice is confidential to the UK and Belize Governments.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if her Department requested KPMG to assess whether the 1982 Britain-Belize Investor Protection Treaty applied to the public investment companies during the study commissioned by her Department to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes; when this request was made by her Department; what the conclusion of this assessment was; and if she will place in the Library a copy of KPMG's assessment. [11604]

Clare Short: The request was implicit in the terms of reference for the study KPMG was contracted to undertake on 11 July 2000. KPMG's conclusion on this assessment was recorded in their report on the study. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 11 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 531W, concerning the confidentiality of the KPMG report.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 13 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 653W, on Belize, if she will place in the Library *(a)* a copy of the correspondence of 25 August 2000 in which her Department was informed by KPMG that KPMG were the external auditors of the Belize Bank and *(b)* copies of responses made by her Department to KPMG following the receipt of this correspondence. [11611]

Clare Short: A copy of the letter dated 25 August 2000 to DFID will be placed in the Library. The enclosures referred to in that letter are confidential to the parties concerned. No written response was made to this letter.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what meetings her Department has held since 3 August with the Government of Belize to discuss progress on the Commonwealth debt initiative and the effect of tax exemptions and public investment companies on pro-poor programmes; where each of these meetings took place; and which departments of the Government of Belize attended. [11603]

Clare Short: Following my decision on CDI, referred to in my answer to question [6605] and sent to you during the recess, I met with Prime Minister Said Musa in London on 22 October to discuss this and other matters relevant to Belize.

India

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects her Department supports in India; and what the amount of grants is in each case. [11395]

Clare Short: All project support to India is provided in the form of grants. The table provides details of active projects and total financial commitment.

£

SI Number	Projects	Total commitment
Andhra Pradesh		
1	Andhra Pradesh Energy Efficiency Project	42,700,000
2	Andhra Pradesh Power Sector Reform Project	31,500,000
3	Andhra Pradesh Economic Restructuring Project	5,300,000
4	Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project	45,543,000
5	Andhra Pradesh Urban Services for the Poor	94,413,000
6	Impact and Expenditure Review for Government of Andhra Pradesh Project	600,000
7	Andhra Pradesh Governance Reform Project	5,900,000
Karnataka		
8	Karnataka Watershed Development Project	14,758,000
9	IISD/MYRADA—Project on developing appreciative inquiry technique	105,052
10	Western Ghats Forestry Project	23,294,000
11	OXFAM—Western Ghats Parallel Project	173,643
West Bengal		
12	West Bengal Sexual Health Project	4,780,000
13	Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project	8,091,000
14	Calcutta Slum Improvement Project	12,620,000
15	West Bengal Reproductive and Child Health Project	2,990,000
16	ADB—Calcutta Environment Improvement Project	28,300,000
17	Christian Aid and Churches Auxiliary for Social Action Project	1,200,000
18	Enhancing Pro-poor Governance in West Bengal and Bihar	212,000
Madhya Pradesh		
19	Support to Self Employed Womens Association	14,000
20	Madhya Pradesh Public Resource Management Project	350,000
21	Western India Rainfed Farming Project Phase II	27,920,000
22	Bihar—Madhya Pradesh Tribal Development Project	7,000,000
23	Natural Resources Management Project in the Bundelkhund Region	1,170,000
24	Indore Financial Services for the Poor Project	79,000
Orissa		
25	Western Orissa Rural Livelihoods Project	32,750,000
26	IFAD Tribal Development Project	25,000
27	Orissa Power Sector Aid	67,000,000
28	Hirakund Rehabilitation Project	21,400,000
29	Orissa Gridco (Power Sector Reform) Restructuring Project	6,000,000
30	Energy: Orissa Rural Community Electric Supplies (CENDERET project)	1,000,000
31	Energy: Dadri Dry Ash Disposal Project	1,700,000
32	Orissa Power Sector Reform: Field Management	4,013,037
33	Orissa Public Sector Reforms Programme	19,000,000
34	Orissa Budgetary Aid—Design Phase	25,000
35	Orissa Health and Family Welfare Project Phase 3	3,827,000
36	Orissa Social Marketing—PSI	2,270,000
37	Orissa Urban Reproductive Health Project	4,997,780
38	Cuttack Urban Slum Improvement Project	12,720,000
39	Orissa cyclone rehabilitation initiatives	57,848,850
National		
40	ILO-International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour	2,860,000
41	Revised National Tuberculosis Project	20,570,000
42	WHO Operational Research on Tuberculosis	719,370
43	World Bank Trust Fund	4,000,000
44	ADB-Poverty Trust Fund	20,000,000
45	CARE: Credit and Saving for Household Enterprises Project	9,852,401
46	Haryana power Sector Reform and Restructuring Project	15,000,000
47	Indo/UK collaboration on Oil Seed crops Phase II	2,000,000
48	Development of Watershed Guidelines Project	60,000
49	Forestry Training Project	2,020,000
50	Integrated Coastal zone management training Project	1,000,000
51	Private Sector Forestry Project	114,000
52	Rural Development Programme Support Fund	100,000
53	Education: Shiksha Karmi Project Phase II	20,140,000
54	Education: Lok Jumbish Project	31,423,000
55	Pulse Polio Project	40,813,000
56	Poorest Areas Civil Society Programme	27,000,000
57	STD: Truck Drivers (Support to HIV/AIDS programme targeted at the Highway community)	4,500,000
58	Partnership for Sexual Health Project (Support to HIV/AIDS Programme)	28,180,000
59	Gender Centre	2,000,000
60	Public Administration training project	4,650,000
61	Training Development of Indian Police	1,180,000

£

SI Number	Projects	Total commitment
62	BBC Marshall Plan for the Mind Project	1,217,825
63	Small Industries Development Banking of India support project	16,585,000
64	Community Ophthalmology Blindness programme support	1,119,754
65	Environment and Poverty Link	200,000
66	Health Systems policy development support	800,000
67	Management Development for senior urban public health officials	1,460,000
68	UNDP Monitoring and Evaluation Project	60,000
69	Small Grants Scheme	212,000
70	Water and sanitation Programme-South Asia	2,520,000
71	Credit and Micro-enterprise support project	500,000
72	UNICEF: Child Environment Improvement Project	17,500,000
73	District Primary Education Project (AP+WB+Orissa)	166,416,000
Others		
74	Himachal Pradesh Forestry Project	6,399,000
75	Cochin Urban Poverty Reduction Project	11,947,000
76	Natural Resources Management Project in the Western Himalayas	182,000

Tajikistan

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the extent of poverty and malnutrition in Tajikistan; and what aid has been offered to Tajikistan by the United Kingdom *(a)* directly and *(b)* through the programmes of the EU and United Nations. [10923]

Clare Short: Reliable data on Tajikistan are scarce. It is one of the poorest countries of the former Soviet Union, with rates of acute malnutrition ranging between 6.4 and 10.3 per cent. in different areas.

Since 1994, the United Kingdom has offered a total of £29.7 million to Tajikistan. Of this, £1 million has been through DFID's direct programme. DFID has also channelled £9.5 million into humanitarian assistance. £11.8 million has been provided through the European Commission, mainly to ECHO (EC Humanitarian Office) programmes. £1 million has been allocated to ECHO this year. £1.2 million has been offered to Tajikistan through programmes of the United Nations.

DEFENCE

Harrier Pilots

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total requirement is for trained Harrier pilots in the *(a)* Navy and *(b)* RAF; and how many there are at present in each case. [11578]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The naval requirement for Sea Harrier pilots (Commander and below) as at 1 October 2001 was 64, with an authorised increase to 66 planned for 1 April 2003. The current naval strength (Commander and below) is 44. The Royal Air Force requires 85 Harrier pilots to fill Harrier GR7-specific flying and flying related ground appointments (Wing Commander and below). It has a current strength of 102 Harrier pilots. A number of these are filling career broadening posts such as staff appointments, or are serving as qualified flying instructors or with the RAF Aerobatic Team, and some are on exchange postings.

Retention

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to improve retention rates within the armed forces. [10067]

Mr. Ingram: Armed forces retention is being tackled as a matter of the highest priority. Our aim is to maintain good levels of retention through policies that genuinely reflect the priorities of our people and their families, both at home and on deployment. A key outcome of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) was a widespread recognition of the need for an Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy (AFOPS) as part of the 'Policy for People'. This was introduced in April 2000 to give more emphasis to personal issues. The SDR 'Policy for People' included some of the following aims: better terms and conditions; improvements to pay and allowances; better quality of training; addressing concerns about family life; ensuring equality of opportunity and provision of better accommodation. All these have now been embodied in the AFOPS Action Plan.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is to improve the career prospects and retention of young service men and women; and if he will make a statement. [10570]

Mr. Ingram: A wide range of challenging careers are offered to both young men and women joining the services. We need over 25,000 high quality, well motivated recruits each year to maintain the correct balance of age and experience; and the need for and success of training is therefore crucial to the continuing operational success of our armed forces. The Defence Training Review, completed earlier this year, emphasised the importance of transferable qualifications to both the recruitment and the retention of personnel in the armed forces. An earlier scheme to come out of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) was the 'Learning Forces Initiative' which provides opportunities for service personnel to gain transferable skills and recognised civilian qualifications, not only improving and enriching their service careers but also preparing them for their second careers. The armed forces are also working closely with a number of key authorities to deliver increased recognition of service education and training leading to academic, vocational and professional qualifications. In

summary, the armed forces provide attractive career prospects by offering: high quality training; accreditation of training wherever possible, against nationally recognised standards; a wide range of professionally demanding jobs, with many offering significant amounts of responsibility early on in careers; good promotion opportunities; encouragement to serve to age 40 or beyond; and provision of education facilities and grants to assist with the cost of education.

Armed forces retention is being tackled as a matter of the highest priority. Our aim is to maintain good levels of retention through policies that genuinely reflect the priorities of our people and their families, both at home and on deployment. A key outcome of the Strategic Defence Review was a widespread recognition of the need for an Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy (AFOPS) as part of the 'Policy for People'. This was introduced in April 2000 to give more emphasis to personnel issues. The SDR 'Policy for People' included some of the following aims: better terms and conditions; improvements to pay and allowances; better quality of training; addressing concerns about family life; ensuring equality of opportunity and provision of better accommodation. New initiatives are under way in all of these areas.

Armed Forces (Pensions)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the report on the armed forces pension scheme will be published. [10108]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 319W.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by his Department; if he will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans he has to sell further such assets over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review; and if he will make a statement. [10837]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence has approximately 250 significant antiques, such as clocks and furniture, together with many more having little intrinsic value but some historic interest to the Department. The Department also has approximately 800 works of fine art, together with many more miscellaneous items of little intrinsic value, such as photographs, reproductions, maps and manuscripts. The Department has no stocks of fine wines. None of these assets has been sold over the last three years, and there are no plans to sell any over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review. The terms of bequest of many of the most important pieces prohibit disposal. Additionally, the Department is responsible for the many Regimental Museums throughout the country, whose collections are open to the public, and for minor collections of publicly owned works of art, such as the Sandhurst Collection, which are displayed at the Royal Military Academy.

Debt of Honour Register

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set up a website giving a debt of honour register similar to that on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, to provide personal and service details and places of commemoration for those armed forces personnel who have served and died for their country since the second world war. [12666]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently no plans to set up a website to commemorate those service personnel who have died since the end of the Second World War. However, the subject is being considered as an additional initiative which could be undertaken in collaboration with the proposals to establish a new memorial to armed forces personnel who have died in the post-war years, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 10 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 414W.

Challenger 2

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Challenger 2 main battle tanks failed to complete Exercise Saif Sareea 2 because of mechanical or technical problems. [11636]

Mr. Hoon: A total of 65 Challenger 2 were deployed on Exercise Saif Sareea 2. The exercise was designed, deliberately, to test the military equipment and personnel deployed on it. Its duration, complexity and the very harsh environmental conditions in which it was conducted combined to offer an excellent training opportunity, enabling us to identify, under realistic conditions, the challenges we might face in future operations. Complex equipment requires routine maintenance to ensure continued peak performance, resulting in temporary periods of non-availability. This is entirely to be expected for deployments of this nature and represents an integral part of the training process.

Experience gained from the early stages of the exercise in logistically sustaining the Challenger 2 fleet required some rescoping of the exercise programme to ensure that the required supply of spares could be sustained. Against this revised programme of activity, the average availability of Challenger 2 was in excess of 80 per cent. and would have been higher if there had not been a delay in a routine supply of track spares.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the expected life is of airfilters used in Challenger 2 main battle tanks in desert conditions. [11638]

Dr. Moonie: The designed life of the Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank air filter was 14 hours when used in extreme desert conditions. Work is currently in hand to determine whether the expected life of the air filter needs to be adjusted in the light of recent experience gained from operating the tank in desert conditions. Stock levels will be adjusted accordingly.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the cost of converting Challenger 2 main battle tanks for desert conditions. [11637]

Dr. Moonie: Two options have been investigated for the desertisation of Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks (CR2 MBT). The first involves a modification package,

and would cost approximately £140,000 per tank. The second option, which involves remodelling the main engine compartment, is based on the Omani CR2 MBT. This would cost approximately £250,000 per tank.

Army Foundation College

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a decision will be made on the establishment of an Army Foundation College in Dundee; and where the other proposed sites are for this establishment. [12186]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The Army needs to attract good quality young people by providing excellent education and work-related training in good facilities. The Army Foundation College (AFC) at Harrogate in Yorkshire provides this, but is currently oversubscribed. The Army are working on new proposals for a second more flexible college for the provision of improved facilities for a range of abilities and age groups. Various alternatives are under study, including establishing a second AFC delivered through partnership. If it were decided to pursue a second college by way of a Public Private Partnership, it would be announced through the Official Journal of the European Community in the normal way. It would then be open for an proposals for the college, including its location, to be put forward for consideration as part of the competitive process. We anticipate a variety of sites, including existing Ministry of Defence and other locations, to be proposed.

A decision on the way forward is unlikely before next year.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the royal prerogative in the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9369]

Dr. Moonie: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised nor could it be practicable to do so.

Pharmaceutical Plants (Security)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to ensure that plants which manufacture antibiotics for the treatment of anthrax and other biological or chemical weapons are given enhanced security. [10589]

Mr. Ingram: The level of security in place at commercial establishments that manufacture antibiotics and other agents to counter biological or chemical weapons is based on the threat pertaining to that establishment. In the first instance, security is a matter for the owners/operators of the establishments. Beyond that, security rests with the police who can, if they feel the threat is beyond their capacity, call on established procedures to augment security, for example, through military assistance, at such establishments. The security of such facilities is also under active review as a result of the events of 11 September.

Role 3 Field Hospital

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much funding he is providing for the establishment of a Role 3 field hospital in partnership with the Netherlands; and if he will make a statement. [11781]

Dr. Moonie: We are not making any funding available specifically to establish a Role 3 field hospital in partnership with the Netherlands. We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Netherlands setting out arrangements for the joint provision of an integrated Role 3 medical unit on future peacekeeping, peace enforcement or humanitarian relief operations in which both nations wish to participate. The aim is to make sensible and cost-effective use of valuable medical resources and avoid duplication of medical support. Existing resources will be used and the integrated Role 3 unit will be formed only when required. Medical personnel of both nations will undertake training and exercises together when possible to develop and foster interoperability.

HMS Ocean

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much time HMS Ocean spent in dock undergoing repairs, before being handed over to the Royal Navy; how much time she has spent in service at sea, since she was handed over to the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement. [11755]

Mr. Ingram: During the period between HMS Ocean's launch in October 1995 and her handover to the Royal Navy in March 1999, she spent some 15 weeks in dock undergoing repairs. Since then, she has been available for programming, either at sea or in harbour, for a total of 904 days.

Gurkhas

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Gurkha reinforcement companies in the British Army and the units to which they are assigned. [12617]

Mr. Ingram: Gurkha Reinforcement Companies are currently serving with the 2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment in Colchester, 1 Royal Irish based in Canterbury and 1 Highlanders in Edinburgh. In addition, there are formed Gurkha units serving with 10 Transport Regiment, 30 Signal Regiment, 36 Engineer Regiment and in training establishments at Sandhurst and Brecon.

Suez Campaign Medal

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce a medal for the Suez campaign; and if he will make a statement on how veterans of that conflict may be recognised for their contribution. [12629]

Dr. Moonie: Service in the Suez Campaign, the Anglo/French Landings which took place in late 1956 as Operation Musketeer, was recognised by the institution of the Naval General Service Medal for Royal Navy personnel and the General Service Medal for Army and Royal Air Force personnel, with clasp Near East. There are no plans to institute a medal for service in the Canal Zone during the early 1950s.

Glencorse Barracks

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what funds will be made available to maintain Glencorse Barracks pending announcement of plans for its reuse. [12188]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Although the Army's Initial Training function based at Glencorse Barracks will transfer to Catterick during 2002, the Recruit Selection Centre will remain at Glencorse and will be funded to maintain its activity.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has to house an infantry battalion in Glencorse Barracks; and when this will take place; [12189]

(2) if the options for Glencorse Barracks include stationing an infantry battalion there. [12185]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The Army's Initial Training function based at Glencorse Barracks will transfer to the School of Infantry at Catterick during 2002. The Recruit Selection Centre will, however, remain at Glencorse and it is the intention to retain a further Army presence there, although the extent of this has not yet been established.

Gibraltar Regiment

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to celebrate 300 years of British rule in Gibraltar. [13011]

Dr. Moonie: At the present time the Ministry of Defence has made no plans to celebrate the 300th Anniversary of British rule in Gibraltar and has not received any requests for participation in any events which are being organised.

Chinooks

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Chinooks were unserviceable during Exercise Saif Sareea 2; and for what period of time. [11747]

Mr. Hoon: The eight Chinook helicopters deployed on Exercise Saif Sareea 2 performed well in very testing environmental conditions. Their availability varied throughout the exercise. This was in part affected by engineering instructions issued from the UK that required non-exercise related maintenance on a number of air frames.

The average daily availability rate during the main period of the exercise was around 70 per cent.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Ovine BSE (Research)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what basis she was convinced that the information concerning tests to establish the presence of BSE in sheep, presented to her Department by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist on 17 October would leak; who she was convinced would leak the information; and if she will make a statement. [10607]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The theoretical possibility of BSE in sheep is an issue of great sensitivity, generating widespread public interest. In light of the information a scheduled meeting of SEAC was—by the decision of its chairman—cancelled at short notice. This in itself was likely to stimulate further interest. In such circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that the possibility of leaks will be much higher and their impact more serious.

A press release was issued on 17 October about what we knew for certain. This was done to avoid the risk of information on a serious issue being presented incorrectly and piecemeal. Nor did we want to exacerbate public concern—in a situation of uncertainty—by giving the impression that the Government were withholding important information.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the results of the inquiries into the errors made by the Institute of Animal Health in relation to BSE in sheep will be made public. [9914]

Margaret Beckett: Urgent and independent scientific inquiries have been established already. We will not know the full facts until they have reported. We will continue to keep the House and the public informed of developments.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to conduct further research into whether BSE is present in the national sheep flock; and if she will made a statement. [9918]

Margaret Beckett: We will carry out a thorough review of the full range of scientific studies currently being undertaken in this area. In doing so we will take account of work that is being conducted elsewhere in Europe and the views of the Food Standards Agency and the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. Findings will be made available to the House.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what inquiries have been commissioned into the results of the Institute of Animal Health in relation to BSE in sheep; and if she will made a statement; [9921]

(2) if she will establish an independent inquiry into the failure of the research into whether BSE is present in sheep. [9912]

Margaret Beckett: Following the receipt of the results of DNA testing by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist on Wednesday 17 October, an independent risk assessment company was immediately commissioned to perform a detailed audit of the Institute of Animal Health research into BSE and sheep; including how the relevant samples were stored and handled.

Additionally, the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS) has been asked to undertake to a longer time scale a rigorous assessment of the chain of custody arrangements for the IAH experiment.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will give details of all work commissioned or undertaken by *(a)* the Government and *(b)* its agencies into BSE in sheep since

May 1997, stating, in each case (i) which organisations have been involved in which tasks and (ii) what costs or payments have been incurred. [10603]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* A list of all research projects on TSEs, funded by UK funding bodies, is available on the MRC website at http://www.mrc/ac.uk/tse—2c.htm. This includes details of duration and cost of projects and the research organisations involved, as well as abstracts of the research projects.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to achieve faster results from tests to establish whether sheep have been infected with BSE. [10615]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* Work is being undertaken to develop molecular profiling techniques so that a rapid, initial indication of whether BSE is likely to be present can be obtained. This will allow screening of the material that is to be tested using conventional strain typing in mice. The latter method, which is the test that has been used to date to distinguish between scrapie and BSE is very slow, taking up to two years to complete.

Of course this area will be examined as part of the thorough review of the range of scientific studies currently being undertaken into BSE and sheep; as I announced on 22 October.

Scrapie

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to publish a Bill to enable the Government to take powers to ensure the removal, from the national sheep flock, of genotypes of sheep susceptible to scrapie; and if she will make a statement. [10597]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The Bill was published on 25 October.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to eliminate scrapie from the national sheep flock; and if she will make a statement. [10609]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The Government launched a national scrapie plan for Great Britain in July. This will breed resistance to scrapie into the national flock.

The plan has initially been targeted at producers of purebred, pedigree breeding sheep registered with a recognised breed society. We are currently consulting about rapid extension of the plan to the remainder of the pure breeding flock, including special action for scrapie-infected flocks. We are considering other ways of speeding up implementation of the plan and we recently announced our intention to introduce a Bill that would allow the Government to take powers to remove from the breeding flock, on a compulsory basis, sheep with genotypes that make them susceptible to scrapie.

We are also consulting on ways to encourage the reporting of scrapie when it occurs, and next year we will be undertaking a survey to gain more knowledge of the incidence of scrapie, using rapid testing methods.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what would be the estimated net cost to public funds of drawing down all EU agrimonetary compensation packages currently available. [8908]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* There is approximately £55 million of agrimonetary compensation currently available for the arable sector. The net cost to the UK Exchequer of drawing down this sum would be approximately £47 million.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the effect on the environment of dioxin veltase associated with the disposal of carcases during the foot and mouth outbreak. [7868]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Dioxins have been measured in the air and the environment around some of the pyres used to dispose of carcases during the foot and mouth outbreak. All this monitoring data will be reported on the Department of Health website.

Analysis of the air measurements and modelling by the Environment Agency suggest that earlier estimates of dioxin emissions were likely to have been overestimates and to have erred on the precautionary side.

Levels of dioxins measured in soil, herbage and food were mostly similar to levels at control farms not affected by pyres. Some chemical analysis of ash from pyres has been performed. Levels of dioxins were within the range found in urban soils.

The Food Standards Agency considers that the available results show that the pyres have posed no additional risk to health through the food supply.

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to give financial assistance to the Youth Hostel Association to offset the impact of foot and mouth disease. [11186]

Alun Michael: We are well aware of the impact that foot and mouth disease and the measures to control it have had on the Youth Hostel Association's finances. I and the Minister with responsibility for tourism, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, have met representatives of the YHA to discuss their difficulties and possible sources of help. We have recently announced a change to the guidelines for the Business Recovery Fund to clarify that individual hostels, if their applications meet the Fund criteria, may apply for assistance in their own right. In the light of the recommendations of the rural task force which I chair, published on 18 October, we are considering what further help might be made available.

Meat Imports

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to tighten controls on the importation of meat products. [7872]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* My Department is co-ordinating action across Government to improve our ability to detect and prevent illegal imports. Improved publicity for travellers has been introduced. Posters have been placed at main airports and information is being provided by the travel industry and FCO posts abroad. National legislation has been amended to make it easier for local authorities to act when illegally imported meat is found and the Food Standards Agency are encouraging local authorities to ensure that checks for illegal imports are part of their routine inspections of food premises. An improved system of sharing and analysing of information has been introduced to enable enforcement bodies to target action more effectively. We are also looking at other ways in which enforcement of import controls may be improved.

Waste Incineration

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reduce the amount of waste being disposed of by incineration; and if she will make a statement. [8287]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* Our priority is to meet the requirement of the Landfill Directive to divert biodegradable municipal waste away from landfill by maximising recycling and composting and minimising the need for incineration and landfill. In order to achieve this the Government have set tough statutory targets under best value for local authorities to double the amount of household waste recycled by 2003–04 and treble it by 2005–06, and will set further targets for later years.

Veterinary Medicinal Products

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on European Commission proposals to reclassify veterinary medicinal products as prescription only medicines. [11726]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* This proposal forms part of a much wider set of proposals produced by the European Commission to amend the procedures for the authorisation and control of both human and veterinary medicines in the EU. In considering the proposal the Government have taken account of its likely impact on the supply of veterinary medicines and have agreed that, during negotiations, UK officials should seek to modify the proposal to enable a flexible approach to the distribution of veterinary medicinal products that takes advantage of existing national practices, so long as consumer protection and animal welfare can be demonstrably assured.

Food Imports

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from the Food Standards Agency regarding the adequacy of food import controls; and if she will make a statement. [10614]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* Officials from my Department and the Food Standards Agency meet on a regular basis to discuss food import issues. There have been no representations from FSA to DEFRA other than these discussions.

Civil Servants

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many civil servants are employed in each area of her Department's responsibilities, and at what grades; and what the equivalent figures for the same responsibilities were prior to the establishment of DEFRA. [10618]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The information requested is given in the figures. The data are derived from different sources and this may lead to minor inconsistencies. The figures relate to people in post; they include staff employed to deal with foot and mouth disease and those who are in the process of transferring to the Rural Payments Agency. The figures are expressed as grade equivalents.

	Core MAFF and DETR Central[1]	*Core DEFRA*[2]
Agriculture and Food		
SCS	12	12
Grade 6	5	4
Grade 7	47	45
SEO	54	53
HEO	177	177
EO	145	139
AO	99	88
AA	64	59
Total	603	577
Fisheries		
SCS	4	3
Grade 6	1	1
Grade 7	16	14
SEO	17	16
HEO	32	28
EO	63	65
AO	43	47
AA	46	43
Total	222	217
Environment, Rural and Regional Services		
SCS	40	42
Grade 6	14	21
Grade 7	138	154
SEO	104	150
HEO	325	768
EO	792	885
AO	1,365	1,437
AA	650	618
Total	3,428	4,075
Animal Health (including State Veterinary Service)		
SCS	22	24
Grade 6	36	39
Grade 7	54	57
SEO	255	249
HEO	109	127
EO	435	682
AO	794	1,151
AA	516	585
Total	2,221	2,914
Science Directorate		
SCS	3	4
Grade 6	8	8
Grade 7	11	12
SEO	11	10
HEO	17	15
EO	22	22
AO	26	25
AA	10	5
Total	108	101

	Core MAFF and DETR Central[1]	Core DEFRA[2]
European Union and International Policy		
SCS	3	4
Grade 6	0	0
Grade 7	9	6
SEO	4	4
HEO	7	7
EO	16	14
AO	9	11
AA	10	11
Total	58	57
Economics and Statistics		
SCS	4	4
Grade 6	1	2
Grade 7	18	18
SEO	6	6
HEO	34	35
EO	47	41
AO	62	58
AA	14	11
Total	186	175
Central Services		
SCS	27	38
Grade 6	29	39
Grade 7	91	97
SEO	88	88
HEO	149	184
EO	164	179
AO	277	307
AA	189	201
Total	1,014	1,133
E-Business Directive		
SCS	2	2
Grade 6	2	3
Grade 7	12	14
SEO	52	48
HEO	106	107
EO	104	124
AO	55	52
AA	13	10
Total	346	360
Communications Directorate		
SCS	1	2
Grade 6	1	1
Grade 7	5	5
SEO	13	17
HEO	22	26
EO	19	21
AO	18	28
AA	6	6
Total	85	106
Grand total	8,271	9,715

[1] At 1 April 2001
[2] At 1 October 2001

Press Officers

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many press officers are employed in her Department; and at what cost to public funds. [10608]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The DEFRA press office has a complement of 16 press officers. In the current financial year, the pay cost to date for the DEFRA press office is £433,239.

The non-paying running costs (NPRCs) for the DEFRA press office for this financial year, are as follows; DEFRA press office NPRCs (ex-MAFF)—£260,171.

Flooding

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the insurance industry regarding flood cover on *(a)* private and *(b)* commercial properties. [10617]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The Government keep in close touch with the insurance industry on these issues. Members of the Association of British Insurers (ABI) have previously said they will continue to provide flood cover, except in exceptional circumstances, for domestic properties and small businesses which they currently insure up to the end of 2002.

My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and the Under-Secretary my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), met the ABI on 5 September to discuss our mutual aim of ensuring that affordable flood insurance cover continues to be generally available beyond December 2002.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the Environment Agency regarding the funds available for work on flood defences. [10606]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The Environment Agency has asked the Government to recognise and commit to meeting the need for a significant further increase in funding on a planned basis to (a) improve flood warnings and (b) maintain and improve the overall standard and extent of flood defence. This will be considered through the Spending Review 2002 process. Current plans are for this Department's spending on flood and coastal defences for all operating authorities to increase from last year's outturn of £66 million to £114 million in 2003–04.

Consultation Exercises

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many consultation exercises by her Department are in progress. [10612]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs currently has 28 consultation exercises in progress.

Pheasants

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what estimate she has of the number of pheasants *(a)* reared and *(b)* shot each year for (i) agricultural and (ii) sporting purposes since 1994; [7253]

(2) what percentage of pheasants released in each year from 1994 to date have been exported; [7254]

(3) what estimate she has made of the number of pheasants released each year; of those, what estimate she has of those (i) shot but not captured and (ii) shot and captured; and in respect of the latter category, how many of these are *(a)* discarded and *(b)* eaten; [7252]

(4) how many people she estimates are employed in connection with pheasant-rearing and shooting; and what the estimated animal income of this sector is. [7256]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The Government do not hold such statistics.

British Waterways

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Board of British Waterways on the scope of its activities in relation to the Environment Agency; and if she will make a statement. [11104]

Mr. Meacher: Ministers met the Chairman of British Waterways together with the Chairman of the Environment Agency on 17 September to discuss the future of the Agency's navigation responsibilities in the light of the publication of the report of Stage 1 of the Environment Agency Financial Management and Policy Review. A decision will be announced shortly.

Council for Voluntary Services

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial assistance she provides to support the Council for Voluntary Services. [R] [10712]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does not provide any direct financial assistance to Councils for Voluntary Service or Councils for Voluntary Action. Individual Councils would be eligible to apply for support from the Rural Support Initiative Fund. This Fund, which is part of the joint Government and voluntary sector Rural Stress Action Plan, has supported local initiatives to help people in distress particularly as a result of Foot and Mouth Disease in recent months. We do provide financial support to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (£90,000 for the 2001–02 financial year) and Rural Community Councils (£2.984 million plus staff costs for a Community Development Worker for the 2001–02 financial year) via the Countryside Agency. The Rural Community Councils work closely with Councils for Voluntary Service in their area and concentrate on activity in rural communities.

Carbon Trust

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the *(a)* names of the board members appointed to the Carbon Trust in each case listing the sector or industry which they represent and *(b)* the date of the board's first meeting, its agenda and minutes. [10290]

Mr. Meacher: The Carbon Trust is an independent not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, funded by the Government and the devolved Administrations. Members of the Carbon Trust Board are drawn from both the public and private sectors and cover a wide range of interest and skills relevant to the Trust's remit.

The current membership is:

Non-executives

Ian McAllister—(Chairman), Chairman of Ford UK

Ian Stephenson—(Deputy Chairman), Johnson Matthey

Dinah Nichols, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Alistair Keddie, Department of Trade and Industry

Diarmuid McLean, Northern Ireland Industrial Research and Technology Group

John Brown, Scottish Executive

David Pritchard, National Assembly for Wales

Richard Brook, Leverhulme Trust

John Edmonds, GMB

Paul Jefferiss, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Peter Lehmann, Energy Saving Trust

Chris Mottershead, BP

Michael Roberts, Confederation of British Industry

John Speirs, Norsk Hydro UK

Gordon Waters, United Utilities

Executives

Tom Delay, the Carbon Trust, Chief Executive

Rosemary Boot, the Carbon Trust, Finance Director.

The first Board meeting was held on 13 July 2001. Publication of Board papers is a matter for the Carbon Trust Board. However, I understand that the Carbon Trust's strategic framework will be published shortly for public consultation.

Water Companies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) under what powers the Ofwat Regulator can *(a)* compel water companies to install meters at the request of tenants, *(b)* make water companies notify tenants of any changes to their water charge tariffs and *(c)* intervene where a tenant feels that the tariff being levied is too high; [11879]

(2) under what powers water companies are required to *(a)* advertise changes in tariffs to (i) residents and (ii) tenants and *(b)* inform (i) residents and (ii) tenants of such changes; [11878]

(3) if she will make a statement on the procedure for resolving disputes between landlords and tenants other than through the Regulator. [11880]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* Under section 142 and 143 of the Water Industry Act 1991, as amended by sections 3 and 4 of the Water Industry Act 1999, water companies have no power to charge for services to a dwelling except in accordance with a charges scheme approved by the Director General of Water Services (Ofwat). Under Condition D of the terms of their appointments as statutory undertakers under the Water Industry Act, companies must make their charges schemes available to anyone on request but there is no requirement to advertise tariffs or changes in tariffs. Companies communicate with their customers about

tariffs when sending out bills. Ofwat also publishes information each year about changes in average bills and detailed tariffs for each company.

Disputes as to the water charges payable by a customer to the water company may be made to Ofwat. There is no distinction in this procedure between customers who are tenants and others.

Under sections 144A and 209A of the Water Industry Act 1991 as amended by sections 6 and 11 of the Water Industry Act 1999, the right to a measured water charge, and therefore to a water meter free of initial cost, is available to all household water company customers irrespective of tenure except for tenancies of less than six months. The terms of a tenancy may not prevent a tenant from requesting the installation of a meter or require any consent from the landlord. Companies are required to fit a meter on request except where it would not be reasonably practicable or would incur unreasonable expense. Any dispute may be determined by Ofwat. Water companies have no involvement or statutory duties as to the charges made by landlords to tenants who are not water company customers, nor is there any statutory duty on landlords to charge tenants on a measured basis.

Sometimes the landlord is the customer liable to pay charges to the water company. The charges set by such a landlord to tenants are service charges that are in the first place a matter between landlord and tenant. Ofwat has made the Water Resale Order 2001, under section 150 of the Water Industry Act, limiting the charges that may be made for reselling water or sewerage services provided originally by a water company. Ofwat can advise but has no powers to determine disputes between landlords and tenants.

Litter

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to encourage a reduction of litter in London. [8330]

Mr. Meacher: The Department funds the Tidy Britain Group (TBG) who work closely with the London local authorities to improve local environmental quality. The Government's Pathfinder initiative announced in March is providing £1 million for 50 local authority schemes to promote local environmental quality including reduction in litter. Four of the approved schemes are in London, in Ealing, Lambeth, Lewisham and Newham. In addition Bexley and Wandsworth councils are working with TBG on an educational project, Eco-Schools. This allows schools to carry out an environmental audit, with tackling litter problems a key part. Under the TBG's People and Places programme, TBG officers are working with a third of London's local authorities to survey the amount of litter on the streets and provide advice on how to improve street cleansing.

Thames21 is a partnership project sponsored by TBG which is designed to improve the environment of the River Thames and its tributaries. This programme is actively supported by two thirds of the local authorities in London who make a voluntary contribution to the work.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish a combined heat and power strategy. [8263]

Mr. Meacher: We will be issuing a draft Government strategy for consultation by the end of this year.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further steps she plans to take to ensure that 10 GW can be generated by combined heat and power by 2010. [10426]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The Department is developing, in close collaboration with DTI and other Departments, a draft CHP strategy, which will set out the measures needed to achieve the Government's target of at least 10,000 MW of installed CHP electrical capacity by 2010. Our timetable for issuing the draft strategy for consultation is by the end of this year.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

SEN Tribunals

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases were referred to SEN tribunals in each local education authority in England in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01; what proportion they represent of the school age population of each authority; and how many appeals were (i) upheld or partially upheld, (ii) withdrawn and (iii) turned down. [12243]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Tables showing the number of appeals referred to the special educational needs tribunal by local education authority in each of the three years for which information is requested, the number decided, the number withdrawn and the proportion they represent of the school age population, have been placed in the Library. The tribunal does not collect information about the outcome of appeals in the format requested. However, information about the number of appeals upheld or partially upheld is available at the national level, and has been placed in the Library. A case is listed as "upheld" when any of the points at issue are decided in the parents' favour. Over the last three years, the percentage of decisions where the appeal is upheld has increased from 75 per cent. to 79 per cent.

AS-level Examination

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to abolish the AS level examination; what assessment she has made of the impact of the introduction of the AS level examination on pupils' involvement in non-curricular school activities; and if she will make a statement. [11490]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: None. The Government remain committed to the principles behind the Curriculum 2000 reforms, including the AS award. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's phase 1 report on the review of Curriculum 2000 included an assessment of the impact of the introduction of the AS-level examinations on enrichment activities. This concluded that student

participation in extra-curricular activities has been reduced in some, but by no means all, institutions. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

Healthy Lifestyles

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what initiatives her Department aims at children of school age to promote healthy lifestyles and positive activities not involving drugs and other substance misuse. [7342]

Mr. Timms: We recognise how important it is for young people to be made aware of the positive effects that a healthy, active lifestyle and a nutritious diet can have on their life chances. We are the first Government to introduce a non-statutory framework for personal, social and health education (PSHE) across all four key stages.

Together with the Department of Health, our commitment to promoting healthier lifestyles through positive activities is clear from the "healthy schools" and "food in schools" programmes. The national healthy school standard, the mainstay of the "healthy schools" programme, helps to set the context for schools when developing policies in areas such as healthy eating and physical activity. "Food in schools" brings together all food-related initiatives in schools to improve young people's health and learning. Our recent White Paper, "Schools: Achieving Success", highlighted our commitment to promoting healthier lifestyles among young people.

Special Schools

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision is made for disability issues and education in the legislation governing residential special schools. [10710]

Mr. Timms: The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, which comes into force in September 2002, will ensure that pupils in all schools receive protection from unfair discrimination. This Act will make it unlawful for education providers to discriminate against disabled pupils and prospective pupils by treating them less favourably on the grounds of their disability or by failing to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not placed at a substantial disadvantage. These provisions apply to admission to the school, the education and other associated services offered and provided to pupils by the school, and exclusion from the school.

Under the Care Standards Act 2000, residential special schools will be obliged to ensure that residential, care and teaching staff work together to identify means of encouraging each child's personal, social, and educational development and achievement.

Through both the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 and the Care Standards Act 2000 the Government are actively promoting welfare, safety, and quality educational provision for children in residential special schools.

IT Staff

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many IT teaching posts in higher education were unfilled in 2000; [10912]

(2) what recent studies she has carried out into the shortage of IT staff in higher education; and if she will make a statement; [10911]

(3) what discussions she has had in 2001 on the shortage of IT staff in higher education institutions; and if she will make a statement. [10925]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not held centrally. Individual universities and colleges, as employers, are responsible for monitoring their own vacancies. However, surveys commissioned by the funding councils and representative bodies to follow up the Bett report suggested that while there were no generalised problems of recruitment or retention, there were specific issues in recruiting to some subjects where there was competition for qualified staff in the economy, including information and communication technology. The Government have made available additional funding for higher education pay over three years, rising to £170 million in 2003–04. In exchange, all institutions have provided the Higher Education Funding Council for England with a human resources strategy which sets out the issues they have to address and how they will be resolved.

Higher Education

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the age participation rate in *(a)* higher education and *(b)* first degree course for each year since 1980. [11032]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* It is not possible to desegregate a separate participation rate for first degree undergraduates only.

The available information, showing the proportion of under-21-year-olds who enter higher education, is shown in the following table. There was an increase in entrant numbers in 1997–98, related partly to changes in the funding arrangements for higher education, with students choosing to enter HE rather than wait until 1998–99. There was a corresponding reduction in 1998–99 before the entry rates started to increase again in 1999–2000. Between 1996–97 and 2000–01, the total of HE students in English universities and colleges rose by 118,000.

Latest figures show that total acceptances to HE courses in autumn 2001 rose by 5.6 per cent.[1]

[1] The API is defined as the number of home domiciled initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate HE aged under 21, expressed as a percentage of the average number of 18 and 19 year olds in the population.

Age participation index (API), Great Britain

Year of entry	*Percentage*
1980	13
1981	13
1982	13
1983	13
1984	14
1985	14
1986	14
1987	15
1988	15
1989	17
1990	19
1991	23
1992	28
1993	30
1994	32
1995	32

Age participation index (API), Great Britain

Year of entry	*Percentage*
1996	33
1997	33
1998	31
1999	32
2000[1]	32–34

[1] Projected: final data on initial entrants are not yet available.

Source:

UCAS

Northamptonshire (Local Initiatives)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual expenditure by her Department was on centrally financed local initiatives in *(a)* Northamptonshire, *(b)* Northampton borough and *(c)* Northampton, South constituency for each of the last six years. [11278]

Mr. Timms: The following table shows the Department's allocated grants to Northamptonshire local education authority for each year since 1996–97.

£

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Standards fund	2,100,980	2,689,725	3,501,381	9,490,717	13,824,907	16,640,731
Teachers pay reforms	—	—	—	—	3,317,167	[1]—
Nursery education	—	7,186,176	1,363,615	1,496,492	2,220,779	[1]—
Early years development and childcare partnership (EYDCP)	—	—	123,000	506,300	789,810	[2]1,466,762
Transitional insurance (former GM schools)	—	—	—	40,407	21,039	597
School standards	—	—	—	—	4,355,000	9,071,000
School budget support	—	—	—	—	655,000	—
Education budget support	—	—	—	—	—	100,000
Statutory education action zones	—	—	—	—	772,000	815,000
Capital	7,389,000	8,455,000	13,059,000	10,925,000	24,531,000	[1]—

[1] Not finalised.

[2] Northamptonshire EYDCP has also been allocated £1,486,110 revenue funding and £634,440 capital funding in 2001–04 for the Neighbourhood Nurseries initiative for Northamptonshire. It will be up to the EYDCP to decide the breakdown between years.

Figures for the amount of grants spent in an individual constituency or borough cannot be provided.

Northamptonshire (School Places)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent steps her Department has taken to assist Northamptonshire local education authority in increasing the provision of school places in Northampton to match *(a)* current needs and *(b)* future requirements generated by new housing developments; and if she will make a statement. [11286]

Mr. Timms: The Government believe that decisions concerning the supply of school places are best taken locally—by the main partners in the provision of education who have knowledge of local needs. Local education authorities have a duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places in their area. They must publish annually a school organisation plan which sets out how they plan to deal with any surplus or deficit of school places over a rolling five-year period.

Where an LEA can demonstrate overall growth in the need for school places, it may apply to the Department for capital funding. I am aware of proposals for change in Northampton and officials are in regular contact with the LEA regarding this.

Northamptonshire (Class Sizes)

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children aged *(a)* five, *(b)* six and *(c)* seven are taught in classes of over 30 in schools in Northampton; and what were the figures in 1997. [11280]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the table. This information has been collected only since January 1998.

Percentage of pupils in classes of over 30 taught by one teacher in mainland primary schools[1,2]

Year	*January 2001*	*January 1998*
Northampton LEA		
Reception[3]	0.0	17.5
Group 1[3]	5.5	27.1
Group 2[3]	5.7	32.8
England		
Reception[3]	1.8	23.2
Group 1[3]	1.3	32.7
Group 2[3]	4.0	35.7

[1] Classes as taught during a selected period in each school on the day of the census in January

[2] Excludes middle schools

[3] Pupils in reception classes will reach the age of 5 during the academic year and pupils in Years 1 and 2 will reach the ages of 6 and 7 respectively during the academic year.

School Autonomy

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria she will use to assess if a school should be given greater autonomy. [11293]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* A combination of inspection evidence, performance data and a record of effective leadership will be used to decide those schools that should be eligible for greater freedom. The precise criteria will be developed in discussion with Ofsted.

Faith Schools

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the criteria by which faith schools are determined to be inclusive. [11461]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The White Paper, "Schools: Achieving Success" said that we want faith schools that come into the maintained sector to

add to the inclusiveness and diversity of the school system and to be ready to work with schools of other faiths and those that do not have a religious character. We welcomed the recommendation in Lord Dearing's report to the Archbishops Council that Church of England schools should serve the whole community, not confining admission to Anglicans. We have not published criteria for inclusiveness.

Schools (Administrative Burdens)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she has taken to reduce the administrative burdens on *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools; and if she will make a statement. [11482]

Mr. Timms: My Department keeps administrative requirements on all schools under continuous review. We have taken a number of actions to reduce the burdens on schools—for example, we have simplified the standards fund by replacing all bidding, claiming and reporting paperwork with a single expenditure returns sheet; and by allowing schools to switch funds between grant headings and carry them over to the end of the school year.

From April 2001, £240 million over three years is being made available in a single small schools fund to provide extra funding for small schools to meet proportionately higher administrative costs; and also to encourage the development of collaborative approaches to reducing burdens, such as shared ICT technicians.

In the school year 2000–01, we exceeded our target of reducing by half the number of pages sent to schools by the Department. We continue actively to screen all mailings to schools.

We recognise that there is more to be done. The White Paper commits the Government to making teaching a more manageable profession. The PricewaterhouseCoopers study of teacher workload, expected at the end of November, will put forward further practical ways of addressing workload issues.

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to give headteachers greater control over the allocation of performance related pay in their own schools; and if she will make a statement. [11484]

Mr. Timms: The Government set the overall performance pay structure and provides funding to support the award of extra pay points, but it is for each school to determine its own performance pay policy and apply this when taking decisions affecting individual teachers.

Powers and Funding

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to decentralise powers and funding from *(a)* national Government to local government and *(b)* local education authorities to schools; and if she will make a statement. [11488]

Mr. Timms: The White Paper, "Schools: Achieving Success", sets out the Government's agenda for transforming secondary education in England, including increased autonomy for successful schools.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will shortly be publishing a White Paper on the role of local government. It will cover, among other things, our plans to reform the local government finance system, including ensuring that schools receive a fair share of the funding provided by central government to local education authorities.

A-level Examinations

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of A-level examination papers have been graded at grade A for each of the last 20 years; how many A-level examinations have been entered in each of these years; and if she will make a statement. [11489]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The proportion of GCE A-level examinations that resulted in a grade A over the last 20 years in England, together with the number of examinations in those years, are shown as follows. Corresponding figures are not available for the intervening years 1986 to 1990.

	Proportion of examination papers resulting in A grades (percentage)	*Total number of examinations*
1980	8.8	567,027
1981	9.2	588,249
1982	8.9	614,153
1983	9.4	632,127
1984	9.6	627,669
1985	9.8	609,215
1991	11.5	635,093
1992	12.6	669,584
1993	13.4	677,093
1994	14.3	675,572
1995	15.4	668,941
1996	15.7	677,295
1997	15.7	713,569
1998	16.8	724,852
1999	17.4	720,304
2000	17.6	709,580

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average points score at A-level was for *(a)* pupils educated in local authorities which retain grammar schools, *(b)* pupils educated in local authorities which have no grammar schools and *(c)* the country as a whole, at the latest date for which figures are available. [11634]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The average GCE A-level point score of pupils aged 16 to 18 in maintained schools in England in 1999–2000 was *(a)* 17.8 for pupils educated in local authorities which retain grammar schools, *(b)* 15.9 for pupils educated in local authorities which have no grammar schools and *(c)* 16.6 for pupils in all maintained schools. The overall figure for all schools in England, including independent schools, was 17.9.

Illiteracy

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how may school children in England are judged to be illiterate in each age cohort; and if she will make a statement. [11491]

Mr. Timms: Early statistics for this year show that 99 per cent. of 15-year-olds (549,450 pupils) achieved a GCSE pass in English. Literacy standards are also rising in primary schools; this year 75 per cent. of 11-year-olds (474,000 pupils) achieved the expected standard for their age in the key stage 2 English tests, an increase of 10 per cent. points since 1998.

Failing Schools (Private Firms)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the statutory provisions that prevent private firms taking over the running of failing schools. [11536]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Section 38 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 provides for the conduct of a maintained school to be under the direction of the school's governing body.

Curriculum

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to allow 12 to 13-year-old pupils to drop history and geography as part of the curriculum. [11545]

Mr. Timms: The last national curriculum review reaffirmed the position of history and geography as statutory subjects for all key stage three pupils. History fires pupils' curiosity about the past in Britain and the wider world. Geography provokes and answers questions about the natural and human worlds, developing pupils' knowledge of places and environments throughout the world.

A major focus of our drive to raise standards for pupils in the first years of secondary school is the key stage 3 strategy. This will eventually impact across all subjects in the curriculum, including history and geography, through the programme for teaching and learning in the foundation subjects, which we are currently piloting.

School Cleanliness

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to monitor the cleanliness of schools. [11588]

Mr. Timms: Cleanliness in schools is a matter for local education authorities and governing bodies, as they have duties as employers to ensure that school premises meet health and safety requirements.

Free School Meals

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in each LEA how many and what proportion of secondary school pupils received free school meals; how many pupils received free school meals and what proportion of the intake this represents at each specialist school within the LEA, at the latest date for which information is available. [11628]

Mr. Timms: Information showing free school meals data for specialist and other secondary schools by local education authority is contained in the table.

Number of pupils eligible for free school meals in specialist secondary schools and other maintained secondary schools, January 2001, by Government office region

	Specialist secondary schools				*Other maintained secondary schools*			
	Number of schools	*Number of day pupils*	*Number of pupils eligible for FSM*	*Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM*	*Number of schools*	*Number of day pupils*	*Number of pupils eligible for FSM*	*Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM*
England	676	769,973	112,865	14.7	2,805	2,457,000	396,811	16.2
North East								
Hartlepool	2	2,409	476	19.8	4	4,270	1,250	29.3
Middlesbrough	2	2,119	753	35.5	9	6,453	2,317	35.9
Redcar and Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stockton-on-Tees	4	5,070	674	13.3	9	7,723	1,883	24.4
Darlington	3	2,953	368	12.5	4	3,056	581	19.0
Durham	13	13,116	2,075	15.8	23	19,042	3,687	19.4
Northumberland	8	8,014	766	9.6	52	22,464	2,927	13.0
Gateshead	5	7,025	930	13.2	5	5,018	1,676	33.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	7	10,140	2,196	21.7	14	7,931	2,377	30.0
North Tyneside	4	3,521	831	23.6	16	10,653	1,667	15.6
South Tyneside	2	2,680	527	19.7	9	7,828	2,008	25.7
Sunderland	4	4,823	1,046	21.7	13	15,014	4,910	32.7
North West								
Halton	2	2,017	396	19.6	7	6,671	1,687	25.3
Warrington	3	4,192	316	7.5	9	9,641	1,084	11.2
Cheshire	6	5,654	671	11.9	39	40,585	3,934	9.7
Cumbria	9	8,533	1,133	13.3	33	25,134	3,034	12.1
Bolton	4	5,363	321	6.0	12	13,782	2,652	19.2
Bury	0	0	0	0.0	14	11,731	1,754	15.0
Manchester	7	8,229	3,110	37.8	16	15,248	7,176	47.1
Oldham	2	2,398	671	28.0	13	14,427	3,022	20.9
Rochdale	4	4,583	1,054	23.0	10	9,571	2,511	26.2
Salford	2	1,874	169	9.0	14	10,650	3,040	28.5

Number of pupils eligible for free school meals in specialist secondary schools and other maintained secondary schools, January 2001, by Government office region

	Specialist secondary schools				Other maintained secondary schools			
	Number of schools	Number of day pupils	Number of pupils eligible for FSM	Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM	Number of schools	Number of day pupils	Number of pupils eligible for FSM	Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM
Stockport	2	2,791	469	16.8	12	13,784	1,856	13.5
Tameside	2	2,357	593	25.2	16	13,011	2,503	19.2
Trafford	5	5,000	1,161	23.2	13	10,846	1,280	11.8
Wigan	7	7,716	910	11.8	14	13,139	2,146	16.3
Blackburn with Darwen	2	2,143	448	20.9	7	7,358	2,021	27.5
Blackpool	2	2,204	397	18.0	6	5,620	1,324	23.6
Lancashire	17	16,642	1,350	8.1	72	58,172	9,832	16.9
Knowsley	3	3,160	1,226	38.8	8	7,080	3,386	47.8
Liverpool	9	10,775	2,781	25.8	24	22,701	9,282	40.9
St. Helens	3	4,167	649	15.6	9	7,992	1,682	21.0
Sefton	3	3,893	493	12.7	19	16,783	3,600	21.5
Wirral	5	5,759	1,452	25.2	18	18,422	5,004	27.2
Yorkshire and the Humber								
East Riding of Yorkshire	5	7,333	527	7.2	13	15,294	1,416	9.3
Kingston upon Hull, City of	3	4,446	807	18.2	13	11,566	3,517	30.4
North East Lincolnshire	3	3,264	850	26.0	9	8,471	1,571	18.5
North Lincolnshire	3	2,933	428	14.6	11	7,716	1,007	13.1
York	4	4,929	295	6.0	7	5,045	592	11.7
North Yorkshire	8	8,703	445	5.1	39	31,513	2,134	6.8
Barnsley[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Doncaster	0	0	0	0.0	17	21,378	3,829	17.9
Rotherham	4	4,910	648	13.2	13	14,935	2,497	16.7
Sheffield	8	9,596	1,371	14.3	19	20,265	4,603	22.7
Bradford	8	12,539	2,869	22.9	19	21,675	6,291	29.0
Calderdale[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kirklees	6	6,073	921	15.2	26	20,242	3,823	18.9
Leeds	8	9,799	1,444	14.7	35	37,369	7,038	18.8
Wakefield	5	6,758	1,283	19.0	13	14,521	2,336	16.1
East Midlands								
Derby	3	3,739	458	12.2	11	11,009	2,518	22.9
Derbyshire	10	11,201	869	7.8	37	36,627	4,240	11.6
Leicester	5	5,436	1,389	25.6	11	12,598	2,638	20.9
Rutland[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire	9	12,977	822	6.3	45	31,682	2,259	7.1
Lincolnshire	15	14,151	1,089	7.7	48	29,842	2,606	8.7
Northamptonshire	12	14,933	909	6.1	48	34,259	4,376	12.8
Nottingham	2	2,115	690	32.6	18	11,795	4,478	38.0
Nottinghamshire	4	5,927	830	14.0	54	49,053	6,148	12.5
West Midlands								
Herefordshire	2	2,032	99	4.9	12	7,792	680	8.7
Worcestershire	7	7,638	801	10.5	54	32,670	3,339	10.2
Telford and Wrekin	2	1,521	204	13.4	111	8,657	1,829	21.1
Shropshire	4	4,075	288	7.1	18	13,531	1,134	8.4
Stoke-on-Trent	3	2,870	623	21.7	14	11,962	2,980	24.9
Staffordshire	4	5,348	478	8.9	65	55,586	5,147	9.3
Warwickshire	5	5,108	427	8.4	32	27,550	2,066	7.5
Birmingham	26	25,401	8,061	31.7	51	43,638	14,826	34.0
Coventry	4	5,091	1,074	21.1	15	15,872	3,149	19.8
Dudley[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sandwell	3	3,240	1,052	32.5	17	16,292	3,688	22.6
Solihull	2	2,398	60	2.5	11	13,188	1,815	13.8
Walsall	3	3,476	682	19.6	17	17,908	2,991	16.7
Wolverhampton	5	4,695	768	16.4	13	11,846	2,942	24.8
East of England								
Luton	2	2,449	367	15.0	10	9,628	2,884	30.0
Bedfordshire[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Peterborough	2	2,583	372	14.4	11	10,378	1,899	18.3
Cambridgeshire	10	10,629	719	6.8	21	20,394	1,706	8.4
Southend-on-Sea	3	2,840	367	12.9	9	8,527	1,122	13.2
Thurrock[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Essex	19	24,000	2,336	9.7	60	62,251	6,265	10.1
Hertfordshire	11	10,956	522	4.8	75	64,868	5,083	7.8
Norfolk	12	13,198	1,343	10.2	40	31,185	3,416	11.0
Suffolk	12	12,538	1,053	8.4	66	40,495	4,513	11.1

Number of pupils eligible for free school meals in specialist secondary schools and other maintained secondary schools, January 2001, by Government office region

	Specialist secondary schools				Other maintained secondary schools			
	Number of schools	Number of day pupils	Number of pupils eligible for FSM	Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM	Number of schools	Number of day pupils	Number of pupils eligible for FSM	Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM
London								
Inner London								
City of London	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Camden	4	4,545	1,254	27.6	6	6,325	1,883	29.8
Hackney	5	4,411	2,061	46.7	4	3,510	1,453	41.4
Hammersmith and Fulham[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Haringey[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Islington	2	1,815	904	49.8	7	5,768	2,557	44.3
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0	0	0.0	4	3,665	1,164	31.8
Lambeth	3	2,398	940	39.2	7	4,815	2,071	43.0
Lewisham	0	0	0	0.0	13	11,661	4,621	39.6
Newham	5	6,667	2,662	39.9	10	10,802	5,177	47.9
Southwark	2	1,844	1,029	55.8	11	8,377	4,372	52.2
Tower Hamlets	4	4,050	3,005	74.2	11	10,037	6,168	61.5
Wandsworth	5	6,397	1,601	25.0	4	3,551	1,069	30.1
Westminster	2	1,777	556	31.3	6	6,244	2,079	33.3
Outer London								
Barking and Dagenham	3	3,709	746	20.1	5	7,370	2,133	28.9
Barnet	3	3,502	623	17.8	18	17,571	2,682	15.3
Bexley[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Brent	4	3,848	856	22.2	9	10,632	2,698	25.4
Bromley	5	6,274	589	9.4	12	14,964	1,915	12.8
Croydon[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ealing	5	6,164	1,756	28.5	8	7,776	2,599	33.4
Enfield	0	0	0	0.0	17	20,530	4,172	20.3
Greenwich	5	5,767	2,125	36.8	9	8,067	2,521	31.3
Harrow	0	0	0	0.0	10	8,874	1,556	17.5
Havering	2	2,068	239	11.6	16	13,836	1,527	11.0
Hillingdon	3	3,869	356	9.2	14	12,603	2,084	16.5
Hounslow	2	2,526	371	14.7	12	13,766	2,842	20.6
Kingston upon Thames	0	0	0	0.0	10	8,639	790	9.1
Merton	0	0	0	0.0	11	7,754	1,262	16.3
Redbridge	5	6,301	1,318	20.9	11	12,567	1,547	12.3
Richmond upon Thames	0	0	0	0.0	8	7,531	1,180	15.7
Sutton[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Waltham Forest	3	2,997	514	17.2	13	9,983	3,373	33.8
South East								
Bracknell Forest	0	0	0	0.0	6	6,022	289	4.8
Windsor and Maidenhead	0	0	0	0.0	13	10,207	573	5.6
West Berkshire	6	7,037	391	5.6	4	4,710	165	3.5
Reading[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Slough	2	1,483	285	19.2	9	6,442	945	14.7
Wokingham	2	2,190	61	2.8	7	8,568	448	5.2
Milton Keynes	4	4,465	466	10.4	7	7,593	972	12.8
Buckinghamshire	9	9,165	314	3.4	25	24,051	1,900	7.9
Brighton and Hove	2	2,872	385	13.4	8	9,154	1,727	18.9
East Sussex	7	8,687	1,010	11.6	19	19,120	2,625	13.7
Portsmouth[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southampton	0	0	0	0.0	14	12,235	2,110	17.2
Hampshire	7	8,633	456	5.3	64	61,931	4,172	6.7
Isle of Wight	2	2,356	317	13.5	19	9,564	1,672	17.5
Kent	13	13,541	1,108	8.2	92	79,451	8,001	10.1
Medway	4	4,363	333	7.6	16	15,474	1,617	10.4
Oxfordshire	8	10,697	798	7.5	37	27,574	2,843	10.3
Surrey	12	15,901	661	4.2	41	40,323	2,788	6.9
West Sussex	8	11,486	493	4.3	31	31,332	2,469	7.9
South West								
Bath and North East Somerset	5	5,219	339	6.5	8	7,054	630	8.9
Bristol, City of	3	3,082	489	15.9	17	14,825	3,180	21.5
North Somerset	5	5,891	547	9.3	5	6,378	411	6.4
South Gloucestershire	3	4,474	278	6.2	11	11,968	960	8.0
Cornwall	12	13,683	1,637	12.0	19	18,318	2,268	12.4
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0.0	1	95	6	6.3
Torbay[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Number of pupils eligible for free school meals in specialist secondary schools and other maintained secondary schools, January 2001, by Government office region

	Specialist secondary schools				Other maintained secondary schools			
	Number of schools	Number of day pupils	Number of pupils eligible for FSM	Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM	Number of schools	Number of day pupils	Number of pupils eligible for FSM	Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM
Plymouth	6	6,786	1,135	16.7	12	12,043	1,494	12.4
Devon	6	9,010	777	8.6	31	30,793	3,290	10.7
Bournemouth	3	3,802	269	7.1	7	5,968	774	13.0
Poole	2	2,321	109	4.7	7	5,876	483	8.2
Dorset	7	7,409	489	6.6	30	21,836	1,318	6.0
Gloucestershire	13	13,729	792	5.8	29	24,436	1,883	7.7
Somerset	8	6,966	585	8.4	31	23,821	2,188	9.2
Swindon	2	2,358	358	15.2	8	9,203	726	7.9
Wiltshire	9	9,571	685	7.2	25	18,460	1,143	6.2

[1] These local education authorities only have one specialist school. It is departmental policy not to release individual school level information unless the school has had the opportunity to check or confirm that information. Schools have not had the opportunity to check their free school meals data.

GCSE Passes

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils attained five or more GCSE passes at grades A-C, by social class, in *(a)* grammar schools and *(b)* comprehensive schools in each of the past five years. [11629]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The primary source of information on GCSE attainment broken down by school type and personal characteristics is the youth cohort study (YCS). The YCS is run in alternate years; estimates for the proportion who gained five or more A*-C grades at GCSE in 1995, 1997 and 1999 are provided in the table.

Percentage

Schools	*Non manual background*	*Manual background*
1995		
Grammar	94	87
Comprehensive	59	33
1997		
Grammar	95	92
Comprehensive	60	34
1999		
Grammar	[1]—	[1]—
Comprehensive	60	39

[1] Figures for Grammar schools in 1999 are not available

These estimates include schools in England and Wales only, and exclude independent and modern schools.

Nuclear Engineering Degrees

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list those universities offering a course in nuclear engineering; and if she will make a statement. [11765]

Margaret Hodge: No universities currently offer an undergraduate course specifically in nuclear engineering. However, a report by the Health and Safety Executive/ Nuclear Installations Inspectorate in October 2000, "Nuclear Education and Research in British Universities", listed eight higher education institutions (HEIs) offering undergraduate courses with nuclear engineering modules. Those were:

University of Birmingham
University of Cambridge
City University
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine
University of Liverpool
University of Manchester
University of Plymouth
University of Sheffield.

The following 12 institutions offered masters courses relevant to nuclear education:

University of Birmingham
City University
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine
University of Liverpool
Loughborough University
Middlesex University
University of Plymouth
Queen Mary and Westfield College, London
Royal Navy School of Marine and Air Engineering, HMS Sultan (Department of Nuclear Science and Technology)
University of Surrey
University of Wales, Swansea
University College London.

The HSE/NII report is expected to be updated during the second half of 2002.

Schools (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills over what transitional period the new funding formula for Worcestershire schools will be phased in; and if she will make a statement. [11882]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* We are continuing to work on the new funding system with external partners: no decisions have been made on the period over which the new system will need to be phased in.

Teachers (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers from ethnic minorities have entered the profession in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [11999]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

Literacy and Numeracy

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local education authorities had agreed new targets in literacy and numeracy for 11-year-olds by 26 October; and what the targets were in each case. [12090]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The new 2004 targets for literacy and numeracy will be agreed as part of the education development plan approval process in the early part of next year.

Three-year-olds

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many places were provided for three-year-olds in each local education authority in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01 (i) in LEA-funded settings, (ii) in Government-funded settings and (iii) in other settings; and how many were taken up in each category. [12242]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The available information on the numbers of three-year-olds in free early years education places in each local education authority area is shown in the following table. The table shows the numbers of three-year-olds taking up: 1. Local education authority funded places; 2. Places funded directly by Government in the private, voluntary and independent sectors including places in settings run by the local authority rather than the local education authority, e.g. social services.

Number of three-year-olds taking up free early years education places, England, Government Office regions and each local education authority area 2000–01—Position in January each year

	2000			*2001*		
LEA name	*Maintained*[1]	*Private, voluntary and independent providers and other LA provisions*[2]	*All*	*Maintained*[1]	*Private, voluntary and independent providers and other LA provision*[2]	*All*
England	229,883	40,309	270,192	226,634	108,813	335,447
North East	22,337	2,245	24,582	21,871	3,288	25,159
Darlington	975	0	975	919	49	968
Durham[3]	3,845	331	4,176	3,850	612	4,462
Gateshead[3]	1,412	562	1,974	1,342	593	1,935
Hartlepool[3]	1,063	36	1,099	961	34	995
Middlesbrough[3]	1,727	53	1,780	1,849	115	1,964
Newcastle upon Tyne[3]	1,757	715	2,472	1,773	857	2,630
North Tyneside[3]	1,793	54	1,847	1,767	232	1,999
Northumberland	2,118	0	2,118	2,139	136	2,275
Redcar and Cleveland[3]	1,795	2	1,797	1,601	14	1,615
South Tyneside[3]	1,391	81	1,472	1,450	143	1,593
Stockton-on-Tees[3]	1,911	67	1,978	1,813	100	1,913
Sunderland[3]	2,550	344	2,894	2,407	404	2,811
North West	41,335	9,156	50,491	39,566	20,727	60,293
Blackburn with Darwen[3]	1,041	381	1,422	966	679	1,645
Blackpool[3]	323	1,271	1,594	314	1,075	1,389
Bolton[3]	2,155	796	2,951	2,088	926	3,014
Bury	1,045	0	1,045	1,046	91	1,137
Cheshire	2,246	0	2,246	2,172	783	2,955
Cumbria	2,418	0	2,418	2,410	1,138	3,548
Halton[3]	623	565	1,188	542	577	1,119
Knowsley[3]	2,066	73	2,139	1,847	133	1,980
Lancashire	4,253	0	4,253	4,199	5,155	9,354
Liverpool[3]	3,890	1,297	5,187	3,648	1,310	4,958
Manchester[3]	4,078	522	4,600	3,890	713	4,603
Oldham[3]	1,525	846	2,371	1,507	1,048	2,555
Rochdale[3]	1,387	885	2,272	1,287	966	2,253
Salford[3]	2,047	147	2,194	1,836	247	2,083
Sefton[3]	2,078	289	2,367	2,103	778	2,881
St. Helens[3]	1,102	362	1,464	1,084	495	1,579
Stockport	1,625	0	1,625	1,703	87	1,790
Tameside[3]	1,646	516	2,162	1,580	581	2,161
Trafford	1,580	0	1,580	1,497	196	1,693
Warrington	963	0	963	889	1,099	1,988
Wigan	1,513	0	1,513	1,358	1,194	2,552
Wirral[3]	1,731	1,206	2,937	1,600	1,455	3,055
Yorkshire and The Humber	32,541	7,204	39,745	31,804	15,222	47,026
Barnsley[3]	1,404	226	1,630	1,356	529	1,885
Bradford[3]	4,747	805	5,552	4,520	1,197	5,717
Calderdale	1,305	0	1,305	1,184	666	1,850
Doncaster[3]	2,219	110	2,329	2,249	161	2,410

Number of three-year-olds taking up free early years education places, England, Government Office regions and each local education authority area 2000–01—Position in January each year

	2000			2001		
LEA name	*Maintained*[1]	*Private, voluntary and independent providers and other LA provisions*[2]	*All*	*Maintained*[1]	*Private, voluntary and independent providers and other LA provision*[2]	*All*
East Riding of Yorkshire	1,033	0	1,033	1,024	138	1,162
Kingston-upon-Hull, City of[3]	2,111	460	2,571	2,036	517	2,553
Kirklees[3]	2,618	407	3,025	2,489	1,488	3,977
Leeds[3]	5,874	1,779	7,653	5,642	1,786	7,428
North East Lincolnshire[3]	998	521	1,519	933	554	1,487
North Lincolnshire	585	0	585	637	536	1,173
North Yorkshire	1,796	0	1,796	1,705	3,218	4,923
Rotherham[3]	1,447	724	2,171	1,364	875	2,239
Sheffield[3]	2,932	1,815	4,747	3,372	2,030	5,402
Wakefield[3]	2,684	358	3,042	2,592	611	3,203
York[3]	788	0	788	701	916	1,617
East Midlands	19,896	1,621	21,517	19,103	8,321	27,424
Derby	1,934	0	1,934	1,845	859	2,704
Derbyshire	4,243	0	4,243	4,016	3,099	7,115
Leicester[3]	2,335	964	3,299	2,146	1,112	3,258
Leicestershire	87	0	87	129	639	768
Lincolnshire	1,785	0	1,785	1,749	41	1,790
Northamptonshire	2,299	0	2,299	2,294	835	3,129
Nottingham[3]	2,653	657	3,310	2,509	700	3,209
Nottinghamshire	4,461	0	4,461	4,328	1,008	5,336
Rutland	99	0	99	87	30	117
West Midlands	30,935	5,188	36,123	30,441	9,450	39,891
Birmingham[3]	7,294	3,275	10,569	7,200	3,844	11,044
Coventry[3]	1,976	957	2,933	1,984	1,031	3,015
Dudley	2,227	0	2,227	2,336	738	3,074
Herefordshire	340	0	340	336	115	451
Sandwell[3]	3,217	21	3,238	3,059	100	3,159
Shropshire	424	0	424	499	309	808
Solihull	1,542	0	1,542	1,499	59	1,558
Staffordshire	2,561	0	2,561	2,554	443	2,997
Stoke-on-Trent[3]	2,032	285	2,317	1,842	367	2,209
Telford and Wrekin[3]	541	464	1,005	651	596	1,247
Walsall[3]	2,928	70	2,998	2,838	151	2,989
Warwickshire	1,603	0	1,603	1,473	813	2,286
Wolverhampton[3]	2,720	115	2,835	2,584	134	2,718
Worcestershire	1,530	0	1,530	1,586	751	2,337
East of England	14,865	0	14,865	15,740	4,352	20,092
Bedfordshire	1,211	0	1,211	1,202	218	1,420
Cambridgeshire	1,091	0	1,091	1,154	867	2,021
Essex	1,961	0	1,961	1,9292	221	2,213
Hertfordshire	5,890	0	5,890	6,406	257	6,663
Luton	954	0	954	975	996	1,971
Norfolk	1,885	0	1,885	1,932	126	2,058
Peterborough	316	0	316	288	593	881
Southend-on-Sea	453	0	453	446	440	886
Suffolk	633	0	633	857	477	1,334
Thurrock	471	0	471	488	157	645
London	46,466	12,138	58,604	46,679	20,825	67,504
Inner London	21,773	8,567	30,340	21,508	10,078	31,586
Camden[1]	916	769	1,685	915	718	1,633
City of London	10	0	10	12	1	13
Hackney[3]	1,608	951	2,559	12	968	2,488
Hammersmith and Fulham[3]	1,102	371	1,473	1,025	586	1,611[3]
Haringey[3]	1,980	396	2,376	1,932	486	2,418
Islington[3]	1,247	780	2,027	1,252	812	2,064
Kensington and Chelsea	591	0	591	612	277	889
Lambeth[3]	1,957	1,102	3,059	1,955	1,163	3,118
Lewisham[3]	1,869	816	2,685	1,892	968	2,860
Newham[3]	3,462	448	3,910	3,306	551	3,857
Southwark[3]	2,214	745	2,959	2,242	1,150	3,392
Tower Hamlets[3]	2,347	315	2,662	2,358	281	2,639
Wandsworth[3]	1,661	1,293	2,954	1,629	1,349	2,978
Westminster[3]	809	579	1,388	858	768	1,626

Number of three-year-olds taking up free early years education places, England, Government Office regions and each local education authority area 2000–01—Position in January each year

	2000			2001		
LEA name	*Maintained*[1]	*Private, voluntary and independent providers and other LA provisions*[2]	*All*	*Maintained*[1]	*Private, voluntary and independent providers and other LA provision*[2]	*All*
Outer London	24,693	3,571	28,264	25,171	10,747	35,918
Barking and Dagenham[3]	1,393	294	1,687	1,418	326	1,744
Barnet	2,010	0	2,010	1,995	389	2,384
Bexley	1,385	0	1,385	1,314	911	2,225
Brent[3]	1,684	754	2,438	1,684	875	2,559
Bromley	242	0	242	247	428	675
Croydon	1,826	0	1,826	1,894	623	2,517
Ealing[3]	2,587	555	3,142	2,604	527	3,131
Enfield	1,30	0	1,230	1,236	1,034	2,270
Greenwich[3]	1,894	715	2,609	1,80	765	2,565
Harrow	620	0	620	615	350	965
Havering	550	0	550	603	1,210	1,813
Hillingdon	1,360	0	1,360	1,813	119	1,932
Hounslow[3]	1,523	479	2.002	1,564	550	2,114
Kingston upon Thames	940	0	940	911	172	1,083
Merton	1,665	0	1,665	1,707	117	1,824
Redbridge	1,604	0	1,604	1,587	852	2,439
Richmond upon Thames	585	0	585	546	40	586
Sutton	245	0	245	266	360	626
Waltham Forest[3]	1,350	773	2,123	1,367	1,098	2,465
South East	12,585	736	13,321	12,705	14,254	26,959
Bracknell Forest	111	0	111	147	735	882
Brighton and Hove[3]	772	712	1,484	732	1,032	1,764
Buckinghamshire	686	0	686	790	404	1,194
East Sussex	570	0	570	588	1,113	1,701
Hampshire	601	0	601	589	1,748	2,337
Isle of Wight[3]	134	23	157	131	471	602
Kent	1,412	0	1,412	1,494	818	2,312
Medway	421	0	421	412	2,119	2,531
Milton Keynes	368	0	368	379	197	576
Oxfordshire	995	0	995	1,024	213	1,237
Portsmouth	435	0	435	441	880	1,321
Reading	738	0	738	716	202	918
Slough	932	0	932	976	31	1,007
Southampton	435	0	435	334	1,346	1,680
Surrey	2,429	0	2,429	2,426	2,145	4,571
West Berkshire	261	0	261	273	99	372
West Sussex	838	0	838	816	441	1,257
Windsor and Maidenhead	306	0	306	306	226	532
Wokingham	141	0	141	131	32	163
South West	8,923	2,023	10,946	8,725	12,375	21,100
Bath and North East Somerset	303	0	303	288	195	482
Bournemouth	267	0	267	282	914	1,196
Bristol, City of	2,802	0	2,802	2,653	1,169	3,822
Cornwall and Isle of Scilly[3]	1,057	1,666	2,723	987	2,089	3.076
Devon	1,197	0	1,197	1,200	630	1,830
Dorset	246	0	246	215	288	503
Gloucestershire	74	0	74	97	3,385	3,482
North somerset	195	0	195	200	98	200
Plymouth[3]	776	358	1,134	744	1,508	2,252
Poole	78	0	78	92	742	834
Somerset	474	0	474	503	217	720
South Gloucestershire	331	0	331	341	145	486
Swindon	414	0	414	412	172	584
Torbay	394	0	394	391	505	896
Wiltshire	315	0	315	320	319	639

[1] Headcount of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year from Annual Schools' Census.
[2] Part-time equivalent number of children aged three at private, voluntary, independent and local authority settings.
[3] This LEA received Nursery Education Grant funding for three-year-olds in 1999–2000, there were 65 such LEAs.

Further Education

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to encourage more children to continue their education in *(a)* sixth form and *(b)* further education colleges. [12404]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have set out our vision for post-16 learning in the recent White Paper, "Schools: Achieving Success". We want all young people to continue after the age of 16 in high quality learning opportunities which best meet their needs and potential. This may be in school, college or in the work-based route. We have established the Learning and Skills Council to

drive this forward and have put in place a number of measures which provide the support and incentives young people need to take up and succeed in learning. We are introducing the new Connexions service to provide advice and guidance to young people on the full range of learning options open to them and to help them progress within their chosen learning environment. We are also addressing the financial barriers to participation through piloting the education maintenance allowance scheme; providing discretionary funding targeted at specific learner needs, and the Connexions card, which offered discounts on transport and learning materials.

Violent and Disruptive Pupils

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will introduce legislation to deal with pupils who are violent and disruptive in the classroom and who threaten *(a)* teachers and *(b)* other classmates. [12582]

Mr. Timms: We will not tolerate violent or abusive behaviour towards teachers or pupils. Parenting orders may already be sought in cases where pupils have committed a criminal act. Our recent "Schools: Achieving Success" White Paper highlights our plans to extend the use of parenting orders so that they can be activated following violence or persistent misbehaviour by pupils at school. Parenting orders provide guidance to parents in managing challenging behaviour and their wider use would encourage parents to take more responsibility for behaviour in school.

We have also made it clear to schools that if a pupil is violent to classmates or persistently bullies them, or if they are violent or threaten violence to teachers, head teachers have the legal power to exclude that pupil permanently. While recognising that permanent exclusion is a serious matter, we plan to require in legislation that exclusion appeal panels balance the excluded pupil's interests against those of all other members of the school community.

School Grounds (Sussex)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which school grounds in Sussex have been sold since May 1997. [12596]

Mr. Timms: No data were collected centrally on how many school grounds were sold before October 1998. Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 was introduced in October 1998 to stop the indiscriminate sale of school playing fields. Before October 1998, there was nothing to prevent a local authority selling school playing fields if it wanted to. As local authorities and governing bodies of all maintained schools are now required to obtain the Secretary of State's consent before disposing of playing fields or any part of a playing field, which can be said to comprise school grounds, we have collected information about the sale of school playing fields since October 1998. For the purposes of answering the question I have, therefore, equated school grounds to school playing fields.

Since 1 October 1998, the Secretary of State has approved the sale of various areas of school grounds that fall within the definition of school playing fields under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 at the following schools in West Sussex and East Sussex:

Beacon Community College, Crowborough;

Barnham Primary School, Bognor Regis;

Chichester High School for Girls, Chichester;

Lindfield Junior School, Haywards Heath[1];

The Forest School, Horsham;

Hazelwick School, Crawley;

Catherington Special School, Crawley, and

Deerswood Special School, Crawley.

[1] School closed 31 August 2000

Student Support

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the evidence that informed her judgment relating to the impact on the Government's target for 18 to 30-year-olds in higher education of the current system of student support. [11580]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Last month my right hon. Friend announced the review of student support which, in seeking to get the right balance between the contributions made by the state, the parent and the graduate, has the explicit aim of ensuring that we reach our target of 50 per cent. of 18 to 30-year-olds having the opportunity to participate in higher education. In particular, the review will consider, in relation to the current system of student support, concerns expressed about the impact of debt, or perceptions of future debt, which have been identified in the 1998–99 student income and expenditure report, the DfES research report, "Social Class and Higher Education: Issues Affecting Decisions on Participation by Lower Social Class Groups" (2001), and elsewhere. We want to ensure opportunities for all and are reviewing student funding to remove obstacles that might deter potential students from low-income families participating in higher education.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Leisure Services (Lee Valley)

10. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on leisure services operated by the Lee Valley Authority. [10029]

Tessa Jowell: The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority is a statutory authority funded from a levy on all 32 London boroughs, Thurrock borough council and Hertfordshire and Essex county councils.

The Park Authority has a specific remit to regenerate the 12,500 acres of the Lee Valley as a regional park and to provide high quality regional sports and leisure facilities. The Park Authority is in the process of developing its facilities in accordance with its 10-year business plan published in 2000.

Sport (Centres of Excellence)

11. **Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on regional centres of excellence for sports. [10030]

Mr. Caborn: The Government remain committed to the development of the United Kingdom Sports Institute (UKSI) and good progress is being made in its establishment. Centres in Scotland and Wales are now operational; the English Institute is developing apace and it is hoped that work on the Northern Ireland Institute will begin soon. It is vital now that all those agencies with an interest in elite sport work together collectively to assist athletes achieve their ultimate goal.

Ofcom

12. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her plans for representation for Wales on the proposed Ofcom. [10031]

Dr. Howells: The draft Communications Bill to be published in spring 2002 will contain details of how the interests of Wales will be represented within Ofcom.

Foot and Mouth

13. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the effects of foot and mouth disease on the hotel industry. [10032]

Tessa Jowell: The Department's best estimate is that revenue loss to the English tourism industry overall is likely to be around £3.3 billion in "value added" terms. The effects of FMD on the tourism industry, including the hotel sector, have been uneven, some areas have done well, others have been hit disproportionately hard. The Government introduced a package of recovery assistance for rural businesses, including tourism businesses, affected by the consequent implications of foot and mouth disease. In total, these measures will bring benefits to businesses of over £300 million.

32. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the effects of foot and mouth disease on the tourism industry in England. [10053]

Dr. Howells: The Department's best estimate is that the revenue loss to the English tourism industry for March to October is likely to be around £3.3 billion in "value added" terms.

An additional £3.8 million was provided to the English Tourism Council in April for immediate recovery work. The British Tourist Authority has received an additional £14.2 million for marketing and promotion. The Regional Development Agency business recovery fund, established in April, is designed to provide targeted help for rural businesses, including tourism businesses, affected by the consequent implications of foot and mouth disease. On 18 October, the Government allocated a further £24 million to the fund taking the total to £74 million. The fund is one element in a package of recovery assistance for tourism that includes business rate relief and deferral of tax payments. These measures and existing programmes will help to encourage tourism.

British Cultural Identity

14. **Mike Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will introduce plans to encourage the celebration of British cultural identity. [10033]

Dr. Howells: British cultural identity can be expressed through buildings and institutions, through the heritage and history of our communities, through art, literature, television and radio, through an appreciation of our countryside and landscape, and most of all through the diversity of the British people and their everyday lives. It is celebrated each day in theatres, halls, libraries, museums and galleries, in cinemas and sports stadiums up and down the country, finding expression in the talent and participation of people of all ages. This Department will continue to give people and communities the confidence and resources fully to express and to celebrate their cultural identity in an atmosphere of tolerance, openness and respect.

Equal Opportunities

15. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she has taken to promote equal opportunities among the non-departmental public bodies which her Department funds. [10034]

Tessa Jowell: I am determined that the Boards of my Department's public bodies reflect the diversity of the society they serve and have set challenging targets for the representation of women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled people. We are currently reviewing our appointments equal opportunities action plan which is published annually, together with those of other Departments, in "Quangos-Opening up Public Appointments", which is deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Community Sport

16. **Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to give children more opportunities to participate in sport in the community. [10035]

Mr. Caborn: My Department has a PSA target to raise significantly year on year the average time spent on sport and physical activity by those aged six to 16. A key element of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme, which will see a network of 1,000 co-ordinators in secondary schools across the country, is to encourage better links between schools and community sports clubs. We will also ensure that facilities refurbished or built under the Space for Sport and Arts initiative and the New Opportunities Fund's PE and School Sport programme will be available for both school and community use. In addition, Sport England's Active Sports programme aims to work through local centres, coaches and clubs to enable young people to participate in sport more frequently, improve their skills and compete at various levels.

28. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the facilities available for sport in the community. [10049]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England estimates that there are over 6,300 sports hall and swimming pool facilities and approximately 500 synthetic turf pitches in England which

meet Sport England's minimum standards in terms of size and community access. In addition there are many smaller community indoor facilities which are used for a range of community activities other than sport.

National Stadium

17. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on when Britain will have a national stadium. [10037]

Mr. Caborn: Scotland and Wales already have national stadiums.

Whether the current English National Stadium project can be developed depends to a great extent on whether the Football Association—whose events are crucial to the viability of the stadium—actually want to proceed with the National Stadium.

The discussions between Patrick Carter and the Football Association are intended to clarify the Football Association's position. The Government will, of course respond, to any proposals but we have made it clear that no taxpayers money will be committed to develop the stadium.

21. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on a national stadium for England. [10041]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to questions from my hon. Friends the Members for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) and the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on 19 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1380–81W.

Community Radio Licences

18. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the result of the latest bids for community radio licences will be announced. [10038]

Dr. Howells: The Radio Authority is responsible for licensing and regulating Independent Radio. I understand that the Radio Authority are is to announce its decision about the award of the Independent Local Radio licence to serve the town of Reading in February 2002.

Coalfield Communities (Lottery Funding)

20. **Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress she has made in ensuring that coalfield communities receive a greater share of national lottery proceeds. [10040]

Mr. Caborn: My Department and Lottery distributors commissioned Sheffield Hallam University to research the impact of the Lottery on the coalfields and we have been working with coalfield groups to take forward recommendations to improve the take-up of funding in such areas. I shall publish a report tomorrow (6 November) on the progress made.

Gaming Machines

22. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has had regarding gaming machines in private clubs. [10042]

Mr. Caborn: We have received a substantial number of representations about the recommendation that jackpot gaming machines should not be allowed in such clubs. We are considering them, but have not yet reached any conclusions. We intend to make an announcement about the report as a whole early next year.

Gambling Review

24. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the gambling review. [10044]

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the gaming review. [10494]

Mr. Caborn: When we published the report of the gambling review body we initiated a period of consultation which ended on 31 October. We are now considering all the responses and intend to announce our conclusions early next year.

Picketts Lock

25. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the decision to abandon Picketts Lock as a venue for the world athletics championships. [10046]

Tessa Jowell: Patrick Carter's report on the Lee Valley project was completed on 31 August. The report concluded that the level of risk facing the project had reached such a stage as to make it unsustainable.

Having discussed his conclusions in detail with Sport England, the Government needed to decide whether to invest significant amounts of new money in the project to make it sustainable or whether to look to alternatives. Patrick Carter took the view that even with significant additional funding, the Lee Valley project still faced the very real prospect of being a substandard event due to transport, infrastructure and athlete accommodation difficulties.

The Government were not willing to see the United Kingdom proceed to stage a substandard event and with Sport England's agreement, decided to terminate the project on 4 October.

Dual Use Stadiums

26. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the viability of dual use stadiums with retractable seating for football and athletics; and if she will make a statement. [10047]

Mr. Caborn: I have made no specific assessment of the viability of dual use stadiums.

Eden Project

27. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress on the Eden project. [10048]

Tessa Jowell: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as Chair of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

S4C

29. **Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the subsidy paid to S4C; and if she will make a statement. [10050]

Dr. Howells: It is an important principle that broadcasters should be independent of Government. In accordance with this principle the funding paid to S4C to provide a Welsh language broadcasting service is set by the formula in section 80 of the Broadcasting Act 1996.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State lays an annual report and statement of accounts prepared by S4C before Parliament annually.

World Cup

30. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the network television broadcasting of World Cup matches in the United Kingdom. [10051]

Tessa Jowell: The whole of the World Cup Finals tournament is protected as a listed event in the UK, reflecting its importance to many millions of people. I therefore welcome the announcement made by the BBC and ITV on 18 October that they have signed an exclusive deal to broadcast the World Cup Finals tournaments in 2002 and 2006. This deal upholds the objective of the listed events legislation and will ensure that UK viewers are able to watch the entire 2002 and 2006 tournaments live on free-to-air, terrestrial television.

Sports Coaching

31. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer of the Minister for Sport of 16 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 4, if she will report the outcome of the meeting of 28 June on sports coaching facilities, and outline progress of subsequent meetings. [10052]

Mr. Caborn: At the first meeting of the coaching task force on 28 June the Terms of Reference set out in "The Government's Plan for Sport" were agreed and three sub-groups were established. The sub-groups have met on a number of occasions and reported back to the second meeting of the taskforce on 25 September. This meeting considered a draft model for a national coaching qualification and agreed to undertake an international bench-marking exercise on coaching structures in a number of other countries. The next meeting of the taskforce will take place on 22 November.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has for parents and grandparents to take basic sport coaching courses; and what links they will have to the National Experience Corps. [12226]

Mr. Caborn: The coaching taskforce established earlier this year has a remit to review the co-ordination of coach education and training. As part of the groups' wider tasks they are currently exploring the opportunities for encouraging more parents and grandparents to become involved in coaching.

My Department are currently examining ways in which the National Experience Corps can contribute to achieving this aim.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to promote coaching skills among parents. [12530]

Mr. Caborn: The coaching taskforce established earlier this year has a remit to review the co-ordination of coach education and training. As part of the groups' wider tasks they are currently exploring the opportunities for encouraging more parents to become involved in coaching.

Museum and Gallery Entry

23. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress she has made towards ensuring free entry to national museums and galleries. [10043]

Tessa Jowell: Our policy is to encourage all museums to offer the widest possible access to their collections. We have enabled those museums and galleries funded by my Department which already offer free admission to continue to offer it. We have scrapped entry charges for children and people over 60 at the main museums and galleries sponsored by my Department that currently charge and have made available from 1 December 2001 additional resources to allow them to introduce free admission for all from that date.

The restoration of free access will enable the greatest collections we have, built up by public funds over generations, to be available to everyone, no matter what their income or background.

Lottery Moneys

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the total amount of lottery moneys paid by parliamentary constituency in each of the last four years. [11859]

Mr. Caborn: I will place copies of the information requested in the Libraries of both Houses.

National Lottery

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to review the procedure for awarding the national lottery operating licence. [12983]

Mr. Caborn: Following the announcement earlier this year by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) that the Government would review the process for selecting the national lottery operator, we are now considering options for change and will be seeking the views of interested parties. We expect to publish our conclusions next year as the basis for wider public consultation.

Public Libraries

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made in improving the service provided by public libraries. [10036]

Tessa Jowell: The Government have encouraged better planning and accountability in public library services through the introduction of Annual Library Plans and a more rigorous enforcement of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Standards of service for library authorities were introduced from 1 April this year. Additionally, £170 million of lottery money is being made available to libraries through the People's Network programme to upgrade their ICT infrastructure, create innovative digital content and train library staff in the use of ICT.

Sport and Recreation Facilities

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what figures she has collated on spending by local authorities in England on sport and recreation facilities since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [10026]

Tessa Jowell: Local authorities are key providers of sport and recreation and play a central role in the delivery of sport in and for the community. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions publishes annual figures on spending by local authorities on sport and recreation. Since 1997 local authorities have spent over £549 million on new construction, conversion and renovation of sport and recreation facilities, which includes a substantial investment from the national lottery, to improve facilities for local communities.

TREASURY

Cancer Patients

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of prostate cancer patients live for at least five years after treatment in the United Kingdom, and what is the average such percentage in the European Union; [11869]

(2) what percentage of leukaemia sufferers live for at least five years after treatment in the United Kingdom, and what is the average such percentage in the European Union; [11870]

(3) what percentage of breast cancer patients live for at least five years after the treatment in the United Kingdom; and what the average such percentage is in the European Union. [11871]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the national statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Robyn Lynch to Mr. John Bercow, dated 5 November 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions on the percentage of prostate cancer patients, leukaemia sufferers and breast cancer patients that live at least five years after treatment in the United Kingdom and the average such percentages in the European Union. (11869, 11870, 11871). I am replying in his absence.

The information requested is not available.

However, the latest available comparable rates of survival from time of diagnosis for England, Scotland and some other countries in Europe were published in Berrino F, Capocaccia R, Estève J, Gatta G, Hakulinen T, Micheli M, Sant M, Verdecchia A (eds). *Survival of cancer patients in Europe - the EUROCARE-2 study.* (IARC Scientific Publications No.151. Lyons: International Agency for Research on Cancer, 1999).

A copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

Mobile Phone Licences

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the *(a)* Department of Trade and Industry and *(b)* Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions concerning 3G mobile phone licences. [12405]

Mr. Andrew Smith: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer meets regularly with Cabinet colleagues and others to discuss a wide range of issues.

Illegally Imported Alcohol

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue lost each year to the Treasury because of illegally imported alcohol; and what plans he has to reduce the loss. [10410]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* Estimates of alcohol fraud were published in the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General "Losses to the Revenue from Frauds on Alcohol Duty" (HC 178) in July 2001.

Details of the Government strategy to tackle alcohol fraud will be published in due course.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the target of HM Customs and Excise is for detecting notifiable export irregularities. [11166]

Mr. Boateng: Targets for the number of notifiable export irregularities detected are not set.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made since 11 September of the priority given by HM Customs and Excise to detecting notifiable import and export irregularities. [11165]

Mr. Boateng: Customs continue to deploy resources on the basis of intelligence and assessment of risk. Many of the potential risks which can result in notifiable import and export irregularities are unaffected by the 11 September events. Where intelligence or risk assessment indicates an increased risk a higher priority is afforded.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in how many and in what percentage of searches of premises by HM Customs and Excise were *(a)* smuggled goods and *(b)* other evidence relating to an offence discovered in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02 to date. [11167]

Mr. Boateng: This information is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many searches of premises were conducted by HM Customs and Excise *(a)* by consent, *(b)* by warrant and *(c)* by writ of assistance in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02 to date. [11168]

Mr. Boateng: Figures for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are not yet available. For the year 1999–2000 there were 298 searches of premises conducted by consent, 265 conducted by warrant and 183 by writ of assistance in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases were taken to court for Common Agricultural Policy export refund offences and irregularities levied by the Intervention Board as a result of Customs detections; what was the total overclaim value of those cases; and what was the total sum of penalties awarded in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date. [11173]

Mr. Boateng: There were no cases taken to court by HM Customs and Excise for Common Agricultural Policy export refund offences in 1999–2000, 2000–01 and no cases to date for 2001–02.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people were detained after arrest by HM Customs and Excise in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date; and how many such people were subsequently (i) charged, (ii) released on payment of a compound settlement and (iii) released for other reasons; [11170]

(2) how many people were kept in Customs detention for more than 24 hours in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date; and how many people in each year were subsequently released without charge. [11171]

Mr. Boateng: Figures for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are not yet available.

1999–2000

	England and Wales	*Northern Ireland*
Number of persons:		
Detained after arrest	3,595	89
Detained for more than 24 hours and subsequently released without charge	25	0
Number of persons for whom warrants for further detention were:		
Applied for	27	0
Granted[1]	26	0
[1]in this instance, the number of persons:		
Charged	46	0
Released on payment of a settlement	5	0
Number of persons:		
Charged	1,563	18
Released on payment of a settlement	310	1
Released for other reasons	0	0

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions were brought by HM Customs and Excise in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date in cases where the offence is registrable under the Sex Offenders Act 1997. [11169]

Mr. Boateng: As part of the multi-agency approach to combating paedophile activity both Customs and Excise and the police bring prosecutions following the investigation of detections of material by Customs.

	1999–2000	*2000–01*
Total number of prosecutions	33	29
Police	14	14
HM Customs	19	15

The figures for 2001–02 are incomplete.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many searches of persons carried out by Customs and Excise officers related to *(a)* drugs, *(b)* revenue goods and *(c)* other prohibited or restricted goods in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02 to date; and what percentages of the number of searches conducted this represented in each case. [11197]

Mr. Boateng: This information is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Individual Pension Account

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to introduce the individual pension account. [12450]

Ruth Kelly: The individual pensions account was introduced in Budget 2001. They have been available since April 2001.

FRS 17 Regulations

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the FRS 17 regulations on portfolio decisions of pension fund managers; and if he will make a statement. [12451]

Ruth Kelly: FRS 17, like the other financial reporting standards, is a matter for the Accounting Standards Board.

Kingscrest Case

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 127W, on care homes, what steps his Department has taken to challenge the decision of the London VAT tribunal. [12162]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are of the clear view that care of vulnerable people provided in residential homes should not be subject to VAT.

Customs and Excise appealed against this tribunal decision. The appeal is expected to be heard early in the new year.

Landfill Tax Credit

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) which organisations and individuals he has *(a)* already consulted and *(b)* plans to consult on the future of landfill tax credit; and when the consultations took place; [12982]

(2) when he plans to make an announcement on the future of landfill tax credit. [12981]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are committed to meeting the challenging targets for waste recycling set out in Waste Strategy 2000. As stated in Budget 2001, it is attracted to replacing all or part of the landfill tax credit scheme with a public spending programme to direct resources towards Government priorities on sustainable waste management. The Government, together with the devolved Administrations, are now beginning work on developing options for a spending programme for consideration as part of Spending Review 2002. In taking forward this work, the Government will consult with interested parties on the shape of any replacement scheme and the transition to any replacement.

Brownfield Sites

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answers of 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 375W, and 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 625W, on brownfield sites, what information he has *(a)* collated and *(b)* published on the take-up of the tax credit for clearing and developing brownfield sites. [12414]

Mr. Boateng: No estimates are currently available for the take up of this measure. Tax relief for expenditure on the remediation of contaminated land will be claimed in the tax return of the company undertaking the remediation work and those returns do not have to be filed until 12 months after the end of the accounting period concerned. Relief is available in respect of land remediation expenditure incurred on or after 11 May 2001, therefore those companies who take advantage of this relief are unlikely to file their tax returns until May 2002 at the earliest. Information provided in those returns is covered by the normal rules on taxpayer confidentiality.

Tobin Tax

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with his European colleagues on the Tobin tax; and if he will make a statement. [9849]

Mr. Boateng: The Tobin tax was discussed by European Finance Ministers during the 22 September informal ECOFIN meeting in Liege. Ministers agreed to further work into the economic implications and practical issues raised by the Tobin tax as part of a wider study into the challenges of globalisation.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about the Tobin tax. [8750]

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury has received correspondence from the public and non-governmental organisations, as well as academic assessments of the Tobin tax, and there have been meetings with non-governmental organisations and academics to discuss the issues.

The Tobin tax was also discussed by European Finance Ministers during the 22 September informal ECOFIN meeting in Liege. Ministers agreed to further work into the economic implications and practical issues raised by the Tobin tax as part of a wider study into the challenges of globalisation.

Church Repairs

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of his policy on making a grant available for the repair of churches in lieu of reducing VAT; and what representations he has received on this subject. [11982]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor's long-term objective is to reduce the VAT rate levied on repairs to listed places of worship from 17.5 per cent. to 5 per cent. This is not permitted under current European Community legislation, but the European Commission has indicated that it will look at the UK's proposal to amend the VAT rules when these are reviewed in 2003. In the interim, the Chancellor has decided to introduce a grant scheme which will award the differential between the 17.5 per cent. and 5 per cent. rate to qualifying buildings. This scheme has been widely welcomed by owners of listed places of worship. It represents significant additional funds for this group—initial estimates are up to £30 million per year.

Sustainable Waste Management

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the performance of the environmental bodies in meeting his indicative guidelines for spending on sustainable waste management projects in the last 12 months. [12044]

Mr. Boateng: It is too early to make any meaningful assessment. In May this year the Government set the waste industry a challenging target of 65 per cent. of landfill tax credits to be allocated to sustainable waste management projects. The Government will review progress in forthcoming budget reports.

Bank Disclosures

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 204W, on bank disclosures, what *(a)* barriers to and *(b)* opportunities for growth in the individual banks' lending activities in disadvantaged communities he has identified; and if he will make a statement. [12446]

Ruth Kelly: The barriers and opportunities to banks' lending activities in disadvantaged communities are identified in several reports including:

"Enterprise and Social Exclusion, Policy Action Team 3" (HM Treasury November 1999).

"Enterprising Communities: Wealth Beyond Welfare" (Social Investment Task Force, October 2000).

"Finance for Small Businesses in Deprived Communities" (Bank of England November 2000).

Competitiveness

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the World Economic Forum calculation of the change in the ranking of the United Kingdom in the league table of competitiveness from 1998 to 2000. [12538]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 640W, regarding the World Economic Forum's growth competitiveness index.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the Institute of Management Development calculation of the change in the ranking of the United Kingdom in the league table of competitiveness from 1997 to 2001. [12535]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkstone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 640W.

Market Abuse Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on his position in regard to the proposed EU market abuse directive; [12392]

(2) what the forecast cost to the UK financial services industry is of the proposed EU market abuse directive. [12391]

Ruth Kelly: The Government support the Commission's objectives of developing the single market in financial services and promoting the integrity of the single market. The proposal for the directive creates for the first time an EU-wide regime to counter market manipulation and updates the existing insider dealing provisions to enable them to benefit from the enhanced co-operation measures.

The Government will examine the proposal carefully to ensure that there is no diminution in the level of protection from market manipulation currently enjoyed by UK markets, that the level of regulation proposed is proportionate and consistent with the goal of advancing the single market in financial services, and that any consequent changes to the UK's new market abuse regime are kept to a minimum.

Since the United Kingdom has a rigorous market abuse regime under part VIII of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 due to come into force shortly, United Kingdom firms should already have in place measures to counter abusive behaviour.

However, the directive as currently drafted would require some modifications to the existing regulatory regime. The inflexible regulatory approach taken in the current draft of the directive could give rise to additional compliance costs as firms incur legal costs on advice to avoid behaviour that could give rise to enforcement actions.

The Government's goal in negotiations is to minimise the need for modification of the current regulatory regime to ensure the directive effectively tackles market abuse and does not impose additional, unnecessary costs.

Charities (Taxation)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the taxation of charities. [12331]

Ruth Kelly: The Government keep all taxes under review and decisions are made as part of the normal Budget process. In April 2000 the Government introduced a number of measures to help charities and to improve incentives for charitable giving. The Getting Britain Giving package of measures included improvements to the Gift Aid and Payroll Giving schemes and a new income tax relief for giving shares to charities. The Government are supporting the Giving Campaign, an independent charities-led initiative, to encourage a culture of giving and increase awareness of planned tax efficient giving.

Business Start-up Tax Credits

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the provision of business start-up tax credits in the Objective 1 areas. [12397]

Ruth Kelly: The Government published proposals in March 2001 for a new community investment tax credit to increase the availability of capital to small enterprises, including start-ups, in disadvantaged communities. Details of the proposal can be found in the Treasury consultation document "Enterprising Communities: A Tax Incentive for Community Investment".

Office of Government Commerce

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the saving to public funds that will be realised by the establishment of the Office of Government Commerce. [11842]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The OGC has been set a target to deliver £1 billion value for money gains across central Government by 2002–03. This will be achieved by Departments applying the tools, methods and techniques promoted by OGC.

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes in the rate of value added tax have been introduced since 1 May 1997. [11378]

Mr. Boateng: Changes up to 1 January 2001 are published in table C6 of the tables and statistics accompanying the Customs and Excise annual report for 2000, available on the Customs and Excise website.

Changes to VAT rates announced in the Budget of 7 March 2001 were published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2001.

Mortgage Lenders (Fees)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to prohibit the practice of mortgage lenders charging their customers a fee should they move their mortgage to an alternative mortgage lender. [11966]

Ruth Kelly: There are legitimate reasons for lenders to charge fees, not least the administration costs that are involved in transferring deeds to other lenders, together with the essential correspondence that needs to be entered into between borrower and (both) lenders as well as between lenders. Moreover, there is clear disclosure of these fees upfront in line with the benchmarks set out in CAT standard mortgages. I do not therefore propose to prohibit this practice.

Tobacco

Rachel Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has of the tax revenue received in each of the last three financial years from the sale of *(a)* cigars and *(b)* cigarettes. [12164]

Mr. Boateng: Duty receipts from sales of tobacco products are published in chapter C of the Government's annual Financial Statement and Budget Report. Duty receipts from sales of individual types of tobacco products are set out on a regular basis in the HM Customs and Excise "Tobacco Factsheet", available from the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the mean annual revenue in terms of *(a)* tobacco tax and *(b)* VAT on combined cost of tobacco products and the duty thereon imposed, from each smoker in the UK in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 2000–01; and if he will estimate the mean annual combined tobacco tax and VAT revenue to be raised from each smoker in the UK in 2001–02. [9172]

Mr. Boateng: No accurate estimates are currently available.

Correspondence

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to respond to the letter of the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales on fiscal variations; and if he will make a statement. [12396]

Mr. Andrew Smith: All representations in advance of the 2002 Budget will be considered carefully in the normal way.

Smuggling

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the value of cross-Channel smuggling in summer *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2000. [9173]

Mr. Boateng: For Customs' estimate of cross-Channel smuggling in 2000 I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Paymaster General gave to the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on 7 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 229–30W. Results from the first year of the "Tackling Tobacco Smuggling" strategy, including Customs' estimate of cross-Channel smuggling in 2001, will be published at the time of the pre-Budget report.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the share of the tobacco market represented by illicit supplies in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 to the most recent date for which information is available. [9174]

Mr. Boateng: Results from the first year of the "Tackling Tobacco Smuggling" strategy, including the level of the illicit market for 2000–01, will be published at the time of the pre-Budget report. Customs estimate of the size of the illicit market during 2001–02 will be published on a full financial year basis during 2002–03.

Cigarette Seizures

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cigarettes were seized by HM Customs and Excise in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 to the latest date for which information is available to him. [9180]

Mr. Boateng: Results from the first year of the "Tackling Tobacco Smuggling" strategy, including the number of cigarettes seized during 2000–01, will be published at the time of the pre-Budget report. Customs cigarette seizures for 2001–02 will be published on a full financial year basis during 2002–03.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Travel Warrants (Members' Spouses)

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the President of the Council what plans there are to increase the number of travel warrants available to the spouses of Members each year. [11082]

Mr. Robin Cook: I am not aware of any such plans. The hon. Gentleman may wish to raise the matter with the Speaker's Advisory Panel, which considers such matters.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many special advisers employed by the Government participate directly with civil service press and public relations staff in the planning and implementation of press and media announcements. [10961]

Mr. Leslie: Special advisers advise Ministers on the development of Government policy and its presentation, liaising as necessary with civil service press officers.

Civil Service (Departmental Changes)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the net effect on full-time employee headcount of the civil service of the departmental changes announced in June. [12049]

Mr. Leslie: Central data on civil service personnel is collected twice yearly on the basis of staff in post at 1 April and 1 October. Changes in civil service staffing levels, including any attributable to the departmental changes announced in June, will not therefore become apparent until figures for October 2001 are available.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Deaths (Registration)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Lord Chancellor will take steps to change the law on the registration of deaths to ensure equality of treatment as between married and unmarried couples. [11961]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

In 1998, the then Economic Secretary to the Treasury commissioned the Registrar-General to carry out a fundamental review of the civil registration service in England and Wales. This was in recognition of the fact that much of the civil registration system is outdated and does not meet the needs of today's society.

In September 1999, the Registrar-General published a consultation paper, 'Registration: Modernising a Vital Service'. The consultation period ended on 6 December

1999. The responses have been used to set out options for the future development of the registration service, so that it can adapt to the changing needs and attitudes of a modern society.

Many of the responses to the consultation document were in support of equality of treatment for men and women in the records of births, deaths and marriages. Proposals on how this could be achieved are now being formulated and the intention is to publish a policy paper in due course.

Georgina McCarthy

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action she intends to take on the Family Law Act Sub-Committee's report on the murder of Georgina McCarthy. [11723]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Sub-Committee's recommendations are currently being considered by a working party of the inter-departmental group on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. The working group, which comprises officials from the Lord Chancellor's Department, Home Office and Department of Health, met on 1 November 2001. Areas were identified for action by each Department and work has begun on developing an inter-departmental strategy to deal with the issue of improving co-operation between the criminal and civil/family jurisdictions.

Bailiff Law

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to reform bailiff law. [11724]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 451W.

The consultation period for the Green Paper 'Towards Effective Enforcement' ended on 12 October 2001. We are very grateful to the wide range of individuals and organisations who have used their time and expertise to respond to the Green Paper.

The responses are currently being analysed by the Enforcement Review Team.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in each of the last five years for which figures are available, how many applications for legal aid in claims for clinical negligence against the NHS were *(a)* accepted and *(b)* rejected. [11956]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission does not record case data in a way that would enable an answer to be given to the exact question asked.

The number of certificates issued by the Commission for legal aid relating to all claims for clinical negligence was as follows:

(a) in 1996–97: 9,165;

(b) in 1997–98: 11,899;

(c) in 1998–99: 7,867;

(d) in 1999–2000: 7,375; and

(e) in 2000–01: 7,329.

It is not possible to say, at this level of detail, how many applications were accepted and rejected. Approximate refusal rates are available for the last two years:

in 1999–2000: 10 per cent.

in 2000–01: 8 per cent.

In addition to this refusal rate, a number of offers of legal aid are not pursued. This figure is in the order of 10 per cent. of applications received.

It is not possible to separate applications from claimants and defendants, or those which involve the NHS from those which do not.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost, in each of the last five years for which figures are available, of legal aid in claims for clinical negligence against the NHS. [11955]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission does not record case data in a way that would enable an answer to be given to the exact question asked.

The Commission records the value of main bills paid, comprising solicitors' costs, disbursements and counsels' fees. The total figures for each year also include the value of claims which are met in full by the opponents. The net cost to the Commission of clinical negligence cases is therefore less than the figures given:

(a) in 1996–97: £56.9 million;

(b) in 1997–98: £64.4 million;

(c) in 1998–99: £64.6 million;

(d) in 1999–2000: £60.6 million; and

(e) in 2000–01: £52.8 million.

It is not possible to separate claims against the NHS from claims against GPs and dentists; or can the Commission differentiate between NHS defendants and non-NHS defendants.

Prior to the introduction of civil contracting in January 2000, clinical negligence was not separately identified as a category of advice work. The figures therefore do not provide information regarding payments for advice and assistance work done under the former 'green form' system.

Magistrates Courts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many court cases in magistrates courts have been abandoned in each of the last five years owing to non-appearance of *(a)* witnesses and *(b)* police witnesses. [12604]

Mr. Wills: Information has not been collected nationally on cases which have been abandoned. From 1 January 2002, a joint scheme will be implemented in England and Wales to collect data on the reasons for Cracked, Ineffective and Vacated trials in the magistrates courts.

Working Group on Gender Allocation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a further statement on progress of the Home Office Working Group on Gender Allocation. [11802]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This subject was transferred from the Home Office to the Lord Chancellor's Department in the recent machinery of Government changes. The Report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People was presented to Parliament in July 2002. The report has been carefully considered within Government and by other interested groups. The Government are sympathetic to the issues raised in the report and are considering further how to take the matter forward.

Induction and Accommodation Centres

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice and representation will be available to asylum seekers in induction and accommodation centres. [11910]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 642.

Details of the services that will be available in induction and accommodation centres will appear in the White Paper, which my right hon. Friend announced on 29 October 2001.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were classified as category A prisoners in prisons in England and Wales as at 1 July. [4782]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional information shows that on 1 July 2001 there were four female category A prisoners in prisons in England and Wales, all of which were adults, compared with 955 category A adult males, and 14 category A male young offenders.

Personal Identity Documents

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance the Government give to Departments in cases involving the loss of personal identity documents *(a)* when they are being held by Departments and *(b)* in other circumstances. [10073]

Angela Eagle: Staff in Home Office departments handling documents of identity are instructed to treat them with proper regard to security.

Where it is confirmed after a thorough search that a document has been lost in the department, the document is replaced at the expense of the department. The circumstances are investigated and the situation monitored.

Losses in other circumstances are investigated wherever possible and the situation monitored to identify trends. Where appropriate, information to help prevent fraudulent use of documents is shared with other Departments. No general guidance to other Departments is issued.

Road Traffic Offences (Fines)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much revenue was generated from fines for road traffic offences in the last 12 months. [11563]

Mr. Denham: Available information taken from the 1999 Home Office Motoring Offences (Court Proceedings) Database shows that the amount (£) of fines imposed at all courts for road traffic offences within England and Wales, was £57 million.

3.1 million fixed penalty notices were issued for road traffic offences in 1999 amounting to £80 million.

Religious Discrimination

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 19 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1399W, on religious discrimination, if he will list the research participants who have been consulted; and if he will put copies of their evidence in the Library. [11066]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The research participants in question took part in a research project commissioned by the Home Office into religious discrimination. They included representatives of religious organisations and representatives of secular agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors throughout England and Wales.

I am not able to disclose their personal details as the organisations and participants were assured their responses would be confidential, as is standard practice in social surveys. In fact, researchers at the University of Derby (who conducted the research) removed all names and addresses before they sent us a copy of the survey data, which again is proper procedure.

This research produced two reports published in the Home Office Research Study series in February 2001;

1. "Religious discrimination in England and Wales" (ISBN 1 84082 612 6). One of the findings from this report was referred to in my last correspondence. This report provides full details of the survey findings; and
2. "Tackling religious discrimination: practical implications for policy-makers and legislators" (ISBN 1 84082 613 4). This is a separate report produced by the Cambridge Centre for Public Law and looks at the practical implications of the findings from the survey.

As with all our publications in the Home Office Research Study series, these reports are available in the Library.

Refugees

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what security profile is carried out on refugees arriving in the UK. [8150]

Angela Eagle: All arriving passengers are presented to the United Kingdom immigration controls where they are examined by an immigration officer before being allowed into the UK.

That examination includes checking personal details against the Immigration Service Warnings Index. The Warnings Index computer system is the primary tool for providing information to staff operating the immigration entry control. It maintains records of passengers who

have, for example, previously been refused entry or been deported, and also contains information for the purposes of national security and the detection and prevention of crime. All Immigration Service staff at control points have access to the Warnings Index and portable equipment is available for use elsewhere when needed. All arriving asylum applicants are checked against the system.

Foreign Armed Forces (UK Citizens)

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking concerning British citizens who serve with the Taliban forces. [11981]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* It is wrong to take up arms against British soldiers and their allies.

Generally British citizens are free to travel abroad and it would not be practical to investigate every individual's intentions. However, anyone considering fighting with the Taliban will know it is wrong to take up arms against British soldiers and their allies, and should be aware that they may be laying themselves open to criminal sanctions, including for treason.

In addition, individuals who are committing offences here under the Terrorism Act 2000 can be detained by the police for investigation.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on dealing with British citizens apprehended in Afghanistan taking arms against British military personnel, on their return to the UK. [12602]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) on 2 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 862W.

Victims of Torture

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance is offered to asylum seekers who make an application to enter the UK on the basis of providing evidence that they are the victims of torture. [11663]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* A person making an application for asylum may be issued with a Statement of Evidence Form (SEF). This has an accompanying explanatory note about the role of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture.

Those who are not given a SEF will be interviewed shortly after having made an asylum claim and if they raise the issue of torture during the course of their interview, the interviewing officer may advise them to get a medical report. The interviewing officer may also refer them to specialist organisations that might be able to assist them, such as the medical foundation.

All interviewing officers are trained to deal with victims of torture and have access to guidelines setting out how to interview such people.

All asylum seekers who are supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) are provided with guidance notes explaining that they have access to the national health service (NHS).

Cannabis

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* arrested and charged with and *(b)* convicted of cannabis possession in (i) the Thames Valley police authority area and (ii) every other police authority area in each of the last four years. [11875]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Arrest data are not collected centrally by individual offence.

Information from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database showing the number of persons convicted of the possession of cannabis by police force area during the period 1997–2000 is given in the table.

Number of persons convicted at all courts for the possession of cannabis by police force area in England and Wales 1997–2000

Police force area	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Avon and Somerset	140	201	260	311
Bedfordshire	227	290	248	212
Cambridgeshire	154	152	147	88
Cheshire	375	505	537	374
Cleveland	79	123	205	221
Cumbria	211	243	199	161
Derbyshire	167	204	248	206
Devon and Cornwall	492	587	517	479
Dorset	105	222	286	281
Durham	97	102	100	212
Essex	465	538	559	567
Gloucestershire	143	191	201	172
Greater Manchester	594	728	808	895
Hampshire	530	770	917	738
Hertfordshire	253	228	236	233
Humberside	146	213	226	232
Kent	542	873	873	720
Lancashire	657	885	814	716
Leicestershire	244	308	245	226
Lincolnshire	292	317	171	162
London, City of	67	89	70	23
Merseyside	999	1,312	1,246	941
Metropolitan police	3,743	5,100	4,974	4,550
Norfolk	318	170	261	237
Northamptonshire	12	11	31	102
Northumbria	314	655	879	925
North Yorkshire	230	371	337	158
Nottinghamshire	244	236	266	260
South Yorkshire	416	474	577	617
Staffordshire[1]	249	289	221	n/a
Suffolk	230	239	234	166
Surrey	208	250	314	358
Sussex	317	330	296	272
Thames Valley	550	683	642	558
Warwickshire	67	76	74	74
West Mercia	261	314	286	218
West Midlands	785	1,212	1,114	1,213
West Yorkshire	940	1,153	1,011	856
Wiltshire	125	169	203	169
Dyfed Powys	302	499	476	368
Gwent	178	262	278	337
North Wales	222	357	355	292
South Wales	585	712	681	692
England and Wales	17,275	22,643	22,623	20,725

n/a = not available

[1] Estimates made for Staffordshire police force, who were able to submit data for only a sample of weeks for year 2000, have been included only in the total.

Note:

All data are given on a principal offence basis.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the effect on the *(a)* quantity of cannabis consumed in the UK, *(b)* quantity of tobacco consumed in the UK and *(c)* number of people in the UK using cannabis that would result from the reclassification of cannabis from a Class B to Class C drug. [11589]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I do not anticipate that a decision to reclassify cannabis from Class B to Class C under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 would have any effect on the number of people using the drug or the quantity consumed. Cannabis will remain a controlled drug and using it still a criminal offence.

Sex Offences

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reviews of sex offences are in progress in his Department; and when their conclusions will be reported to the House. [11873]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government set up a Sex Offences Review in January 1999. Its recommendations on reforming the law on sex offences were published in 'Setting the Boundaries' in July 2000. We are now considering the recommendations in the light of the over 700 responses to that consultation document. We hope to make an announcement as soon as possible.

In addition responses to consultation on a review of Part One of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 (the register of sex offenders) are currently being analysed.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information will be stored on the asylum seekers' identification smart card. [12055]

Angela Eagle: The Application Registration Card or 'ARC' will have a microchip which could enable it to support financial transactions in due course. In addition, it is currently envisaged that the following data will be stored within the microchip:

Printed on card

- Name
- Date of Birth
- Sex
- Nationality
- IFB ref no
- Place of original issue
- Date of original issue
- Card Issue No
- Date of application
- Number of dependants
- Dependant of
- Language 1
- Language 2

Contained in microchip

- Name
- Address
- IFB ref no
- Home Office ref no
- Port/LEO reference
- NASS ref no
- Originating Port/LEO code
- Date of Birth
- Sex
- Nationality Code
- Case Type
- Asylum/Non-asylum
- Place of original issue
- Date of original issue
- Next report date
- Case Status
- Card Issue No
- Card Serial No
- Face image
- Fingerprints
- Issuing Officer
- Fingerprint used
- Date of application
- Number of dependants
- Dependant of
- Language 1
- Language 2.

However, these lists are still subject to change. Card design will not be confirmed until 9 November.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum claims by *(a)* families, *(b)* unaccompanied minors and *(c)* all persons were rejected on the grounds of non-compliance (i) as an initial decision and (ii) as a final decision, as a percentage of all decisions, for each of the last six months. [10749]

Angela Eagle: The available information on initial decisions made on asylum claims made by (a) principal applicants and (b) families are included in the table. Decision data for unaccompanied minors are unavailable.

Initial decisions made[1,2,3] and refusals on non-compliance grounds of asylum and exceptional leave, principal applicants, February 2001-July 2001[4]

	Initial decisions made	*Refused on non-compliance grounds*	*Percentage of total decisions*
February 2001	14,430	3,460	24
March 2001	18,895	3,110	16
April 2001	9,455	1,415	15
May 2001	9,645	1,625	17
June 2001	8,205	1,400	17
July 2001	7,600	1,285	17

[1] Figures (other than percentages) rounded to nearest 5.
[2] Information is of initial decision excluding the outcome of appeals of other subsequent decisions.
[3] May include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[4] Provisional.

Initial decisions made[1,2,3] and refusals on non-compliance grounds of asylum and exceptional leave, families, February 2001-July 2001[4]

	Initial decisions made	*Refused on non-compliance grounds*	*Percentage of total decisions*
February 2001	780	170	22
March 2001	1,165	205	18
April 2001	705	165	24
May 2001	750	175	23
June 2001	655	100	15
July 2001	590	70	12

[1] Figures (other than percentages) rounded to nearest 5.
[2] Information is of initial decision excluding the outcome of appeals of other subsequent decisions.
[3] May include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[4] Provisional.

Information on final decisions are not readily available and would only be obtained by examination of individual case files relating to the outcomes of initial decisions, appeals and reconsiderations, which would incur disproportionate cost.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the percentage of applications for asylum refused on non-compliance grounds at the initial decision stage by country of origin in the last six months. [10724]

Angela Eagle: The information requested has been provided in the table.

Refusals[1,2,3] of asylum and exceptional leave, excluding dependants, by nationality, February 2001-July 2001[4]

Europe	*Total decisions*	*Total refused*	*Percentage of total decisions*	*Refused on non-compliance grounds*	*Percentage of total decisions*	*Percentage of total refusals*
Albania	975	885	91	245	25	28
Czech Republic	595	595	100	60	10	10
FRY	6,035	4,805	80	1,110	18	23
Poland	455	445	98	95	21	21
Romania	1,300	1,265	97	760	58	60
Russia	525	495	94	120	23	24
Turkey	4,495	4,265	95	445	10	10
Ukraine	705	685	97	165	23	24
Other former USSR	1,650	1,560	95	545	33	35
Other former Yugo.	525	480	91	100	19	21
Others	485	440	91	65	13	15
Total	17,745	15,910	90	3,710	21	23
Americas						
Colombia	420	375	89	65	15	17
Ecuador	345	330	96	65	19	20
Others	400	370	93	90	23	24
Total	1,165	1,080	93	220	19	20
Middle East						
Iran	3,360	2,900	86	545	16	19
Iraq	4,735	3,520	74	745	16	21
Others	1,110	940	85	140	13	15
Total	9,200	7,360	80	1,430	16	19
Africa						
Algeria	1,670	1,585	95	345	21	22
Angola	695	380	55	95	14	25
Dem Rep of Congo	1,455	1,115	77	125	9	11
Ethiopia	650	515	79	40	6	8
Gambia	45	35	78	10	22	29
Ghana	230	180	78	55	24	31
Ivory Coast	305	285	93	50	16	18
Kenya	540	490	91	105	19	21
Nigeria	640	555	87	210	33	38
Rwanda	585	300	51	120	21	40
Sierra Leone	1,425	365	26	210	15	58
Somalia	4,180	1,505	36	745	18	50
Sudan	465	370	80	40	9	11
Tanzania	75	65	87	10	13	15
Uganda	640	570	89	70	11	12
Zimbabwe	945	885	94	85	9	10
Others	3,710	3,020	81	480	13	16
Total	17,305	11,330	65	2,720	16	24
Asia						
Afghanistan	7,175	1,470	20	795	11	54
Bangladesh	555	535	96	165	30	31
China	2,340	2,255	96	595	25	26

Refusals[1,2,3] of asylum and exceptional leave, excluding dependants, by nationality, February 2001-July 2001[4]

Europe	*Total decisions*	*Total refused*	*Percentage of total decisions*	*Refused on non-compliance grounds*	*Percentage of total decisions*	*Percentage of total refusals*
India	1,775	1,740	98	790	45	45
Pakistan	2,420	2,260	93	800	33	35
Sri Lanka	6,375	5,215	82	485	8	9
Others	1,340	1,240	93	445	33	36
Total	21,980	14,710	67	4,070	19	28
Other and unknown nationalities	825	635	77	140	17	22
Grand total	68,230	51,030	75	12,285	18	24

[1] Figures (other than percentages) rounded to nearest five.
[2] Information is of initial decision excluding the outcome of appeals of other subsequent decisions.
[3] May include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[4] Provisional

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what purpose asylum seekers will be required to present their application registration cards. [11744]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* Asylum seekers will not be required to present Application Registration Cards (ARCs) other than for immigration and asylum purposes. They are being introduced to help them identify themselves in order to access Asylum Support services. The current standard acknowledgement letter (SAL) is too open to forgery and counterfeiting.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether employers will be required to check the Application Registration Card of employees they believe to be asylum seekers. [11745]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* Employers are not currently required to check an asylum seeker's standard acknowledgement letter (SAL) but they must ensure that any person they are proposing to employ has permission to work in this country. Employers who fail to carry out such checks may be committing an offence under section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996.

The Application Registration Card will be issued to all new asylum seekers. It is not envisaged that it will in itself confer permission to work and a statement to that effect will be on the reverse of the card. Other evidence will have to be provided for employers to check eligibility for employment. However, the card will help the holder to establish his/her identity.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money per *(a)* individual and *(b)* family was allocated to Barnsley metropolitan district council in respect of (i) council housing for asylum seekers and (ii) financial support for asylum seekers in the last 12 months. [10947]

Angela Eagle: In the year from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 Barnsley metropolitan district council received £629,478.62 in grant for supporting asylum seekers, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This was based on unit costs of *(a)* £140 per week per single person and *(b)* £240 per week for a family. This amount is inclusive of (i) housing and (ii) other support.

Barnsley is a member of the Yorkshire and Humberside consortium and provides housing under contract to National Asylum Support Service but it is not possible to identify the amounts directly attributable to Barnsley.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers in Barnsley metropolitan borough council are funded by the Government. [10942]

Angela Eagle: The available information comes from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) which supports asylum seekers who applied for asylum on or after the 3 April 2000. Information is not available centrally on the number of asylum seekers in Barnsley who are funded by the Government under the Interim Support Scheme.

Statistics from NASS, for the end of July 2001, show that 160[1,2] asylum seekers (including dependants) were being supported in NASS accommodation in Barnsley.

A further 150[1,2], asylum seekers (including dependants) were receiving voucher only support from NASS in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, which includes Barnsley.

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Cases which have had their support ceased are excluded from these figures.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* asylum seekers, and *(b)* others applying under immigration law whose cases and appeals have failed (i) left the UK voluntarily and (ii) remained in the UK; if he is aware of their whereabouts; and if he will make a statement. [9442]

Angela Eagle: 550 persons left the United Kingdom under the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme in 2000. It is not possible to say how many other persons voluntarily left the United Kingdom without the knowledge of the Home Office, or left voluntarily after enforcement action had been initiated.

Comprehensive information on the number and location of persons who remain in the UK after having exhausted their rights of appeal is not available.

Prison High Security Estate

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much of the £70 million allocated for new places in the prison high security estate announced in September 2000 has been spent. [10588]

Beverley Hughes: The £70 million allocated for new places in the Prison Service High Security estate announced in September 2000 provides funding for the development of new services for those who are dangerous and severely personality disordered (DSPD) over three years. It includes resources for capital costs, for the construction of new units, running costs and support for the development of new approaches to assessment and treatment. These are complex schemes involving major innovation both in design and in the approach to service delivery.

The initial capital allocation in 2001–02 was £9 million to fund three refurbished units at Whitemoor Prison (and replacement of prison places lost as a result) and the beginning of construction of a new build unit at Frankland Prison. The work at Whitemoor Prison is complete and has incurred a total capital cost of £230,000 together with £4.27 million allocated to the Prison Service for replacement of lost prison places.

Work at Frankland Prison has been slightly delayed by adverse ground conditions but is projected to incur capital costs of £1 million this year to open on schedule in 2003. In 2001–02, £11 million was allocated for running costs and service development work. This was necessarily a rough projection of likely costs because of the ground breaking nature of this work. At this stage we project spending of £5.2 million (with £766,584 spent to date). Any underspend is being reallocated to other key Home Office priorities.

Overstayers

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the processing of applications for indefinite leave to remain in the UK made under the regularisation of overstayers scheme; and when he expects it to be completed. [10558]

Angela Eagle: Resources have been invested in the current financial year to identify and process those cases where leave to remain can be granted under existing policy concessions. A dedicated unit within Immigration Casework Directorate (ICD) North has now been trained, and has already sifted and taken action on 600 applications. During the next financial year (2002–03) more caseworkers and resources will be devoted to the consideration of the remaining cases. The target date for the completion of all considerations is April 2003.

Charity Commissioners

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been received by the Charity Commissioners and from how many complainants; how many have been fully or partially upheld; how many complaints relating to the Charity Commission have been received by the independent complaints reviewer and from how many complainants; how many have been fully or partially upheld; and if the present pilot complaints procedures are to continue. [10963]

Angela Eagle: This is a matter for the Charity Commission, who will write to the hon. Member. A copy of the Commission's reply will be placed in the Library.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Criminal Records Bureau will be launched; and if he will make a statement. [11752]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) on 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 449W.

Criminal Justice System Reserve

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much of the Criminal Justice System Reserve has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent to date; and if he will make a statement about his plans to allocate the reserve in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [11754]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Of the £100 million Criminal Justice System Reserve in 2001–02, £85 million has been allocated to date. Information on spend to date on approved initiatives indicates that full allocations will be spent. In addition £13.75 million has been allocated from the Reserve to approved initiatives in 2002–03 and up to £53.1 million in 2003–04.

Allocations from the Criminal Justice System Reserve require the joint agreement of the Home Secretary, Lord Chancellor and Attorney-General prior to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury releasing the money from the Reserve. Bidding guidance for the Criminal Justice System Reserve for 2001–02 and 2002–03 was issued to the three Criminal Justice System Departments in July 2001. Ministers will shortly be recommending to the Chief Secretary further allocations for 2002–03 and 2003–04.

Drug Testing

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimation he has made of the pilot projects on drug testing for detainees in *(a)* Staffordshire, *(b)* Hackney and *(c)* Nottingham. [11586]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Piloting of the provisions for drug testing persons in police detention after charge, introduced under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, began in Staffordshire on 30 July and in Hackney and Nottingham on 17 September. An interim evaluation report is due in spring 2002, with a further interim report in spring 2003 and a final full evaluation report in early 2004.

Correspondence

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will respond to the fax from the hon. Member for Poole of 11 September on Leonilla Beck (Ref 16407/1). [10298]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member for Poole on 24 October.

Independent Schools

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on the charitable status of independent schools. [11456]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The advancement of education is the second of the four main heads of charity and any not-for-profit body that operates an independent school will normally be charitable under this head. The issue of charitable status is being more broadly considered by the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit as part of its review of the legal and regulatory framework for voluntary organisations. The review will cover the scope and definition of charity, although it does not have the aim of removing charitable status from any particular type of organisation. The report of the review is due in early 2002.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will abolish the charitable status for independent schools. [9594]

Angela Eagle: There are no plans to remove charitable status from independent schools. The issue of charitable status is being more broadly considered by the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit as part of its review of the legal and regulatory framework for voluntary organisations. The review will cover the scope and definition of charity, although it does not have the aim of removing charitable status from any particular type of organisation such as independent schools. The report of the review is due in early 2002.

National Asylum Support Service

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been received by NASS in respect of sub-standard accommodation provided for asylum seekers since April 2000; and if he will make a statement. [11370]

Angela Eagle: Since April 2000 the housing management team of National Asylum Support Service has received 347 complaints about sub-standard accommodation. These complaints relate to both housing conditions and management. The complaints are from a range of sources including asylum seekers themselves or their legal representatives as well as voluntary and public sector organisations acting on their behalf.

All complaints received by the housing management team are registered, investigated and monitored. The team liaises as necessary with other agencies such as local authorities and refugee organisations in dealing with complaints.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many part 8 reviews have been carried out by the Metropolitan police on incidents of domestic violence since the inception of the system. [11205]

Mr. Denham: When a child dies, and abuse or neglect are known or suspected to be a factor in the death, local agencies should consider whether there are lessons to be learned from the tragedy about the ways in which they work together to safeguard children. Consequently, when a child dies in such circumstances, the area child protection committee should always conduct a review into the involvement with the child and family of agencies and professionals.

Additionally, the area child protection committee should always consider whether to undertake a serious case review where a child has sustained a potentially life-threatening injury through abuse or neglect, serious sexual abuse, or sustained serious and permanent impairment of health or development through abuse or neglect, and the case gives rise to concerns about the way in which local professionals and services work together to safeguard children.

The Metropolitan police service does not carry out serious case reviews themselves, but like any other agency, they may be asked to undertake a management review of its involvement with a child and family as part of the case review process.

The conduct of such reviews is the responsibility of the area child protection committee for the area in which the child, who is the subject of the review, was normally resident.

In five serious case reviews to which the Metropolitan police service has contributed, a history of domestic violence between the carers prior to the death of a child has been identified.

Extradition

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people accused of capital crimes have been extradited to the USA since 11 May 1997; and under what arrangements. [11402]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The availability of the death penalty has been an issue in only one of 34 surrenders to the United States since 1997. In that case, the fugitive was surrendered following an assurance from the United States authorities that the death penalty would neither be sought nor applied. That is consistent with the UK/US Extradition Treaty (United States of America (Extradition) Order 1976 as amended by the United States of America (Extradition) (Amendment) Order 1986) which provides that extradition may be refused unless the requesting party gives satisfactory assurances that the death penalty will not be carried out.

Political Asylum

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are applied when deciding whether an unsuccessful applicant for political asylum should be granted exceptional leave to remain; and how many people have been granted such exceptional leave since June 1997. [12455]

Angela Eagle: Exceptional leave is a discretionary grant of limited leave made by the Home Secretary. Every case is considered on its own individual merits and

exceptional leave is normally granted only after an asylum application has been substantively considered and it has been decided to refuse the application.

Exceptional leave may be granted for a wide number of reasons but is mainly granted for compassionate or humanitarian reasons or where there is a specific government policy or concession. Exceptional leave is also granted where removal from the United Kingdom would breach our obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR).

Exceptional leave is granted for limited periods, normally up to four years. After four years, an applicant may apply for settlement in the United Kingdom.

Our current statistical records run from June 1997 to July 2001. During this period, 46,215 people were granted exceptional leave, of which 14,110 were granted under the post July 1993 backlog clearance measures.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of applications for political asylum came from people who have already been living in the United Kingdom for at least six months. [12456]

Angela Eagle: The requested information is unavailable because data on applicants' dates of entry to the United Kingdom are not currently collected. The majority of applicants apply for asylum in-country rather than at ports.

Motoring Offences

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in the county of Essex for *(a)* serious motoring offences and *(b)* speeding by motor vehicles in (i) each full year since 1994 and (ii) the nine months to September 2001. [12007]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Available information is given in the table. Data for 2000 will be available later this year. 2001 data will be available in the autumn 2002.

Proceedings at magistrates courts for serious motoring offences[1] and speeding by offence group within Essex police force area, 1994–99

Number of offences

Offence group/type	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Serious motoring offences[1]						
1—Causing death or bodily harm	13	8	16	30	15	9
2—Dangerous driving	264	252	291	274	293	240
6—Unauthorised taking or theft of motor vehicle	1,123	811	1,061	957	954	1,108
14—Fraud, forgery etc. associated with vehicle or driver records	689	541	405	511	427	373
Total	2,089	1,612	1,773	1,772	1,689	1,730
Speeding						
16—Speed limit offences	8,130	6,354	6,528	5,457	5,132	7,019

[1] 'Serious motoring offences' includes those motoring offences which are indictable only or triable either way.

Joint Enterprise Charges

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to propose amendments to the law in respect of serious charges involving joint enterprise. [12587]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There are no plans to change the Law on Joint Enterprise at present. However, the Law Commission is conducting a major review of the whole area of inchoate offences and secondary liability, which will include this area.

National Criminal Intelligence Service

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the *(a)* size and *(b)* caseload of the National Criminal Intelligence Service and its predecessor bodies in each year since 1997. [12649]

Mr. Denham: The information is as follows:

(a) The National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) establishment in April (except where specified) each year since 1997 has been:

1997: 637
1998: 637
1999: 683 (June)
2000: 787
2001: 900 (August).

(b) The National Criminal Intelligence Service does not have an operational caseload. NCIS provides strategic intelligence; maintains intelligence reports on serious criminals for all law enforcement agencies; co-ordinates the activity of law enforcement agencies; conducts some intelligence investigations on behalf of law enforcement agencies; provides specialist advice and a range of other support functions. There is no single case record system.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 3 October 2001 to the hon. Member for Crosby (refs. 9417, 9418 and 9419), when he will provide a substantive reply. [12547]

Mr. Denham: I replied to my hon. Friend on 2 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 853W.

Young Offenders (Education)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours per week on average have been spent on education courses by those serving custodial sentences of compulsory school age in each year since 1995. [11632]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not available. Data on prison education participation do not distinguish between those of, and those above, compulsory school age. Prison Service Order 4950 states that education must be provided to all young offenders under school-leaving age for at least 15 hours per week.

Prisoners (Depression)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners were identified as suffering from clinical depression at the latest date for which figures are available. [11626]

Beverley Hughes: This information is not available in precisely the form requested. A survey of mental ill health in the prison population of England and Wales, was undertaken by the Office for National Statistics in 1997. Some 56 per cent. of remanded men and 64 per cent. of remanded women reported to a lay interviewer, applying a recognised tool for diagnosing neurotic symptoms and depression, that they had experienced certain recognised symptoms of depression for more than two weeks prior to interview. The comparable figures for sentenced men and women were 33 per cent. and 51 per cent. respectively.

Prison Education

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prison inmates were assessed as having literacy and numeracy skills below level 2 at the latest date for which figures are available. [11625]

Beverley Hughes: Figures for September 2001 show that of those prisoners tested on induction, 71 per cent. and 65 per cent. respectively were assessed as having literacy and numeracy skills below level 2.

The Prison Service has in place targets for 23,400 prisoners to achieve national qualifications in 2001–2002 rising to 36,000 in 2003–2004. This includes a planned increase in the number of Level 2 basic skills awards to 21,000 over the period. In addition, targets have been agreed for the current year with the Adult Basic Skill Strategy for qualifications below Level 2 in Basic Skills: 7,500 qualifications at Entry Level and 7,500 qualifications at Level 1.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to *(a)* collect and *(b)* publish data on the average time spent in prison education classes by prisoners in private sector prisons. [11633]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service collects data on the average time spent on purposeful activity, including education, in all prisons including those run by the private sector. National statistics are published in the annual "Prison Statistics, England and Wales". Figures for different categories of prison are not published separately, I will write to my hon. Friend about education in private sector prisons.

Prisoners (Special Educational Needs)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the number of prisoners in each of Her Majesty's prisons with special educational needs. [11631]

Beverley Hughes: No reliable information is available on the total number of prisoners with special education needs. The Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit located in the Department for Education and Skills is implementing new procedures to collect this kind of information.

Young Offenders (Penalties)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent consultations he has had regarding reducing penalties in youth courts for *(a)* criminal damage *(b)* shoplifting and *(c)* offences involving airguns. [12585]

Mr. Keith Bradley: None. We have not reduced the penalties or propose doing so.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement regarding the tariff of penalties in youth courts for criminal damage offences. [12586]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Sentencers in the youth court have discretion within the statutory framework laid down by Parliament. The maximum penalty for criminal damage above £5,000 is a two-year Detention and Training Order. Below that a range of non-custodial orders is available. These were enhanced by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Penalty Downgrading

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Judicial Studies Board with regard to downgrading penalties issued by magistrates for low seriousness offences. [12584]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There have been no discussions between the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Judicial Studies Board regarding the downgrading of penalties issued by magistrates for low seriousness offences. However, Lord Justice Auld's Report 'Review of the Criminal Courts of England And Wales' recommended that there should be a systematic review leading to fixed penalty and/or notice-to-correct schemes for a wider range of infringements than are presently the subject of criminal prosecution. Lord Justice Auld's report is currently out to a public consultation. Officials in the relevant departments are also considering these recommendations. An assessment of the feasibility of taking them forward will be made after a full consultation.

HEALTH

Heart Transplants

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take into account the implications of the Bristol inquiry report before making further decisions on the national specialist commissionary advisory group report; [6764]

(2) what the terms of reference were of the national specialist commissionary advisory group report into the future of heart transplant units; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [6763]

Mr. Hutton: We have published our intention to keep all six cardiothoracic transplant centres open in the discussion document "National Adult Heart and Lung Transplant Service" published on 21 September. We will receive comments on these proposals until 7 December.

The report by the National Specialist Commissioning Advisory group was an internal Department of Health paper. However reference to the paper is included in discussion document the "National Adult Heart and Lung Transplant service".

We are still considering our response to the Bristol Inquiry Report.

Small Birthing Units

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will allocate funds to increase the number of small birthing units, led by midwives in hospitals without a maternity unit; and if he will make a statement. [7097]

Jacqui Smith: The National Health Service provides a variety of types of care for women during pregnancy and childbirth including care in midwife-led births units. We expect this variety to continue and do not support any one single model of maternity service provision in preference to all others. It is for health authorities and NHS trusts to decide on the pattern of service provision taking into account the needs of local service users, evidence of effectiveness and available resources.

Community Equipment Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what system is used to allocate budgets for community equipment services to local NHS trusts and social services departments. [R] [8718]

Jacqui Smith: National Health Service and social services community equipment services have their funding determined locally. Additional funding being made available to enable them to meet the NHS Plan targets is allocated through health authority allocations and local council personal social services spending assessments.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts and social services departments that have received funds from the community equipment services budget this financial year. [R] [8720]

Jacqui Smith: In addition to pre-existing levels of funding for community equipment services by health and social services, all National Health Service health authorities received additional funding for community equipment services in their general allocations in 2001–02. Where authorities have identified that additional funding is required, they will have allocated it to the appropriate organisation running the equipment service which may be an NHS trust, a primary care group or a social services department. Similarly, all local councils with personal social services received allocations from which they are expected to contribute not just previous funding but an increased amount towards achieving the community equipment services targets in the NHS Plan.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the national budget is for community equipment services for the 2001–02 financial year. [R] [8719]

Jacqui Smith: £12 million has been allocated nationally to support the National Health Service to work towards achieving the NHS Plan targets in relation to community equipment services. We also took account of the need for additional investment in the personal social services settlement for 2001–02 to 2003–04 to enable councils to contribute an appropriate share to the expansion of these services. These amounts are in addition to pre-existing local funding for equipment services.

Dentists

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what levels of investment have been made and what initiatives have been taken to promote access to NHS dentists in Shropshire since 1997. [9257]

Ms Blears: In 2000–01 dentists within Shropshire health authority received £9.66 million for providing general dental services.

Shropshire health authority also received £414,000 in 2000–01 to develop a dental access centre (DAC) and £80,000 from the Dental Care Development Fund to promote access to NHS dentistry. The DAC now operates from Shrewsbury, Donnington, Oswestry and Market Drayton and two further sites opening shortly in Ludlow and Craven Arms.

In addition £409,000 has been awarded for 11 "Investing in Dentistry" approvals leading so far to 24,800 additional patient registrations.

The connection between NHS Direct and NHS dentistry is now up and running and all callers to NHS Direct should now be able to get information about where they can find an NHS dentist.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investment is planned to promote access to NHS dentistry in Shropshire. [9256]

Ms Blears: The table shows the investment planned to promote access to National Health Service dentistry in Shropshire for 2001–02.

	£
Local personal dental service funds:	50,000
Modernisation fund:	207,000
Dental care development fund:	50,000
Quality assurance (to implement clinical governance)	17,000

In addition, the anticipated spend on the Shropshire Dental Access Centre in 2001–02 is £656,000 revenue and £33,000 capital. The exact level of expenditure may vary depending on the opening date of the two new sites, in Ludlow and Craven Arms, and the numbers of patients needed in year.

Following changes in Regulations it is now possible for health authorities to use their own resources to respond to local patterns of unmet demand for NHS dentistry identified in their dentistry action plans.

Social Services Departments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the methodology used to calculate the top

and bottom 14 social services departments as set out in the publication of Social Services Performance Assessment Framework Indicators 2000–01 on 19 October. [10500]

Jacqui Smith: The methodology used to rank social services departments was as follows:

A council was classified as one of the best performing if:

it was in the top one third of councils based on the proportion of indicators banded three or higher this year; and

had on average three quarters or more of its indicators banded as three or higher over the past three years.

There were 15 councils in this category.

A council was classified as one of the least well performing if:

it was in the bottom third of councils based on the proportion of indicators banded three or higher this year; and

had on average 55 per cent. or less of its indicators banded as three or higher over the past three years.

There were 14 councils in this category.

Banding of the performance indicators was introduced last year to help clarify what level of performance is generally good in relation to a performance indicator. Bands range from "investigate urgently" to "very good". Band three represents a council performing at a level which is "acceptable but with possible room for improvement".

Mental Health Services

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what private finance initiative projects in mental health services have *(a)* been given approval and *(b)* had contracts signed since 1 May 1997. [10529]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the number of private finance initiative projects in mental health services which have been given approval and had contracts signed since 1 May 1997.

Trust	*Project description*	*Date full business case approval given*	*Date financial close reached*
Bay Community NHS Trust	New Mentally Ill Unit	25 September 1998	30 September 1998
Birmingham Specialist Community Health NHS Trust	Reprovision of accommodation for people with learning disabilities	12 February 1999	17 May 1999
Black Country Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental Health Unit	6 October 1998	8 October 1998
Bradford Community Health NHS Trust	Horton Park Centre—range of primary and community services including medical centres for GP practices, rehabilitation centre and Mental Health resource centre	26 November 1998	15 March 1999
Central Nottingham Healthcare NHS Trust	Learning disability/Mental Health team base	30 March 2000	15 May 2000
Doncaster and South Humber NHS Trust	Elderly Mental Health Services and Mental Health Rehabilitation Services	14 September 2001	17 September 2001
East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental Health reprovision	10 August 2000	30 July 2000
Enfield Community Care NHS Trust	Elderly/Mentally Ill home	7 May 2000	9 May 2000
Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS Trust	Reprovision of Mental Health Services, High Royds	28 February 2000	24 January 2001
Local Health Partnerships NHS Trust	Mental health unit	15 August 2000	24 January 2001
North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust	Reprovision of Mental Health facilities	29 November 1999	8 December 1999
Northern Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust	Reprovision of Mental Health facilities	9 August 2000	10 August 2000
Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare NHS Trust	Mental Health Medium Secure Unit	1 June 1998	1 June 1998
Oxleas NHS Trust	Reprovision of Mental Health	4 December 1998	11 December 1998
Redbridge Health Care NHS Trust	Mental Health Reprovision and Geriatric Day Centre	27 June 2000	4 July 2000
Rotherham Priority Health Service NHS Trust	Elderly Mental Health	19 March 1997	15 May 1998
Stockport NHS Trust	New Mentally Ill Unit	18 September 1998	10 October 1999
Thames Gateway NHS Trust	Acute Psychiatric—Stonehouse Hospital	14 December 1998	14 December 1998
West Berkshire Priority Care Services NHS Trust	Prospect Park mental health redevelopment	1 February 2001	2 May 2001

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the occupancy rate of NHS mental health beds, excluding day only, is in each London hospital. [10531]

Jacqui Smith: The latest data available are for 2000–01 and are shown in the table.

The data are collected annually at national health service trust level, rather than by individual hospital site.

NHS Trust[1]	*Available beds*	*Occupied beds*	*Occupancy rate (Percentage)*
2000–01			
Barnet Community Health Care	207	187	90.5
BHB Community Health	245	223	91.3
Brent, Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Mental Health	732	621	84.8
Camden and Islington Community Health Service	358	352	98.2
Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham Mental Health	567	543	95.8
East London and the City Mental Health	514	480	93.4

NHS Trust[1]	Available beds	Occupied beds	Occupancy rate (Percentage)
Enfield Community Care	262	244	93.1
Forest Healthcare	213	190	89.0
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children	8	6	77.1
Hammersmith Hospitals	72	65	90.4
Haringey Healthcare	240	235	98.1
Harrow and Hillingdon Healthcare	83	81	97.7
Hillingdon Hospital	116	109	93.9
Hounslow and Spelthorne Community and Mental Health	164	162	98.8
Kingston and District Community	308	289	94.0
Oxleas and District Community	391	354	90.7
Redbridge Healthcare	245	203	83.2
Royal Free Hampstead	122	114	93.4
South London and Maudsley	947	916	96.7
South West London and St George's Mental Health	595	541	90.9
University College of London	13	10	75.2

[1] Pre April 2001 Trust Configurations

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking *(a)* to promote mental health and *(b)* to encourage people to seek help at an early stage, among those from an ethnic minority background. [10523]

Jacqui Smith: We have asked local health and social services to ensure that by March 2002, as required by Standard One of the National Service Framework for Mental Health, they develop and agree an evidence-based mental health promotion strategy based on an assessment of local needs which incorporates action to reduce discrimination. In August 2001, the Department issued to local services "Making it Happen: a guide to delivering mental health promotion". The document recognises the need to promote mental health for ethnic minority groups and it includes examples of good practice including working with Asian communities and assessing the needs of refugee children.

The mental health taskforce is preparing a draft strategy, which we expect will be launched for consultation in spring 2002, to promote more accessible and appropriate services for people from black and ethnic minorities.

The Department also plans to commission the development of a toolkit to support mental health services in promoting mental health for people from ethnic minority communities.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health carer support workers have been recruited in accordance with the NHS Plan. [10525]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan set a target for 2004 that 700 more staff will be recruited to increase the breaks available for carers and to strengthen carer support networks. In pursuance of this target, all regular carers of people with mental health problems will have been identified, received an assessment and have their own care support plans by April 2004. By June 2004, local support networks for these carers will have been developed. The statutory and voluntary sector currently provide support to carers, and the Department is currently developing a service specification for carers support services against which we will measure progress.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of levels of major depression and self-harm in children; and if he will make a statement on recent trends. [10517]

Jacqui Smith: In August this year the Office for National Statistics reported on the prevalence rates of self-harm (defined for the purposes of the report as any attempt to harm, hurt or kill themselves) among children and adolescents aged five to 15 in England, Scotland and Wales during the first half of 1999. The report represents a secondary analysis of data originally collected for the national survey of the mental health of young people published in March 2000.

The main findings were that, according to parents, approximately 1.3 per cent. of the sampled five to 10-year-olds had ever tried to harm, hurt or kill themselves. The rate of self-harm among those with no mental disorder was 0.8 per cent. but the rate increased significantly to 6.2 per cent. among young children with an anxiety disorder and 7.5 per cent. for those with conduct/hyperkinetic disorder. However there was no recorded link with depressive disorder in this age group.

According to parents, approximately 2.1 per cent. of the sample of 11 to 15-year-olds had ever tried to harm, hurt or kill themselves. The rate of self-harm among 11 to 15-year-olds with no mental disorder was 1.2 per cent. but the rate rose markedly to 9.4 per cent. of those with anxiety disorders, 12.6 per cent. of those with a conduct disorder and 18.8 per cent. of young people with depression.

As was the case with younger children, the prevalence of self-harm among 11 to 15-year-olds was influenced by factors relating to family constitution, exposure to discord and frequency of punishment, and, most significantly, the number of stressful life events.

At present there is no firm information on trends but it is believed that the prevalence of mental health problems among children and young people has increased over recent decades, both in this country and in the rest of western Europe.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the prevalence of mental illness is in children; and if he will make a statement setting out his assessment of recent trends. [10515]

Jacqui Smith: A survey of the mental health of children and adolescents in Great Britain was carried out in 1999 by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Department, the Scottish Health Executive and

the National Assembly for Wales. The intention was to provide up-to-date baseline information on the prevalence of mental disorders among five to 15-year-olds. Prevalence rates were produced for the three main categories of mental disorder, for example, conduct disorders, hyperactivity and emotional disorders.

Key findings on prevalence were about 10 per cent. of children aged five to 15 in Great Britain had a mental disorder in 1999, 5 per cent. had conduct disorders (e.g. aggressive and antisocial behaviour), 4 per cent. had emotional disorders (e.g. anxiety, depression) and 1 per cent. were hyperkinetic (inattention, over-activity); and mental disorders were significantly more common in boys than girls in both the five to 10 and the 11 to 15-year-old age groups.

At present there is no firm information on trends, but it is believed that the prevalence of mental ill-health among children and young people has increased over recent decades, both in this country and in the rest of western Europe. It is the intention to repeat the original survey in approximately five years in order to detect any changes in prevalence over time.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were issued in 2000–01 for medicines used to treat mental illness. [10513]

Jacqui Smith: The number of prescription items dispensed in the community in England for the treatment of mental illness during the financial year ending 31 March 2001 is given in the table.

Information about the diagnosis for which the drugs were prescribed is not available. Drugs used to treat mental illness have therefore been defined as those within British National Formulary (BNF) paragraphs hypnotics and anxiolytics (4.1), drugs used in psychoses and related disorders (4.2) and antidepressant drugs (4.3).

Prescription items dispensed in the community for treatment of mental illness for the year ending 31 March 2001, England

Prescription items (thousand)

BNF description	*Number*
4.1 Hypnotics and anxiolytics	16,561
4.1.1 Hypnotics	10,677
—Benzodiazepine	7,112
—Chloral and derivative	179
—Other hypnotics	3,386
4.1.2 Anxiolytics	5,826
—Benzodiazepine	5,722
—Other anxiolytics	104
4.1.3 Barbiturates	58
4.2 Drugs used in psychoses and related disorders	5,857
4.2.1 Antipsychotic drugs	4,920
4.2.2 Antipsychotic depot injections	216
4.2.3 Antimanic drugs	722
4.3 Antidepressant drugs	22,634
4.3.1 Tricyclic and related antidepressant drugs	9,722
—Tricyclic antidepressants	9,233
—Related antidepressants	489
4.3.2 Monoamine-oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs)	96
4.3.3 SSRIs	10,884
4.3.4 Other antidepressant drugs	1,932

Notes:

1. The therapeutic classifications are based on British National Formulary, Number 40 (September 2000).

2. These data are based on items dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered. The data are from the Prescription Cost Analysis system.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were formally admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983 in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01. [10521]

Jacqui Smith: The Department collects and publishes information annually relating to patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 on: admissions to hospitals under the Act by section of the Act; sex and category of disorder as defined and required under the Act; changes in patient's legal status while in hospital; and patients in hospital at the end of the year, by sex and category of disorder.

The latest data are published by the Department, in a statistical bulletin "In-patients formally detained in hospitals under the Mental Health Act 1983 and other legislation, England: 1989–1990 to 1999–2000". The National Assembly for Wales published a separate statistical report entitled "Admission of patients to mental health facilities in Wales, 1999–00 (including patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983)". Both publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the proportion of those admitted to psychiatric wards who come from ethnic minority backgrounds; and if he will make a statement. [10510]

Jacqui Smith: Certain ethnic minorities, especially black ethnic groups, are over-represented in psychiatric care. While there are demographic and socio-economic factors which can partly account for over-representation of black ethnic groups, these cannot explain all of the disparity.

Due to this disparity and the acknowledgement that mental health services are not fully meeting the needs of ethnic minorities, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), when Minister of State with responsibility for community health, asked the mental health taskforce to prepare a strategy to address the issues surrounding black and minority ethnic mental health. A taskforce member, Professor Sashidharan, is taking forward the development of a draft strategy under the guidance of the ethnicity and mental health reference group. We expect consultation papers on the draft strategy to be issued in spring 2002.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the annual number of people with a diagnosis of severe mental illness who are refused treatment when they ask for it. [10526]

Jacqui Smith: Our policy is that nobody with severe mental illness who asks for treatment should be refused. The National Service Framework for Mental Health (NSF), published in September 1999, spells out national standards for mental health. The NSF contains seven overarching standards, two of which are specifically about the provision of effective services for people with severe mental illness. The standards aim to ensure that each person with severe mental illness receives the range of mental health services they need

In addition, the NHS Plan, published in July 2000, contains a number of commitments relating to the provision of services for people with severe mental illness. These include the establishment of crisis resolution and early intervention teams, and an increase in the number of assertive outreach teams.

Special Hospitals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many places there were in the special hospitals at *(a)* Ashworth, *(b)* Broadmoor and *(c)* Rampton (i) in 1996–97 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available. [10518]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is given in the table.

	Contracted places	
	1996–97	*October 2001*
Ashworth Hospital	500	427
Broadmoor Hospital	443	408
Rampton Hospital	448	430
Total	1,391	1,265

The reduction in contracted places reflects our policy that patients inappropriately placed in the high security hospitals should be moved to more appfopriate accommodation.

Electro-convulsive Therapy

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ECT treatments were administered in 2000–01. [10516]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available. The most recent information available is contained in a one-off survey covering the period from January 1999 to March 1999, England only, that was undertaken to provide an up to date and accurate snapshot picture of the use of electro-convulsive treatment (ECT). Prior to this survey, the information previously recorded on ECT did not provide an accurate picture on the use of ECT treatment.

The results of the survey are contained in the Department of Health Statistical bulletin "Electro-convulsive Therapy: Survey covering the period from January 1999 to March 1999, England", a copy of which is in the Library.

The Department is hoping that more useful and reliable information on ECT will be obtained from the mental health minimum data set which is person-centred. It is being implemented across all mental health trusts on a phased basis during 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 but data will not be available until 2003.

Diabetes

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the original date was for the introduction of the national standard framework for diabetes; what it is now; and if he will make a statement. [10447]

Jacqui Smith: The Diabetes National Service Framework is due for publication this year. It will be published in two stages—the Diabetes National Service Framework Standards this autumn and the Diabetes National Service Framework delivery strategy next summer. This will enable the National Health Service to prepare to plan for implementation from April 2003.

Head Injury Rehabilitation

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will respond to the Health Committee report entitled "Head Injury: Rehabilitation". [10566]

Jacqui Smith: The response was laid before Parliament on 24 July. The response is called, "Government Response to the Health Select Committee: Inquiry into Head Injury Rehabilitation, (Command Paper 5226.)" The response is also on the Department's website at "www.doh.gov.uk/nsf/longterm.htm."

Nurses

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses *(a)* returned to and *(b)* left the NHS in (i) 1999–2000 and (b) 2000–01. [11118]

Mr. Hutton: The work force censuses record the net change in the work force taking account of the number who leave and the number who start work, including newly qualified staff, returners and nurses trained outside the United Kingdom. In 1999 there were 329,640 nurses working in the National Health Service and in 2000 there were 335,950.

Between 1 October 1999 and 30 September 2000, 3,405 former nurses returned to work in the NHS. Between 1 October 2000 and 30 September, 2001 3,906 former nurses returned to work in the NHS.

Treatment Abroad

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the arrangements to be in place for NHS patients to travel abroad for their operations when they live outside a pilot site. [11252]

Mr. Hutton: Following recent rulings of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) it is clear that National Health Service bodies may commission treatment for NHS patients in other countries in the European Economic Area. However, this does raise a number of clinical, legal and quality issues. Officials are working through these issues with NHS colleagues in three test-bed sites, East Kent, Portsmouth and West Sussex/East Surrey, with the aim, if possible, of sending the first patients overseas for treatment by the end of the year. The Department will publish guidance for the rest of the NHS in England by the end of the year, based on the experience of the test-bed sites.

The Department also intends to establish through an open tendering process a list of approved foreign providers to assist primary care trusts planning to commission treatment abroad. It will take a number of months to put this in place.

Patients throughout the United Kingdom can already apply to travel overseas for treatment under the long-standing E112 scheme. This is of course subject to prior authorisation.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if primary care trusts have the option to secure treatment for NHS patients in other European countries; [11044]

(2) what assessment he has made of the requirements for funding primary care trusts to support the European Court of Justice ruling of receiving NHS treatment abroad. [11046]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* Following recent rulings of the European Court of Justice it is clear that National Health Service bodies, including primary care trusts, may commission treatment for NHS patients in other countries in the European Economic Area (EEA).

It will be for local commissioners to decide whether or not to contract with health care providers in other EEA countries. Primary care trusts (PCTs) will need to meet the costs out of their budgets.

This is a new opportunity and freedom for PCTs. There is no requirement for PCTs to make use of this opportunity and it will remain a matter for local commissioners to decide how to use their budgets.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money is being made available to support the initiative to reduce waiting lists through the funding of operations for UK citizens in other European countries. [11662]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* Following recent rulings of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) it is clear that National Health Service bodies may commission treatment for NHS patients in other countries in the European Economic Area.

It will be for local commissioners to decide whether or not to contract with health care providers in other EEA countries. Primary care trusts in England will need to meet the costs out of their budgets.

The decision to commission treatment for patients from Northern Ireland elsewhere in the European Economic Area is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Professor David Southall

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was to the NHS of locums to cover the duties of Professor David Southall during his two year suspension. [11248]

Mr. Hutton: The Department collects information quarterly in regard to the suspension of hospital medical and dental staff and costs incurred, including the cost of locum cover. The most recently available return is for October 2001, and indicates that the North Staffordshire Hospital National Health Service Trust has incurred costs of £284,258 in regard to the suspension of Professor Southall.

Cancer Referrals

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will extend the guidelines for the referral of patients with suspected cancer for an appointment within two weeks to include patients with atypical symptoms. [11250]

Mr. Hutton: Cancer referral guidelines were issued in March 2000 to help general practitioners identify possible signs and symptoms of cancer and to refer appropriately. For some cancer types, for example, lung cancer and breast cancer atypical symptoms were included on the advice of the members of the relevant tumour working parties who helped to draw up the guidelines. A review of the guidelines will be undertaken by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. All National Health Service trusts have been encouraged to work with primary care to audit referrals against the guidelines. The Department will shortly be announcing research projects to help inform decision making and the identification of patients with suspected cancer requiring referral.

GP Visits

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimate he has made of the proportion of the population who regularly visit their general practitioner for each of the last 10 years. [11037]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The information is not collected in the form requested. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes an estimate of the proportion of the population of Great Britain who consult a general practitioner within a 14 day period in their report "Living in Britain—Results from the General Household Survey". The table shows the estimate for each year for which figures are available from 1988.

Year	*Percentage consulted GP in last 14 days*
1988	14
1989	15
1990	16
1991	14
1992	15
1993	17
1994	15
1995	16
1996	16
1998	14

Source:
ONS "Living in Britain—Results from the General Household Survey"

The survey was not carried out in 1997 or 1999 and the report for 2000 is expected in December.

New Hospital (Romford)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the new hospital planned for Oldchurch Park, Romford. [11656]

Mr. Hutton: Excellent progress has been made on this scheme since its national prioritisation in July 1999. The new hospital is still planned to be complete and operational in autumn 2005.

GM Crops

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the safety of genetically modified crops grown for human consumption. [11729]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that all genetically modified crops approved for human consumption in the European Union following a rigorous safety assessment are considered as safe to eat as their non-modified counterparts.

Coquetdale Hospital

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects work to start on the Coquetdale Hospital redevelopment at Rothbury, Northumberland; and if he will make a statement. [11675]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* As negotiations on the site for the new Coquetdale Community Hospital at Rothbury are continuing, at this stage we are unable to give a date by which construction work will have commenced.

Residential Nursing Homes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 159W, how many residential nursing homes have closed and beds been lost in Great Britain and Northern Ireland since 1 May 1997. [11944]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 November 2001]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* columns 159–60W. The figures are for England only. Figures for other parts of the United Kingdom are matters for the devolved Assemblies.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 159-60W, which client groups have been included in the figures provided in written answers N115 and N113 tables 1 and 2. [11946]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 November 2001]*: The number of residential care homes, residential places in these homes and year on year changes, refer to the adult and older people client groups of: older people; younger physically/sensorily disabled adults; older mentally infirm adults; people with mental illness; people with learning disabilities and alcohol/drug misusers and other people. For residential care homes, information on client groups is based on the principal client group of the homes as defined for registration purposes and not of the client group of the places.

The number of nursing homes, registered nursing beds and year-on-year changes refers to all those available and includes those intended for children, older people, younger adults and for maternity usage and all of the primary registration categories. For nursing care homes, the allocation of homes and places is based on a combination of primary registration category (general nursing, people with learning disabilities, specialist nursing, maternity, mental health nursing, specialist mental health nursing, general specialities and other) and intended use (children, older person, other person).

Information by client group is available in the publications "Community Care Statistics 2000: Residential Personal Social Services for adults" and "Community Care Statistics 2000: Private Nursing Homes, Hospitals and Clinics". Copies of these publications are available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0028.htm and sb0107.htm respectively.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his written answers of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 159-60W, whether the figures provided include small residential homes of less than four beds. [11947]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 November 2001]*: The figures include residential care homes (and places) for small homes, defined as homes with less than four places, registered under the Registered Homes (Amendment) Act 1991.

Residential Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds his Department allocated to local authorities for the uprating of the capital limit for residential care. [11676]

Jacqui Smith: Adequate provision was made in the personal social services expenditure settlement for 2001–02 to cover the costs of uprating the capital limits from April 2001 to restore them to their 1996 value.

Specialist Register

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received concerning the ending of the transition period for entry of non-consultant career grades to the specialist register; and if he will make a statement; [12623]

(2) what representation he has received on behalf of associate specialists within the National Health Service in relation to their inclusion on the specialist register. [12624]

Mr. Hutton: We have received a number of representations from medical professional bodies and from individual members of the profession on these issues.

As laid down in the NHS Plan, we are committed to increasing the number of consultants working in the National Health Service and it is important all available resources are harnessed. We are fully aware there is a pool of doctors within the non-consultant grades with the potential to become consultants. We are committed to removing unnecessary restrictions on the career progression of these doctors to ensure each is given the appropriate opportunity to demonstrate his or her potential.

NHS (Suspensions)

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* NHS consultants, *(b)* general practitioners, *(c)* public health doctors and *(d)* managers presently suspended, indicating the durations of the suspensions; and what plans he has to shorten the length of these suspensions. [11249]

Mr. Hutton: In the quarter ended 30 September 2001, a total of 33 hospital doctors and dentists had been suspended for six months or longer. The information is not broken down as between consultants and public health doctors. Information is not collected centrally on managers. Currently, three general practitioners are

suspended by the National Health Service Tribunal. New procedures and guidance are being developed which should reduce both the incidence and length of suspensions. In addition, NHS employers will be able to seek advice from the National Clinical Assessment Authority.

The NHS Tribunal is due to be abolished in December 2001. Health authorities (and later primary care trusts) will then be able to suspend or remove general practitioners from their lists where appropriate. Time limits will be applied to these suspensions.

Suicide

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for completion of the national suicide prevention strategy. [11521]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The Department is in the process of developing, under the direction of the National Director for Mental Health, Professor Louis Appleby, a coherent national suicide prevention strategy to ensure that we are doing all we can to prevent suicides. We hope to launch this strategy in spring 2002.

Private Health Care Provision

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the involvement of the private sector in the provision of health care; and if he will make a statement. [10743]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear on 24 October in his evidence to the Health Select Committee, the Department is working to improve collaboration between the National Health Service and the private sector. There are five aspects to this collaboration. First, £40 million is being made available to the NHS to buy treatment for NHS patients in the private sector over the coming months. Secondly, officials are working on a national framework agreement to build longer term relationships between the NHS and the private sector with a view to doubling the number of NHS patients treated in private hospitals to 100,000 a year from next year. Thirdly, the Department is exploring the possibility of contracts under which part of or indeed even entire private hospitals would become NHS providers of services for a number of years. Fourthly, Ministers will consider approaches from private sector providers to build privately owned diagnostic treatment centres which will perform operations purely on NHS patients. And finally we are exploring whether private sector providers in mainland Europe have spare capacity available to treat NHS patients. Three sites in south-east England are providing a test-bed for this new policy.

PFI Hospitals

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many major hospital developments have been authorised under the Private Finance Initiative; how many of these are *(a)* completed and *(b)* nearing completion; what plans exist for expanding the number of these developments; and if he will make a statement. [12009]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the major hospital developments which have been approved to go ahead under the private finance initiative. There are currently no plans to approve any further waves of major PFI schemes.

Major capital schemes approved to go ahead since May 1997—England

Regional office	*Scheme*	*Capital value (£ million)*
PFI schemes reached financial close which are completed:		
South East	Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust	94
Northern and Yorkshire	Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust	65
South East	South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust	45
London	Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust	93
Northern and Yorkshire	Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Trust	65
Northern and Yorkshire	North Durham Health Care NHS Trust	61
North West	South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust	66
Eastern	Norfolk and Norwich NHS Trust	158
8	Total PFI Schemes at Financial Close which are completed	647
PFI schemes reached financial close and under construction:		
London	Bromley Healthcare NHS Trust	118
London	Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	54
West Midlands	Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	87
West Midlands	Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust	64
Northern and Yorkshire	South Durham Healthcare NHS Trust	41
Northern and Yorkshire	South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	122
South West	Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust	96
London	King's Healthcare NHS Trust	64
Northern and Yorkshire	Leeds Community and Mental Health services Teaching NHS Trust	47
London	St. George's Hospital NHS Trust	49
London	University College London Hospitals NHS Trust	404
Northern and Yorkshire	Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	22
London	West Middlesex University Hospitals NHS Trust	60
West Midlands	Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust	137
South East	Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	30
15	Total PFI Schemes reached Financial Close with work started on site	1,395
23	Total PFI Schemes Reached Financial Close with work started on site or completed	2,042

Major capital schemes approved to go ahead since May 1997—England

Regional office	*Scheme*	*Capital value (£ million)*
PFI Schemes approved to proceed and out to tender		
South West	Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust	32
North West	Central Manchester Healthcare/Manchester Childrens Hospitals NHS Trusts	199
Northern and Yorkshire	Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals/Newcastle City Health NHS Trusts	124
West Midlands	University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire/Coventry Healthcare NHS Trusts	178
Northern and Yorkshire	Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	125
South East	Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust	95
London	Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust	156
South East	Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	121
North West	Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Healthcare NHS Trust	61
Trent	Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	177
PFI Schemes approved to proceed but not yet out to tender:		
London	Barts and The London NHS Trust	620
West Midlands	University Hospital Birmingham/South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trusts	291
Northern and Yorkshire	Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	116
South West	Avon and Western Wiltshire Mental Health NHS Trust	68
London	North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	56
South East	East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust	102
Trent	University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust	286
London	Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust	44
Eastern	Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust	135
North West	Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trusts	114
South East	Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells/Invicta Community Care NHS Trusts	175
Northern and Yorkshire	Pinderfield and Pontefract Hospitals/Wakefield and Pontefract Community/Dewsbury Health Care NHS Trusts	164
London	Whipps Cross Hospitals NHS Trust	184
South East	Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	28
South West	United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust	104
Trent	Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Trust	66
London	Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	41
Eastern	Mid Essex Hospitals NHS Trust	80
Eastern	Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust	79
Northern and Yorkshire	Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	39
London	North Middlesex Hospitals NHS Trust	73
West Midlands	North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trusts	224
South West	Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust	101
North West	St. Helens and Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust	211
West Midlands	Walsall Hospitals/Walsall Community Health NHS Trusts	43
London	Paddington Basin	460
West Midlands	Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust	110
South East	Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust	28
South East	Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust	52
South West	South Devon Healthcare NHS Trust	65
North West	Tameside and Glossop Acute Services NHS Trust	41
64	Total PFI	7,510

Notes:
The capital value of PFI schemes is approximate and defined as:
Total Capital Cost to the private sector includes the costs of land, construction, equipment and professional fees but excludes Value Added Tax, rolled up interest and financing costs such as bank arrangement fees, bank due diligence fees, banks' lawyers fees and third party equity costs. As PFI procures a service rather than the underlying asset, capital values shown are necessarily estimates.

NHS Pensions Agency

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state the total lump sum cash payment received by the NHS Pension Agency from transfers back into the scheme as a result of the outcome of private pensions mis-selling; and if he will estimate the sums still to be received. [12654]

Mr. Hutton: In the period 1 October 1996 to 31 October 2001, the National Health Service Pensions Agency received cash payments totalling £753,915,089 in respect of transfers back into the NHS Pension Scheme arising from the review of private pensions mis-selling. The NHS Pensions Agency forecasts receipts to the scheme of a further £95,000,000 over the course of the next two financial years.

Midwives

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what long-term measures there are to encourage midwives to return to work in the NHS apart from the existing one-off incentive payment; and under what circumstances they would be eligible to receive assistance with child care. [12402]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is working closely with the Royal College of Midwives to encourage and support returning midwives. The National Health Service now offers all midwives improved pay, more supportive and family friendly working and training conditions, better access to continuing professional development and a better career structure. Applications for midwifery diploma courses are 63 per cent. higher than they were in

1997–98. In 2000–01 there were 14 per cent. more training places for midwives than there were in 1996–97. Since February 1999, 299 midwives have already returned to the NHS with another 170 in the pipeline.

Returning midwives receive £1,500 financial support and generous assistance with child care support is available while retraining. All midwives will have access to the benefits offered by the Department's child care strategy. For example, access to on-site nurseries, offering flexible opening and subsidised places, together with access to child care co-ordinators who will help midwives meet other child care needs. Over 60 new NHS nurseries are currently being built, providing an additional 2,500 places.

The amount of child care assistance received will be determined by whether or not the returner is employed while retraining. For parents who are not employed while retraining, assistance with child care costs incurred while attending refresher training and associated clinical placements should be provided up to Working Families Tax Credit levels.

For parents who are employed while retraining, employers and local child care co-ordinators should help returners access suitable, affordable child care, including access to the child care support available through the Working Families Tax Credit, where applicable.

Tonsillectomies

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many tonsil operations have been cancelled in the last 12 months; how many patients are waiting for tonsil operations; what the average waiting time is for tonsil operations; if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of single-use tonsillectomy instruments in the NHS; and what supplies of single-use tonsillectomy instruments are held by the NHS and how widely they are distributed. [12601]

Mr. Hutton: The number of cancellations by procedure is not collected.

Data are collected on the number of patients waiting for tonsillectomy and adenoidectomies, but tonsillectomies cannot be identified separately. The following table shows the number of patients waiting for tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy operations at the end of August 2001.

Months	*England*
6–8	7,299
9–11	4,078
12–14	1,854
15–17	710
18+	177
Total waiting	44,576

Source:
Department of Health waiting list statistics.

The average waiting times in national service hospitals in England for tonsillectomies are given in the table.

Year	*Median days*
1995–96	128
1996–97	116
1997–98	127
1998–99	147
1999–2000	118

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

All surgical instruments used in tonsillectomy operations are Conformitte Europeane marked under the provisions of the Medical Devices Regulations and as such are considered fit for their intended purpose. Any breach of these Regulations would be investigated by the Medial Devices Agency's Compliance Unit and action taken as needed. During the summer there were reports of an increase in the rates of secondary haemorrhage at a number of centres following tonsil and adenoid surgery. This was investigated by the MDA who found that in some cases the diathermy used to close the wound was set at too high a power setting, and the instruments being used were in some cases inappropriate for this site. On 10 October the MDA issued advice to the health service to address these problems.

The NHS Logistics Authority holds sufficient stock to deliver enough single use instruments to perform 10,000 tonsil and adenoid operations each month. 5,000 equivalent operations were performed in October 2000. Any NHS Trust in England can order the single use instruments from the NHS Logistics Authority. The lead-time for delivery is 48 hours for standard service. Faster delivery can be arranged if required.

NHS Priority Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on giving priority to NHS patients over private health policy holders for operations in NHS hospitals. [12605]

Mr. Hutton: The overwhelming majority of elective operations carried out in National Health Service trusts are performed on NHS patients. Although NHS trusts are permitted to generate income from providing facilities and staff to operate on private health policy-holders and self-pay patients, trusts must ensure that this private activity is not at the expense of their NHS work.

General Practioner Appraisers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the number of general practitioners who have come forward to act as general practitioner appraisers. [12597]

Mr. Hutton: We are pleased with the progress being made towards introduction of appraisal for general practitioners from 1 April 2002. The Department has asked primary care trusts and primary care groups to identify at least three suitable GPs to train as an appraiser. Most have now replied putting forward at least the three nominations requested.

Beta Interferon

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to initiate further trials into the effectiveness of beta interferon; and if he will make a statement. [12366]

Mr. Hutton: We are currently holding discussions with the manufacturers to consider a range of options under which drugs for multiple sclerosis might be made available under the National Health Service. One option is a 'risk-sharing' scheme and until these discussions are concluded we cannot provide the information requested.

Strategic Outline Cases

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason his Department will not accept strategic outline cases for future hospital projects; and if he will make a statement. [12369]

Mr. Hutton: Strategic outline cases for major capital projects are accepted in specific rounds by the capital prioritisation advisory group (CPAG) which advises Ministers on each scheme's viability. Ministers can consider cases outside of the CPAG where there is an urgent need. The eventual treatment of such cases will depend on the progress and priority of those schemes already approved to commence their procurements, and the number of schemes waiting to go to tender, so as to ensure optimal value for money.

29 major hospital projects were announced in February 2001, which should be released to the market over the next 36 months.

Hospital Building

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the original tender price, *(b)* final cost, *(c)* projected time for construction and *(d)* actual time for construction for each of the last 20 new build hospital schemes under traditional public sector funding. [12250]

Mr. Hutton: The details for each of the last 20 new build hospital schemes under traditional public sector funding are shown in the table.

	(£ million)		*(Months)*	
NHS Trust	*Original construction tender price*	*Final construction cost*	*Projected construction time*	*Actual construction time*
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals	16.3	18.4	23.0	25.2
Blackpool Victoria Hospital	14.4	14.4	23.9	28.2
City Hospitals Sunderland	15.2	15.6	22.0	24.0
Homerton Hospital	13.5	14.9	24.0	24.6
Brighton Healthcare	27.5	27.5	31.0	35.2
Medway	36.9	37.8	30.4	35.5
Mid Essex Hospital Services	17.6	19.8	22.1	25.8
Birmingham Childrens Hospital	23.7	30.9	14.7	23.1
West Dorset	24.6	26.7	24.6	34.4
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals	17.8	21.9	23.8	23.8
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals	26.6	28.7	35.9	42.4
Royal West Sussex	20.3	20.7	24.5	26.9
Lewisham Hospital	10.4	11.1	12.4	16.9
Bolton Hospitals	21.4	21.6	36.0	33.2
East Kent Hospitals	12.9	13.5	24.0	24.3
Salford Royal Hospitals	10.9	12.3	36.0	41.2
Northumbria Healthcare	12.5	13.3	28.1	28.1
Morecambe Bay	13.4	14.7	39.0	40.8
Royal Devon and Exeter	21.6	23.8	35.8	36.9
Southend Hospital	10.9	11.3	24.0	24.2

NICE

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how his Department monitors the implementation of NICE appraisal guidance throughout the NHS; and if he will make a statement; [11468]

(2) what advice his Department has given to *(a)* NHS trusts, *(b)* health authorities and *(c)* primary care groups and trusts on how they should audit the implementation of NICE guidance; [11470]

(3) what advice his Department has given to *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* health authorities on how they should prescribe treatments that are currently undergoing appraisal by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; [11467]

(4) if he will publish the data collected by his Department on the implementation of the NICE appraisal guidance. [11469]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The Department is monitoring the implementation of National Institute for Clinical Excellence appraisal guidance through its routine performance assessment procedures supplemented by other data sources available to the Department. We will be looking to the Commission for Health Improvement to provide more information in due course. Additionally, we are preparing to implement our manifesto commitment that

> "local health authorities and trusts will be directed to fund drugs and treatments recommended by NICE",

and expect to announce further details shortly.

The Department has not provided specific guidance about the audit of guidance implementation. However, the National Prescribing Centre recently published a guide for National Health Service professionals to help with

the process of local implementation of NICE guidance, including audit. NICE itself is developing audit tools which will be published alongside its appraisals.

Guidance to the NHS on treatments undergoing assessment by NICE is set out in Health Service Circular 1999/176. NHS bodies are advised to continue to use existing arrangements to access the publicly available evidence and to determine local policies for the managed entry of the new intervention.

We are currently formulating proposals for the release of data about products subject to NICE recommendations.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 6 November 2001

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements have been put in place for the people of Gibraltar to participate in elections to the European Parliament. [11773]

Peter Hain: We are actively working to ensure Gibraltar's enfranchisement in time for the 2004 elections to the European Parliament. We plan to consult the Government of Gibraltar soon about the precise detail of the necessary arrangements.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has made to the motion passed by the Gibraltar House of Assembly requesting Her Majesty's Government to seek a legal opinion from the International Court of Justice on the right of self-determination and the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713; and if he will make a statement. [11774]

Peter Hain: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to a Gibraltar House of Assembly motion of November 1999. We have not been asked to respond to this motion.

However, HMG's position on this issue has been consistent since the mid-1960s. We believe that Gibraltar's right of self-determination is not constrained by the treaty of Utrecht except in so far as Article X gives Spain the right of refusal, should Britain ever renounce sovereignty. Thus independence would only be an option with Spanish consent.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when further talks will be held with the Spanish Government over the future of Gibraltar. [11813]

Peter Hain: The Foreign Secretary and Spanish Foreign Minister Pique met on 26 July to re-launch the Brussels process. A further ministerial meeting will be held in Barcelona on 20 November. Both we and the Spanish Government hope that the Chief Minister of Gibraltar will participate in this meeting. Normal contacts between the UK and Spanish and the UK and Gibraltar Governments in preparation for these talks will continue. The Government stand by their commitments to the people of Gibraltar as set out in the preamble to the Gibraltar constitution.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the talks in July under the Brussels process with Spanish officials regarding Gibraltar; what the agenda is for the discussions under the Brussels process; and what guidelines are being issued to officials leading up to the negotiations. [11814]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) on 10 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 473W, regarding the Government's decision to resume talks with Spain under the Brussels process. In accordance with the terms of the Brussels communique issued in November 1984, the talks are aimed at overcoming all the differences between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar and at promoting co-operation on a mutually beneficial basis on economic, cultural, touristic, aviation, military and environmental matters. The communique establishes that issues of sovereignty will be discussed under the Brussels process.

Through these talks we aim to build a better future for Gibraltar. Both we and the Spanish Government intend that Gibraltar should be fully engaged in this process, and hope that the Chief Minister will participate at the next ministerial meeting planned for 20 November in Barcelona. Normal contacts between the UK and Spanish and the UK and Gibraltar Governments in preparation for these talks will continue. The Government will stand by their commitments to the people of Gibraltar as set out in the preamble to the Gibraltar constitution.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of statements from the Spanish Government relating to responsibility for the payment of increases in pensions to Spaniards who worked in Gibraltar prior to 1969; and if he will make a statement. [11775]

Peter Hain: Spanish nationals who worked in Gibraltar before 1969 and who are now retired and living in Spain, are eligible to receive pension payments from the Gibraltar social insurance fund. Pension payments under the SIF are awarded to all beneficiaries in line with contributions made.

After the decision was taken in 1988 to wind up the SIF, by 31 December 1993, the UK and Gibraltar Governments agreed in 1996 to set up a new 'closed' scheme to provide for on-going pension benefits to all beneficiaries of the old SIF scheme. Payments to all beneficiaries under the 'closed' scheme were fixed at the level payable at 31 December 1993. The Spanish authorities were kept informed of decisions regarding the dissolution of the Gibraltar social insurance fund.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has asked the European Commission to initiate legal proceedings against the Government of Spain on the grounds of its failure to allow the use of Gibraltar's internationally recognised dialling code by telephone companies in Spain. [11877]

Peter Hain: We are in close contact with the Government of Gibraltar on this matter. We raise the question of Gibraltar's telecommunications situation with the Spanish Government, at both ministerial and official level, at every appropriate opportunity. Most recently, I raised the matter with my Spanish counterpart, Sr de Miguel, on 29 October.

Two private competition complaints have been brought before the Commission by Gibtel and Gibraltar Nynex Communications. We have supported these complaints in our dealings with the Commission and we will continue to ensure that the Commission is fully aware of our concerns.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he is making to the European Commission and other relevant European Union institutions to ensure that citizens of Gibraltar are accorded the right to participate in elections to the European Parliament. [12016]

Peter Hain: We are in close contact with the heads of both the Council and the Commission Legal Services on this issue.

Afghanistan

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the policy papers which he has produced relating to the objectives of the *(a)* action in Afghanistan and *(b)* international coalition against terrorism. [12146]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Secretary of State placed the paper "Defeating International Terrorism: Campaign Objectives" in the House of Commons Library on 16 October 2001. This paper sets out the objectives of the international coalition against terrorism and our action in Afghanistan.

Drugs Trade

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries are working with the UK Government to combat the trade in illegal drugs. [12082]

Mr. Bradshaw: We work bilaterally and through the EU and the UN to combat the illegal drugs trade. The UK supports counter-drugs work and capacity-building in all of the key countries concerned in the supply of heroin and cocaine to the UK and Europe. These include Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, the central Asian republics, Central Europe, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, Jamaica and the countries of the eastern Caribbean. We also work closely with the United States and our European partners.

Afghanistan's leading role in world opium production was the focus of a meeting of representatives of countries close to Afghanistan and of the main donor countries to the UNDCP, in Vienna on 11 October 2001.

Burma

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Burma regarding the continued imprisonment of Min Ko Naing (also known as Paw Oo Tun). [12031]

Mr. Bradshaw: We take every opportunity to press for the release of all political prisoners in Burma through our embassy in Rangoon, visiting officials, the EU and also by supporting UN resolutions.

We welcome the release so far this year of over 180 political prisoners, but many more remain in detention. We will continue to press for the early release of all political prisoners, including Miss Ko Naing.

Belize

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 484W, on Belize, if High Commission staff arranged calls to the two public investment companies in order to arrange meetings between the companies and KPMG; and what the result of these calls was. [11616]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 484W. The report is for disclosure only to the Governments of the UK and Belize.

Commonwealth Conference

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to attend a Commonwealth Conference; and what issues he expects to be on the agenda. [12429]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary expects to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, originally scheduled for 6–9 October 2001 and now due to be held in Australia early next year. The dates and agenda for the meeting have not yet been set. But we expect Heads of Government to discuss the Commonwealth's response to terrorism as well as the high level group review of the Commonwealth.

Correspondence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will answer the letter from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight, dated 8 October 2001, to the Secretary of State for Defence, which was passed to him. [12920]

Mr. Bradshaw: I received the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight's letter of 8 October to the Secretary of State for Defence on 18 October and replied on 6 November.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many individual learning accounts have been taken up by residents of the Isle of Wight in each year since their inception, and what their total value was; [12562]

(2) how many individual courses funded by individual learning accounts have been provided on the Isle of Wight in each year since the inception of the scheme, what their total value was, and how many were completed; [12563]

(3) how many individual courses, funded by individual learning accounts, have been *(a)* commenced and *(b)* completed in each year since the scheme's inception; [12565]

(4) how many individual learning accounts have been taken up nationally in each year since their inception. [12564]

John Healey: On the basis of recorded postcode information available, 5,506 people from the Isle of Wight became an individual learning account member through the national framework, launched on 4 September 2000. The figure given is up to 31 October 2001. As a result, 3,038 episodes of learning have been funded so far on

behalf of these members, resulting in £825,393 total learning costs. Individual learning accounts funded £533,477 of these costs.

The corresponding figures for England up to 31 October 2001, are 2,529,609 people opened an individual learning account, and 1,380,370 episodes of learning have been supported.

Information is not maintained relating to course completion.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information is collected on the *(a)* size, *(b)* capitalisation, *(c)* corporate status, *(d)* qualifications of staff and *(e)* range of courses offered by providers under the individual learning account scheme. [12561]

John Healey: Learning providers registered with the individual learning account centre are not required to provide information about the size, capitalisation, corporate status or qualifications of staff. They do provide information about the range of courses offered to individuals. They are also required to provide health and safety and public liability certification.

New registrations to become a learning provider with the ILA centre ended on 28 September.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures are being taken to guarantee the quality of *(a)* the learning providers and *(b)* the courses on offer, through the individual learning account scheme. [9686]

John Healey: ILAs were designed to encourage more people into learning by helping tackle the financial barriers to learning. It was a key principle of the design that people were able to take responsibility for learning they felt to be most appropriate and most beneficial to themselves. ILAs are not and were not intended to be a guarantee of quality for learning or learning providers.

Of course the Government do not want ILAs to be used for poor value learning or by providers that cause concern. In July of this year, the Department started to receive increasing numbers of complaints from individuals and local trading standards officers. In response the Department took positive actions to tighten up the ILA system to address these problems. We re-registered all learning providers, withdrew blank application forms, suspended all new provider registrations, introduced a revised learning provider agreement that made it harder for providers to act against the ethos of the programme, and made changes to the applications process, for the same purpose. While we have taken this action the first safeguard remains an informed public looking for learning of value to them.

However, it became clear that these changes were not sufficient by themselves to prevent the mis-selling of ILAs. At that point we decided we had no option other than to withdraw the programme, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 24 October that ILAs are to be suspended from 7 December. The programme has exceeded the Government's expectations in encouraging very large numbers of people to take a new interest in learning, and has quickly expanded beyond its capacity. The programme has attracted over 2.5 million account holders.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information is collected on the *(a)* age, *(b)* gender, *(c)* employment record, *(d)* academic/vocational attainment, *(e)* social class and *(f)* location of users of individual learning accounts. [12560]

John Healey: Characteristic information on age, gender, employment, academic attainment and location of the 1,246,449 individual learning account members who had activated their accounts in England, since the launch of the national framework on 4 September 2000, is given in the following tables. Although social class information is not routinely collected, the Department commissioned an evaluation earlier in the year and arranged for a question to be included in this. The report determined that the most frequently represented social class among ILA account holders was C1, which includes non-managerial and non-professional administrative and sales staff as well as nurses and technicians.

Table 1: Analysis of active individual account members—England

By gender	*Number*
Male	531,799
Female	710,707
Not supplied	3,943
Total	1,246,499

Table 2: Analysis of active individual account members—England

By age group	*Number*
19–30	382,181
31–40	365,328
41–50	253,120
51–60	157,243
60+	88,577
Total	1,246,449

Table 3: Analysis of active individual account members—England

By employment status	*Active ILA Members*
Self-employed	98,560
Employed	765,167
Employed and self-employed	3,662
Not employed	91,130
Retired	49,749
Unemployed	144,565
Student	30,452
Other	34,814
Data not supplied	28,350
Total	1,246,449

Table 4. Active ILA members by academic attainment at point of entry to ILAs

Highest qualification	*Number*
Degree/NVQ4 or equivalent	181,491
A-level/NVQ3 or equivalent	162,381
GCSE/NVQ2 or equivalent	271,455
NVQ1	58,699
Other	4,498
Data not supplied	567,925
Total	1,246,449

Table 5. Location of individual learning account users

Region	*Number*
East	102,813
East Midlands	103,332
London	215,445
North East	45,027
North West	128,580
South East	175,946
South West	118,741
West Midlands	222,487
Yorkshire, Humberside	94,389
Region unassigned	39,689
Total	1,246,449

Faith Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what approaches have been made to her Department by groups wishing to *(a)* establish new faith schools and *(b)* bring independent faith schools into the maintained sector in the last 12 months. [12780]

Mr. Timms: Since 1 November 2000, 26 approaches have been made by groups inquiring about the possibility of establishing new faith schools in the maintained sector, including nine about bringing independent schools into the maintained sector. Previous experience suggests that relatively few inquiries become firm proposals to a school organisation committee to establish a new school.

DEFENCE

Personal Radios

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the performance and size specifications are of *(a)* the Thales Defence Systems Bowman personal radio and *(b)* the CDC Systems personal radio system, with particular relevance to the size of the (i) radio, (ii) microphone and (iii) ear-piece; if a smaller ear-piece design was explored by Thales Defence Systems; what assessment he has made of whether the Thales Defence Systems Bowman personal radio wiring restricts a soldier's range of motion; and if he will make a statement. [11785]

Dr. Moonie: There is no "personal radio system" supplied as part of the Bowman programme. For the purpose of this answer, I have assumed the intended subject to be the Bowman Personal Role Radio (PRR).

PRR was separated from the total Bowman requirement in October 1999 to ensure delivery of these radios to the front line earlier than would otherwise have been the case. The PRR Invitation to Tender was issued in March last year and eight responses were received. CDC Systems did not take part in the competition.

Thales (then trading as Thompson CSF) did submit a bid. However, as it did not win the competition and is no longer involved with Ministry of Defence on the PRR programme, it would be inappropriate for MOD to release commercial information that was obtained as part of the competitive process. I am therefore withholding the performance and size specifications requested in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

I can confirm that the Thales PRR audio ancillaries were assessed during the competition and were not found to restrict the soldier's range of motion.

Marconi ultimately won the PRR contract on the basis that its system offered the best value for money in terms of performance, through life support, programme and cost. Work has progressed extremely well and we expect to better the declared ISD of March 2002.

Armed Forces (Special Payments)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the payments made to British armed forces service men and women who are engaged in theatres of operation; what assessments he has made of payments made to members of armed forces from other countries engaged similarly; and if he will make a statement. [12458]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* All payments made to service personnel are regularly reviewed, the majority of them by the independent Armed Forces Pay Review Body. These include basic pay; the X-factor, which takes account of the unique demands and circumstances of service life over a whole career; and allowances to compensate for particular disadvantages such as prolonged separation from home life. In addition a recent review of welfare support to service personnel on operations led to the introduction earlier this year of a new comprehensive operational welfare package. Where personnel receive this package, an overseas cost of living allowance is not usually payable.

A comparison of operational conditions of service in a wide range of NATO and non-NATO countries was undertaken by the UK last year. This showed that payments to UK service personnel over the course of a military career bear favourable comparison with those of any of our allies. While some countries pay their personnel more when deployed on operations, this is more than offset by lower levels of remuneration at other times.

Chinook ZD576

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of the maintenance team responsible for servicing RAF Chinook ZD576 at Aldergrove on 1 and 2 June 1994 had completed a full Chinook MK2 trade course and held the appropriate Trade Qualification Annotation prior to 2 June 1994; [13033]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* the Supplementary Flight Servicing Certificate MOD Form 705(SSC) of RAF Chinook ZD576 for 1 and 2 June 1994 and *(b)* pages 25 and 26 of the Flight Servicing Certificate for RAF Chinook ZD576; [13030]

(3) if he will list the regulations covering tool checks and the documentation to be completed on the RAF Chinook MK2 aircraft prior to flight for the period covering May and June 1994; [13032]

(4) if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* sheet numbers 17, 18 and 19 of the Maintenance Work Order Log MOD Form 707A (ADP) for RAF Chinook ZD576 and *(b)* the MOD Form 711 associated with SNOW 0226 as listed on Sheet No. 20, Maintenance Work Order Log, MOD Form 707A(ADP) for RAF Chinook ZD576. [13031]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my right hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what arms control measures he proposes to take to tackle the potential threat from ballistic missiles; and if he will make a statement; [11324]

(2) what defensive measures are available to tackle the potential threat from ballistic missiles; and if he will make a statement. [11325]

Mr. Hoon: We currently assess that as of today there is no significant ballistic missile threat to the UK. We do, however, continue to monitor developments closely. We also remain concerned by the potential ballistic missile threat to our armed forces when deployed to certain parts of the world. We believe it is important to tackle the potential threat from weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery with a comprehensive strategy that encompasses diplomacy, non-proliferation, export control, counter-proliferation, conflict prevention, deterrence and defensive measures. We will continue to work closely with our allies, partners and friends in all of these areas.

Beyond our wide-ranging arms control efforts to tackle the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, we have been working closely to establish a set of international norms dealing specifically with ballistic missiles. As a first step, a draft International Code of Conduct (ICOC) on ballistic missiles, based on an original text prepared by the UK, has been developed by members of the Missile Technology Control Regime. This draft will now be negotiated through an open multilateral process with a view to eventual signature during 2002. We hope that it will form the basis of a new international consensus against the destabilising spread of ballistic missiles, and we strongly support efforts to gain wide adherence to it.

We have a range of capabilities for passive defence of deployed forces against weapons of mass destruction delivered by ballistic missiles. Detection, identification, warning and reporting of possible attacks, physical protection, hazard management and medical countermeasures are all key elements of our force posture. We continue to believe it is premature to decide on acquiring a specific active ballistic missile defence capability, either for defence of the UK or deployed forces. This is based on our assessment of the threat, the rapidity with which defensive technologies are changing, and the need to evaluate further the potential role of missile defences as one element of a broad-ranging defence response to missile proliferation. We will continue to support NATO work in this area, as well as our own national work and bilateral dialogue with the US. Our future options remain open.

Military Personnel (Overseas)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK military personnel are serving overseas, broken down by *(a)* unit and *(b)* country in which they are serving. [12080]

Mr. Ingram: The following table shows the number of UK regular forces serving overseas as at 1 September 2001 broken down by service. To break down the figures to unit level could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	Navy	*Army*	*RAF*	*Total*
Overseas total	4,551	33,116	5,435	43,102
Continental Europe	441	17,423	2,006	19,870
Cyprus	8	2,053	1,089	3,150
Gibraltar	217	70	114	401
Other Europe	490	2,986	106	3,582
Near and Middle East	396	2,586	819	3,801
Far East	18	239	23	280
Others	2,981	7,759	1,278	12,018

Source:
DASA (Tri-Service)

Italy (A400M)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what Italy's financial contribution was to the A400M consortium; [12224]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the Italian Defence Minister about the A400M. [12223]

Dr. Moonie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence last met the Italian Minister of Defence on 12 October when he was informed that Italy had reached the decision not to continue, at present, with the A400M programme. However, I understand that this is being reviewed and I expect the situation to become clearer in the near future.

Italy had been expected to procure 16 of these aircraft out of a total initial order of 212 aircraft and their financial contribution would have been commensurate with this. It would not be appropriate to release financial details while commercial negotiations are still under way.

Water Supplies

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with DEFRA and the water companies about the protection of water supplies from chemical and biological attack. [12338]

Mr. Ingram: All aspects of the UK's resilience to terrorist attack are being reviewed following the events of 11 September. The Ministry of Defence and DEFRA are both involved in that work, and there are well-established arrangements for military assistance to the civil authorities when required. Government responsibilities in relation to the water companies are a matter for DEFRA.

Overseas Accommodation

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what improvements are being made to overseas accommodation for armed forces personnel and their families. [13008]

Dr. Moonie: In accordance with the Department's aim to improve the condition of living accommodation in overseas locations, there is an extensive programme of works projects currently under way. I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Gibraltar (Accommodation)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what improvements are being made to accommodation for armed forces personnel and their families in Gibraltar. [13009]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Territorial Army

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria he uses to determine whether Territorial Army units are fit for role. [13024]

Dr. Moonie: The term "fit for role" is applied to individual members of the Territorial Army (TA) and not to units. TA units are required to achieve a level of collective performance that depends on the role and specified readiness of the unit. Readiness is defined as the time within which a unit can be made ready to deploy for operations from its normal peacetime location. The performance of TA units is measured in the same way as regular Army units, through the measurement of fighting power, which assesses units against a number of criteria, such as manning and equipment levels and the amount of training conducted.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what standards Territorial Army service personnel must meet in order to obtain the annual bounty. [13025]

Dr. Moonie: In order to obtain the annual bounty, the standard requirement is for Territorial Army (TA) personnel to pass a set number of Individual Training Directives (Army); attend unit annual camp (15 days); and attend a specified number of out of camp training days. This requirement is 12 days for independent TA and four days for specialist TA.

Armed Forces Memorial

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations with ex-servicemen's organisations have taken place about the site and form of the memorial to members of the armed forces killed in conflicts since 1945; and if he will make a statement. [12637]

Dr. Moonie: A project office was appointed in January this year to consult the Services and ex-Service organisations on the criteria for inclusion on and siting of the proposed memorial to Service personnel killed since the end of the Second World War. Consultation is continuing with the Confederation of British Service and ex-Service Organisations (COBSECO) before a final decision is made.

Afghanistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on confining military action against terrorism to targets in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [11648]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

Coalition military action is focused on Osama bin Laden, the Al Qaeda network and their Taliban allies in Afghanistan.

The military action is necessary, but it cannot be seen in isolation. It is part of a wider global campaign against terror, which includes diplomatic, intelligence, financial, humanitarian and political elements.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Poverty

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made in the Government's target to reduce the number of people worldwide living in extreme poverty by 2015. [12420]

Clare Short: The goal of reducing by half the population of people living on less than $1 a day was recently endorsed by 147 heads of state at the UN Millennium summit, and the UN have stated a commitment to monitoring progress towards this, and the other Millennium development goals, on a regular basis.

The most recent published figures from the World bank show that in 1990 29.0 per cent. of the population of developing countries lived on less than $1 a day. By 1999 this had fallen to 22.7 per cent. World bank projections indicate that by 2015 the proportion living on less than $1 a day will fall further to 12.3 per cent. meaning that the 2015 target will be achieved overall but will be missed in some countries and some regions.

Afghanistan

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what action she plans to take in order for the volume of food aid reaching Afghanistan to increase substantially; [12682]

(2) what assessment she has made of the increase needed in the volume of food aid reaching Afghanistan in order to guarantee adequate stockpiles for the winter. [12681]

Clare Short: In October, the World Food Programme reported that it managed to despatch over 27,000 metric tonnes of food into the country. This was less than their target but tonnage has improved and over 10,600 metric tonnes were despatched last week. WFP and other humanitarian agencies are working to maximise opportunities to get more food into the country as winter approaches. We are working with the international community to open up new land convoy routes into Afghanistan. As I announced in the House on 1 November 2001, *Official Report* columns 769-70W we have agreed to contribute £600,000 to Russian EMERCOM for a new convoy operation to deliver 9,000 metric tonnes of food from Tajikistan to northern Afghanistan.

WFP is buying 17,000 metric tonnes of wheat from the Iranian Government, which will be transported by rail to Turkmenistan, and from there to north and west Afghanistan. WFP is also looking at the airdropping of food to vulnerable people living in remote mountainous regions of Afghanistan which are likely to be cut off by winter snows.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on international plans to deliver food aid to refugees in Afghanistan this winter. [12153]

Clare Short: As I said in my statement to the House of Commons on 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 283-85, humanitarian agencies, especially the World Food Programme, are working under extremely difficult circumstances and continuing to get food and other relief items into Afghanistan. In October, WFP reports that it managed to despatch over 27,000 metric tonnes of food into the country. WFP and other humanitarian agencies will continue to maximise opportunities to get more food into the country as winter approaches. DFID has been assessing ways of maximising other routes of food delivery into Afghanistan, and as I announced in the House on 1 November, we have agreed to contribute £600,000 to Russian Emergency Ministry (EMERCOM) for a new convoy operation to deliver 9,000 metric tonnes of food from Tajikistan to northern Afghanistan over the next two months.

WFP is buying 17,000 metric tonnes of wheat from the Iranian Government, which will be transported by rail to Turkmenistan, and from there to north and west Afghanistan. WFP is also looking at the airdropping of food to vulnerable people living in remote mountainous regions of Afghanistan which are likely to be cut off by winter snows.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Working Time Directive

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the working time directive proposals to increase night-time working restrictions will have on distribution and deliveries of basic goods to rural areas. [9659]

Mr. Jamieson: From our regular meetings with industry, we are fully aware of the problems that will result from an eight-hour limit for night workers. That is why the Government support the ten-hour figure included in the Council's common position.

Parking Revenue (London)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list income and expenditure under the parking places revenue accounts of each local authority in London for the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01. [10720]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested for the periods *(a)* to (d) has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The figures for period *(e)* are a matter for the Mayor of London.

Stingray

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which areas of Scotland will be covered by the Stingray system. [11233]

Mr. Jamieson: The new mobile system will operate throughout Scotland.

Manchester Airport Eastern Link Road

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when construction will begin of the Manchester Airport eastern link road (western section). [11078]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East Manchester Multi Modal Study covers the Manchester Airport eastern link road (western section). The Secretary of State is awaiting the recommendations of the North West Regional Assembly on the Study and will announce his findings shortly.

Railtrack

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on conditions under which the new Railtrack company will be able to draw down the Government loan facility. [11266]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 195W and to the right hon. Member himself on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 671W.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of *(a)* the gross assets to be transferred to the new Railtrack company and *(b)* the debt to be set against those assets. [11092]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 671W.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will make a statement on the amount of Government money available for *(a)* Railtrack in administration and *(b)* the successor Railtrack company for the next three years. [11265]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1230W.

The successor company to Railtrack would be entitled to receive network grants to the profile and amounts set out in the Rail Regulator's October 2000 Periodic Review and the 2 April agreement between Railtrack and Government.

The Government propose that a company limited by guarantee be established to succeed Railtrack. We would expect to put in place an arrangement by which the company could access a standby, subordinated loan facility. For details on this loan facility, I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 195W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department held with the Treasury

regarding the financial situation at Railtrack and his plans for the company prior to the announcement of the administration order. [12151]

Mr. Jamieson: There were regular discussions between my Department and the Treasury prior to the announcement.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which officials were involved in planning the press announcement by his Department of the Railtrack administration. [12150]

Mr. Jamieson: The announcement was prepared by my Department following normal procedures.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what criteria he will use to assess proposals put to him by the administrators to resolve the future of Railtrack plc; [11801]

(2) by what process he will assess the solution proposed by the administrators to resolve the future of Railtrack plc. [11881]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report,* columns 669–71W.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the implications of the decision to place Railtrack into administration for *(a)* all services between (i) London Euston and Wolverhampton, (ii) Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury and (iii) Shrewsbury and Chester and *(b)* the proposed sale of the Oswestry branch line from Gobowen to Llanymywech to the Cambrian Railways Trust. [12608]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government will ensure that the administrator has the funds to finance Railtrack's activities, including the full operation of the network.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place the procurement documents relating to the Birmingham Northern Relief Road in the Library; and if he will make a statement in respect of health and safety of the project. [11237]

Mr. Jamieson: A copy of an edited version of the concession agreement prepared in accordance with the judgment of the High Court was placed in the Library in June 2000. I am also arranging for a copy of the OJEC notice that advertised the procurement of the BNRR construction contract to be placed in the Library of the House.

Midland Expressway Ltd. and CAMBBA have health and safety obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Construction Design and Management Regulations 1994 for the safe design, construction and management of the BNRR. They will continue to meet these obligations.

Road Safety (Motorcyclists)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to encourage and promote road safety for motorcyclists; and if he will make a statement. [11658]

Mr. Jamieson: In March 2000 the Government published their strategy for improving road safety in the next decade, "Tomorrow's Roads—Safer for Everyone", which is available in the House Library.

On motorcycling, our strategy is:

to improve training and testing for all learner riders;

to publish advice for people returning to motorcycling after a break and people riding as part of their work;

to ensure the quality of instruction;

to help drivers become more aware of how vulnerable motorcyclists are;

to promote improvements in engineering and technical standards which could protect motorcyclists better; and

to work with representatives of interested organisations, in an advisory group, to look at issues of concern.

Port of London Authority

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what application he has received from the Port of London Authority under section 14 of the Harbours Act 1964 concerning changes to their Act and proposals for a statutory instrument; what correspondence he has received from objectors or potential objectors to the proposed statutory instrument; what steps he has taken to ensure that those most likely to be affected have been consulted; and if he will make a statement on his intentions. [12168]

Mr. Jamieson: The Port of London Authority's application for a Harbour Revision Order was advertised in the *London Gazette* and various local newspapers. The Secretary of State received objections or representations from the following:

St. Pancras Cruising Club
Thames Boating Trades Association
Residential Boat Owners Association
TGWU South East and East Anglia
Thames Passenger Services Federation
London Tideway Harbour Company Ltd.
The Company of Watermen and Lightermen of the River Thames
Toughs Boatyard Ltd.
Royal Yachting Association
Royal National Lifeboat Institution
Inland Waterways Association
The Barge Association
River Association for Freight and Transport
British Marine Industries Federation
Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs
National Association of Boat Owners
Commercial Boat Owners Association.

All of the objections and representations were copied to the PLA who are currently involved in discussions with a view to resolving the various concerns. The Secretary of State is awaiting the outcome of these discussions before deciding whether or not to call a public inquiry.

Bull Bars

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent work has been undertaken to assess the effects of bull bars on pedestrians in vehicle accidents. [11986]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport Research Laboratory has undertaken some test work for us comparing the likely effect on pedestrians of a range of typical bull bars and base vehicles. Its report, "Assessment and Test Procedures for Bull Bars", was published on 26 July last year, and copies were placed in the Libraries of the House.

GoVia

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what amendments to GoVia's proposals for the new South Central franchise have been put forward since Railtrack went into administration with particular reference to *(a)* start date and *(b)* levels of investment. [12526]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority and GoVia have not agreed any changes to the Heads of Terms for a new South Central franchise, which was signed on 23 October 2000. However, items relating to Mark 1 rolling stock replacement contained in the Heads of Terms have been brought forward into the current Franchise Agreement. Progress in negotiations on the exact terms of the new franchise is commercially confidential.

Bus Passengers

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will undertake a review of the regulations on the permitted number of standing passengers on local buses. [12318]

Ms Keeble: The recent agreement in the EU for common standards for the construction of buses will lead to a change in the regulations. However, in practice, the provisions of the EU Directive are broadly similar to our current requirements.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to amend the Public Service Vehicle (Carrying Capacity) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 in order to end the practice of three seated children under the age of 14 years counting as two passengers. [12556]

Mr. Jamieson: Permitting three children sitting in the space provided for two seats is a concession, not a requirement, and applies only where the vehicle is not fitted with seat belts.

Currently, there is no plan to amend the Carrying Capacity Regulations to abolish this concession. The responsibility for choosing an appropriate vehicle must rest with those who are making the arrangements for the transport of children.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the legislative basis is of the three for two rule in the carrying of pupils under 14 years on scheduled bus services; and what plans he has to abolish this rule. [12555]

Ms Keeble: The regulations that permit the three for two rule are the Public Service Vehicles (Carrying Capacity) Regulations 1984. I have no plans to abolish this rule as it a concession and not a requirement.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment the Health and Safety Executive has made of passenger overcrowding on buses transporting pupils to school. [12444]

Ms Keeble: No assessment of overcrowding of buses has been made by the Health and Safety Executive. The responsibility for ensuring that a bus does not carry more passengers than it is certified for lies with the driver and, if applicable, conductor. Enforcement of regulations relating to carrying capacity and safety of buses rests with the Police and the Vehicle Inspectorate. I am not aware of any prosecutions for overcrowding on services involving school transport.

Motorway Speed Limits

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on congestion of the variable speed limit system in operation on the M25 motorway; and if he will make a statement. [12326]

Mr. Jamieson: Independent monitoring and assessment of the scheme by the Transport Research Laboratory during the first year of operation confirmed its success. The monitoring indicated that traffic flow had improved, with drivers reporting more "comfortable", less aggressive driving conditions, with fewer very short, dangerous spaces between vehicles and fewer long (inefficient) spaces and more even use of the carriageway. There were also indications of improved safety, and shorter and more reliable journey times.

Regional Chambers

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the total budget for each regional chamber in England by region for *(a)* the last financial year and *(b)* this financial year; and what the projected figure is for next year. [12523]

Dr. Whitehead: The regional chambers have been established voluntarily by bodies representing the interests of each region. Their budgets are a matter for the chambers and their members. The Government have however allocated £500,000 this year to each regional chamber, with an additional £1 million for chambers to use collectively, to help them establish a stronger strategic and scrutiny role within the regions.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of funding for regional chambers in England came from central Government for *(a)* last year and *(b)* this financial year; and what the projected apportionment is for the next financial year. [12524]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government provided no funding to the regional chambers in 2000–01. For 2001–02 we have allocated £500,000 to each regional chamber, with an additional £1 million for chambers to use collectively, to help them establish a stronger strategic and scrutiny role within the regions. As the total budgets of the

chambers are a matter for the chambers themselves, information on the proportion represented by Government funding is not available centrally.

Unitary Development Plan

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in respect of the unitary development plan process *(a)* what review he has undertaken of the process since 1989, *(b)* what potential improvements he has identified and *(c)* how these will be incorporated in guidance to local authorities. [12527]

Ms Keeble: I shall be issuing a Green Paper shortly setting out proposals for comprehensive reform of the planning system.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which local authorities have applied to be considered for trial schemes for *(a)* congestion taxes and *(b)* work parking taxes. [12576]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Two schemes have been published for public consultation, one in central London and one in the City of Durham.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what additional central Government funding each local authority will receive for taking part in trial schemes for *(a)* congestion taxes and *(b)* work parking taxes. [12577]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The local transport capital settlement for 2001–02 announced in December 2000 did make specific funding available to local authorities in England for capital costs directly related to the implementation of a road user charging or workplace parking levy scheme as follows:

Authority	*£000*
Nottingham City Council (workplace parking levy)	1,500
Derbyshire County Council (road user charging)	400
Durham County Council (road user charging)	240

Railway Stations (Disabled Access)

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what responsibility *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* Virgin Rail have for the provision of disabled access at Lockerbie railway station. [12923]

Mr. Jamieson: Lockerbie station is owned by Railtrack and leased to ScotRail who are the "Stations Facilities Owner" with responsibility for managing the station on a day to day basis. ScotRail would be responsible for overseeing the provision of enhanced facilities at the station.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the completion of Phase II of the upgrade of the west coast main line; and when he expects trains will be able to operate at more than 140 mph on the line south of Crewe. [12922]

Mr. Jamieson: It is clear from our discussion with the Strategic Rail Authority, the Railway Administrator and Virgin that parts of the project are subject to uncertainties over cost increases and timetables. We are in discussion with the parties on the issues involved and the options. At this stage we cannot predict the outcome of those discussions, but we are working hard to reach agreement on a project which is value for money and can be delivered to a clear timetable, subject to the need to obtain any planning consents.

Correspondence

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will reply to the letters of 10 July and 21 August from the hon. Member for Doncaster, North regarding Manchester Airport and Finningley Airport. [13137]

Ms Keeble: I replied to my hon. Friend's letters on 1 August 2001 and 6 November 2001 respectively.

Education Funding (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will meet *(a)* hon. Members for Worcestershire, *(b)* representatives of the Worcestershire Education Authority and *(c)* head teachers and governors from the county, to discuss education funding in Worcestershire; and if he will make a statement. [12675]

Dr. Whitehead: I and my ministerial colleagues are certainly prepared to meet hon. Members to discuss the distribution of formula grant to local authorities, which the Government are currently reviewing.

Council Tax

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will revise the regulations governing the council tax benefits limitation scheme. [12609]

Dr. Whitehead: We review the regulations governing the council tax benefit subsidy limitation in advance of each year's local government finance settlement.

Parking Restrictions

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives local authorities on the use of parking restrictions relating to *(a)* HGVs and *(b)* lighter commercial vans in residential areas. [12685]

Ms Keeble: Traffic management and parking restrictions are best addressed by local traffic authorities, who are able to take account of particular local circumstances. We have not issued guidance to authorities on the exercise of their road traffic regulation powers in respect of parking of heavy goods vehicles and lighter commercial vans in residential areas.

Two publications that do include advice on parking provision for lorries are "Transport in the Urban Environment" published in 1997 by the Institution of

Highways and Transportation with support from the Department of Transport and "Lorries in the Community" a report based on a study sponsored by the Civic Trust, the County Surveyors Society and the Department of Transport and published in 1990.

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if his Department's discussions with coach operators over concessionary pensioners' fares are intended to cover inter-authority journeys. [13036]

Ms Keeble: We have agreed in principle to a proposal from the Commission for Integrated Transport under which coach operators would offer half-price fares to older and disabled passengers on long distance scheduled coaches in England. In return for these fare concessions, operators would—for the first time—receive Fuel Duty Rebate. We shall be consulting the industry and others shortly on the details. Under the proposal concessionary fares on the services eligible, which of course cross local authority boundaries, would not be part of the local authority concessionary fares schemes.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will extend eligibility for concessionary pensioners fares to inter-authority journeys. [13034]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to my replies of 10 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 439W and 30 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 578W.

Passenger Information

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those means of public transport for which he does not collect passenger information. [13037]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department collects and publishes data from operators on the total number of passengers carried by all means of public transport, including buses, coaches, rail, light rail and ferries.

In addition, my Department collects data on the personal characteristics of passengers (including age) using the National Travel Survey. The number of people in the sample who record trips by less common means, including ferry, is too small to produce reliable estimates, and these trips are recorded in published NTS figures aggregated in the 'other public transport' category.

Public Transport Subsidies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* fuel tax rebates and *(b)* other subsidies are available to operators of buses, trains, taxis, passenger hovercraft, passenger ferries, coaches and other means of public transport on UK internal routes. [13039]

Mr. Jamieson: Operators of local bus services in England receive fuel duty rebate from my Department. For the fuel predominantly used in bus operation, ultra low sulphur diesel, this is equivalent to 80 per cent. of the duty paid. Following consultation in the spring, we will be introducing regulations later this financial year to extend this rebate to a wide range of community transport services. We have also announced approval in principle of a recommendation from the Commission for Integrated Transport under which operators of long-distance scheduled coach services would receive the rebate in return for offering half-price fares to older and disabled passengers. Operators of Licensed Hackney Carriages, who hold a Bus Operators Licence, can also receive Fuel Duty Rebate when operating Taxi-Bus services along registered routes.

Local authorities outside London have powers under the Transport Act 1985 to subsidise bus services where transport needs are not being met by an existing commercial service. My Department also provides grants to local authorities to support bus services by means of the Rural Bus Subsidy Grant, Rural Bus Challenge and Urban Bus Challenge grant schemes.

The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs provides grants, administered by the Countryside Agency, for a range of community-based transport initiatives in rural areas.

Bus, coach and taxi operators can apply for grants towards the cost of converting to cleaner fuels or fitting emission reduction technologies through my Department's PowerShift and CleanUp programmes.

Train operating companies (TOCs) receive support for passenger rail services (SPRS) from the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) to enable them to provide services which produce social, environmental and economic benefits that cannot be paid for through fares and charges. Similarly Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) pay grants to those TOCs which provide rail services in their areas. Freight Operating Companies (FOCs) receive freight grants from the SRA to encourage the movement of freight by rail in order to maximise environmental benefits by removing lorries from roads.

Since 1 April 2001, Railtrack has received network grants from the SRA. Various organisations also receive funding from the SRA under the Rail Passenger Partnership (RPP) scheme.

My Department supports the work of Transport for London through the Greater London Authority Transport Grant which is paid under the Greater London Authority Act 1999. Transport for London's responsibilities include support for buses, light rail and the Woolwich ferry.

Grant is provided to London Regional Transport using powers under the London Regional Transport Act 1984 to support London Underground.

Under the Local Transport Plan system, my Department only provides capital support for light rail projects.

Apart from its indirect support for the Woolwich ferry, my Department does not provide subsidies for operators of passenger hovercraft and passenger ferries. These are matters for local authorities.

Model Code of Conduct

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will lay before Parliament the model code of conduct for members of relevant authorities under the Local Government Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [13166]

Mr. Raynsford: I have today laid before the House four model codes of conduct for members of relevant authorities. The four are:

The Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2000—which covers principal local authorities, the Greater London Authority, the City of London, the Scilly Isles Council, Fire and joint authorities;

The Parish Councils (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2000;

The National Parks and the Broads Authority (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2000; and

The Police Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) (England and Wales) Order 2000.

The Government have embarked on a radical programme to modernise local government and deliver better services. Strong and effective community leadership is at the heart of this vision. It is essential that communities trust those in local government and, equally, that members have clear guidelines under which they must operate.

The code, published today, meets those two objectives. It will help safeguard and raise standards of conduct in local government—ensuring that the highest professional standards are met by those who run our councils and represent our communities.

Authorities now have six months in which to adopt their own codes of conduct, which must contain the mandatory provisions set out in the relevant model codes.

I believe the code is a considerable improvement on its predecessor. It is easier to understand, and easier for members to apply to their day to day duties. We need to keep the provisions under review, to ensure their workability and also to make sure that the public has the reassurance it needs that those they elect really are serving only the public interest. I shall from time to time ask the Standards Board for England to review the efficacy of the code, or specific provisions within it, and provide advice to Ministers on whether it can be improved.

I will ensure that copies of all four codes are placed in the House Libraries.

Ferry Services

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost of subsidies to the Woolwich ferry was in the last year in which they were paid; and what resources were made available by his Department to support such subsidies. [13038]

Mr. Jamieson: The Woolwich ferry is now the responsibility of Transport for London's Street Management Services. My Department paid just over £1 million for the ferry in the first quarter of 2000–01 before Transport for London took over. We took account of Transport for London's need to fund the ferry during the rest of 2000–01 in setting the level of GLA Transport Grant for that year.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason he does not collect information on the number of passenger journeys by ferry. [13035]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on number of passenger journeys by ferry is collected by my Department and the information is published annually in "Maritime Statistics".

East Coast Main Line

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on how many occasions in *(a)* 2001 *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 1999 services on the east coast main line have been disrupted owing to collapse or other failure of the overhead power cables; and what average length of delay has been caused to passenger services as a result. [6652]

Mr. Jamieson *[pursuant to his reply, 23 October 2001, c. 191–92W]:* The following corrected table from Railtrack shows the number of overhead line failures attributable to Railtrack and the train operators respectively in 1999, 2000 and 2001:

Minutes delay to ECML passenger services due to overhead line problems—period 11 (January) 1999 to end of period 6 (mid September) 2001

Year	*Total minutes delay*	*Number of incidents*	*Average delay*	*Percentage of all delays ECML*
Railtrack attributable (overhead line)				
1999	19,328	157	123	5.4
2000	24,037	134	179	3.0
2001	17,797	100	178	2.9
TOC attributable (pantograph)				
1999	—	—	—	—
2000	[1]387	[1]5	[1]77	[1]0.2
2001	8,149	13	627	2.2

[1] Data relating to these were not collected until summer 2000

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Flood Protection

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what provision she plans to make to *(a)* the Environment Agency and *(b)* East Riding of Yorkshire Council to protect properties at risk from flooding. [11963]

Mr. Morley: I have recently announced the allocations to flood and coastal defence operating authorities for 2002–03.

The capital allocation, on which we have offered to pay grant, for the Environment Agency in Yorkshire is £19.6 million (compared with £12.5 million in 2001–02). The rate of grant is one of the highest in the country at 65 per cent.

East Riding of Yorkshire Council have indicated that they intend to submit applications for funding for a number of schemes to reduce the risk of coastal erosion, but not to reduce the risk of flooding.

Ocean Management

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will bring forward proposals to introduce an eco-system approach to the management of the oceans around the UK. [11503]

Mr. Meacher: We are working through the European Commission and the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic for the sustainable management and conservation of the seas around the UK. The Government's Marine Stewardship Report will set out our overarching strategy. We are looking at adopting an eco-system approach in this context.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by her Department; if she will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans she has to sell further such assets over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review; and if she will make a statement. [10845]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The National Asset Register gives full details of departmental asset holdings across all categories of assets, including heritage assets, along with details of major acquisitions and disposals since the publication of the last register in 1997. While DEFRA does not hold any stocks of antiques, paintings or fine wines, the National Asset register does contain a summary of DEFRA's asset holdings.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the contribution of hunt staff to the control of foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [8987]

Mr. Morley: All our slaughter teams have provided a valuable contribution in the effort to control the disease. The first licensed hunt slaughtermen were engaged by the Department at the end of March on exactly the same basis as all licensed slaughtermen.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what restrictions she intends to impose on the sourcing of animals for restocking farms after foot and mouth has been eliminated. [5344]

Mr. Morley: From 5 November 2001, it will be possible for farmers in high risk counties, outside Infected Areas and restricted Infected Areas to bring stock into such counties from foot and mouth disease free and at risk counties for the purposes of restocking farms which have been culled. The arrangements for restocking will be kept under review as the disease situation changes.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many confirmed foot and mouth cases occurred in 2001 in each of the borough council areas of Cheshire. [11083]

Mr. Morley: It is only possible to provide data from the DEFRA Disease Control System (DCS) database for Cheshire as a whole. As at 31 October, there have been 17 Infected Premises (IPs), 32 Dangerous Contacts (DCs) and three Slaughter on Suspicion (SOS) cases in Cheshire.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farms included in the foot and mouth cull but not recognised as infected premises have had laboratory tests conducted for the presence of foot and mouth; and what proportion of these recorded positive results. [286]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* As at 22 October a total of 7,294 Dangerous Contacts (DC) and 255 Slaughter on Suspicion (SOS) cases, which had not been recognised as Infected Premises, had laboratory tests conducted. Of these, five yielded positive results and subsequently became IPs and were recorded as such.

Notes:

In addition to IPs and SOS cases, contiguous premises and DC premises have had samples taken from sheep at slaughter to further inform the Department as to origin and spread of disease. Some of these were subsequently recorded as IPs as they yielded positive laboratory results. A negative result does not necessarily mean that disease was not present. In the main, testing was for antibody, ie looking for evidence of origin (older disease).

Source:

DEFRA Disease Control System database as at 22 October—these figures may be subject to change as quality assurance of the data are carried out.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to apply for all available agrimonetary compensation in the 2001–02 financial year; and if she will make a statement. [8631]

Mr. Morley: As stated in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 738W, we have decided not to pay the agrimonetary compensation currently available for the arable sector. Any future payments of agrimonetary compensation must be balanced against the needs of other sectors and taxpayers.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much EU agrimonetary compensation is available to be applied for on behalf of UK arable farmers. [9845]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 738W.

Farm Funding

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will allow English farmers to access England Rural Development Programme funding on the same basis as Welsh farmers. [12610]

Alun Michael: Separate Rural Development Plans/ Programmes have been prepared for England and Wales which reflect the particular characteristics of each country but this has been done within the common framework of measures and requirements laid down in the European Commission's Rural Development Regulation. Farmers in some parts of Wales also receive support for rural development through Structural Funds.

Environmentally Sensitive Area Status

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make

it her policy to accord Environmentally Sensitive Area status to all national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty. [11909]

Alun Michael: Under the Agriculture Act 1986, Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) may be designated where the maintenance or adoption of particular farming methods is likely to contribute to the conservation or enhancement of natural beauty, biodiversity, features, buildings or historic interest. In England, a total of 22 ESAs were designated between 1987 and 1994, many of which overlap with National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Since 1996, this Department has also operated the Countryside Stewardship Scheme which provides payments for similar objectives outside designated ESAs. There are no plans to designate any further ESAs pending the review of all agri-environment schemes which is due to begin shortly.

Business Links

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase the funding for Business Link schemes for three-day consultancy for farmers; and if she will make a statement. [12361]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* We have recently reviewed the budget allocations for the Farm Business Advice Service. As a preliminary step, 10 per cent. of the enhanced (five-day) service budget has been switched to the core (three-day) service in order to help farmers who have been subject to Form D restrictions. Funding will not be increased this year. Consideration is being given to making further budget realignments in order that predicted demand can be met.

Stewardship Schemes

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to encourage a broader availability of stewardship schemes under the modulation and environmental subsidies scheme; and if she will make a statement. [12358]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* We are planning for a major expansion of the Countryside Stewardship budget as is now well known. Under the England Rural Development Programme, expenditure on agri-environment schemes is scheduled to increase from £119 million this year to £197 million in 2006–07. This expansion is partly funded by receipts from modulation. Subject to EU approval, we also plan to introduce a number of new arable options to Countryside Stewardship next year, which will provide greater opportunities for arable farmers to join the scheme. Over the longer term, we have started a major review of agri-environment schemes which will consider a range of issues, including the scope for further broadening of the schemes. This is consistent with the Department's policy of seeking further CAP reform to redirect expenditure from agricultural subsidies towards measures to support environmentally friendly farming and the wider rural economy.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will increase veterinary resources in the south-west to help against the spreading of TB; and if she will make a statement. [12355]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Resources normally available to the State Veterinary Service in the south-west for TB testing are still, in part, diverted to foot and mouth disease control. The issue of whether extra resource will be needed in certain areas is currently being assessed within the Department.

Rendering Capacity

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase rendering capacity; and if she will make a statement. [12351]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* We have no immediate plans for increasing rendering capacity, but increases in rendering capacity will be thoroughly considered in our development of contingency measures for future disease outbreaks.

Flooding (Upton-upon-Severn)

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will fund the provision of a pontoon bridge at Upton-upon-Severn which can be put in place in the event of flooding. [11660]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I am not aware of a proposal for a flood defence scheme at Upton-upon-Severn and none have been submitted to this Department. To secure DEFRA funding capital works must be technically sound, economically worthwhile and environmentally acceptable, and achieve an appropriate priority score (based on an assessment of Departmental priorities, urgency and benefit:cost ratio).

British Horticulture (Greenhouse Fuels)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will compensate British horticulture businesses for subsidies granted by Spain for greenhouse fuels; and what measures she is taking to prevent unfair competition caused by subsidy of greenhouse fuels in competition with the UK horticultural industry. [10675]

Mr. Morley: I am not aware of subsidies granted by Spain specifically for fuels used in horticultural production. In the UK, heating oil used in glasshouses is exempt from duty.

The rate of Climate Change Levy applied to energy used in horticulture in the UK has been abated by 50 per cent. for five years and we have allocated up to £5 million over three years to provide energy efficiency advice to growers to help them adjust to the full rate of levy. These measures (which require Commission approval under the state aids rules) recognise the importance of energy costs to competitive production in this sector.

Fodder and Grazing

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she received from the Arthur Rank Foundation and

industry bodies about the price and availability of *(a)* fodder and *(b)* grazing for livestock (i) in the UK and (ii) on the Isle of Wight. [9910]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The Arthur Rank Foundation, ADAS and industry bodies have been examining the prices and availability of fodder and grazing throughout the country. We have received information on a broad regional basis but have no specific information on the Isle of Wight. The Department has been supporting a number of charities giving support to individuals and families suffering hardship as a result of foot and mouth disease, including the Arthur Rank Foundation. A total of £13 million has been provided to such charities up to September and we have now made available a further £2 million to the end of the year.

Groundwater

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement in respect of the requirement on manufacturing industries to prevent the release of hazardous substances into water and the policy of Ofwat in respect of contaminants penetrating underlying aquifers to significant depths. [11383]

Mr. Meacher: Under various powers contained in the Water Resources Act 1991, the Water Industry Act 1991, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and regulations made under the Pollution Prevention and Control Act 2000, discharges from manufacturing industries to sewer and controlled waters require written authorisation from, respectively, the sewerage undertaker and the Environment Agency. Conditions in these authorisations are set in order to protect receiving waters from polluting substances. The Agency also has powers to prevent polluting activities. Ofwat has no direct responsibilities for discharge consents or associated standards.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to protect groundwater resources from known sources of contamination. [11379]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have, through the Groundwater Regulations 1998 and the Anti-Pollution Works Notices Regulations 1999, increased the powers available to the Environment Agency to protect groundwater resources. In addition the Government have issued, under Regulation 21 of the Groundwater Regulations, a groundwater protection code of practice on the use and disposal of sheep dip. A draft code for petrol stations and underground storage tanks has been to public consultation and work is under way on codes for potential sources of contamination.

Litter Offences

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many on-the-spot fines were levied for litter offences in England in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available. [12418]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, litter wardens can issue a £25 fixed penalty to anyone who drops litter and refuses to dispose of it properly. These penalty notices are not on-the-spot fines but can be paid within 14 days of an offence occurring. If the money is not paid within 14 days the litterer can be prosecuted and if convicted face a maximum fine of £2,500.

In the period 1997–98, 727 litter fixed penalties were issued by local authorities in England, of which 660 were paid. The last year from which figures are available is the period 1999–2000 where 2,970 fixed penalty notices were issued of which 1,563 were paid.

Sheep Meat

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will calculate *(a)* the number of sweet lambs awaiting entry into the national supply chain and *(b)* the amount of sweet lamb being processed in the supply chain as a result of the imposition of export control restrictions on British livestock and meat. [11417]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA figures for the week ending 13 October 2001 indicate that the volume of sheep being slaughtered in the UK for human consumption was about 73 per cent. of the level that would have been expected had foot and mouth not occurred. However, allowing for the impact of the export ban, the production of sheep meat for the UK market is approximately 99 per cent. of normal.

Apples

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the average crop harvested of Bramley apples in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* England since 1981. [11977]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Home production of Bramley apples marketed for the calendar years 1985 to 2001 was as follows:

thousand tonnes

	England and Wales	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*	*UK total*
1985	121.6	0.1	24.4	146.1
1986	123.0	0.2	24.6	147.8
1987	114.5	0.1	24.3	139.0
1988	100.9	0.1	29.4	130.4
1989	189.0	0.1	35.6	224.7
1990	118.6	0.1	34.3	152.9
1991	150.5	0.1	41.9	192.5
1992	155.5	0.1	41.4	197.0
1993	101.4	0.1	51.2	152.6
1994	87.8	0.1	35.6	123.5
1995	89.7	0.1	41.3	131.2
1996	75.2	0.1	39.7	115.0
1997	57.5	0.1	31.0	88.5
1998	54.7	0.1	27.6	82.4
1999	83.5	0.1	25.8	109.4
2000	59.5	0.1	45.5	105.1
2001[1]	55.5	0.1	50.2	105.7

[1] Provisional

Draft Guidance (Parishes)

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish draft guidance on quality parishes. [13249]

Alun Michael: I shall be publishing a consultation paper on Quality Parish and Town Councils tomorrow, Wednesday 7 November. This takes forward the commitment in the Rural White Paper to help town and parish councils develop a new role, give communities the opportunity to help shape their future and to make local government in the countryside more responsive to local people and local needs. Copies will be placed in the Library and the Vote Office in the morning. The consultation paper will be available on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' website www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/consultfrm.htm and from my Department on request. I shall also be writing to Members of Parliament individually with the document.

Ebola Virus

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to stop ebola from entering the United Kingdom. [9433]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Cases of ebola haemorrhagic fever are not infectious before the onset of symptoms and there are systems in place, based on the World Health Organisation's international health regulations, to ensure that individuals who appear to be ill on entry to this country are identified and are put in contact with health care services.

We have issued guidance to the national health service on the management and control of viral haemorrhagic fevers to help in the identification and safe care of cases, including the monitoring of contacts. There are two high security infectious disease units in England that provide specialised isolation facilities on a United Kingdom-wide basis for people suffering from or suspected of suffering from highly infectious diseases such as viral haemorrhagic fever. Specialist laboratories, which provide early diagnosis of suspected cases, support these units.

Bioterrorism

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what checks will be made on grain imports to prevent terrorists from polluting them with disease-bearing spores. [9866]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

There are extensive controls on imports of food including grain at ports of entry. In addition, the Food Standards Agency plays a full part in Government emergency planning to protect the food chain, including against terrorism.

TREASURY

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the value, net of withdrawals and reductions, of the *(a)* penalties and *(b)* interest charged by HM Customs and Excise in respect of Insurance Premium Tax in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02 to date. [12199]

Ruth Kelly: Customs and Excise charged penalties and interest in respect of Insurance Premium Tax as shown in the table.

£000

	Net value charged	
	Interest	*Penalties*
1999–2000	633	61
2000–01	382	75
2001 to 31 August	265	[1]—

[1] Reliable information is not yet available for this period, and it would take a disproportionate amount of time to quantify. Customs are developing a new system to report these data

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the targets for detection of revenue set for each anti-smuggling team in HM Customs and Excise in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02. [12212]

Mr. Boateng: Customs does not set revenue detection targets for individual teams.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff are employed, and at what grades, by the National Investigation Service within HM Customs and Excise. [12214]

Mr. Boateng: The number of staff currently employed by HM Customs and Excise law enforcement investigation (formerly known as the national investigation service) is shown in the table:

Job band	*Number of staff*
02	53
03	99
04	31
05	100
06	1,015
07	571
08	26
09	109
10	4
11	20
12	4
SCS	4
Grand total	2,036

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees of HM Customs and Excise are the subject of criminal investigations by the police; and how many of these relate to frauds on duty. [12638]

Mr. Boateng: The number of officers who are currently the subject of criminal investigations by the police is 16. None of these cases relates to frauds on excise or customs duties.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the sum of revenue detected by each anti-smuggling team within HM Customs and Excise in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02 to date. [12213]

Mr. Boateng: Information about the revenue evasion detected by individual anti-smuggling teams is not available.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what ways the powers and responsibilities of HM Customs and Excise have been affected by the Terrorism Act 2000. [12217]

Mr. Boateng: Under the Terrorism Act 2000, all Customs officers at ports and airports in Great Britain, but not Northern Ireland, are designated as examining officers. This provides officers with a range of investigative powers to enable the officer to determine whether a person is or has been concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism.

In addition, the Act designates all Customs officers in the UK as authorised officers. This provides officers with powers to seize cash at import or export, or moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which is believed to be linked to terrorism. The detention of seized cash beyond 48 hours must be authorised by the courts.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many notifications of businesses no longer trading were received by HM Customs and Excise following the annual reminder mailshots in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [12202]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the number of businesses no longer trading and notified as a result of annual reminders is not readily available. Information about the percentage increase in changes notified due to the annual reminder may be found in the publication "HM Customs and Excise annual report 1998–99, appendix B—Management by Outputs Agreement".

Such data are not readily available for the remaining years in question and would involve disproportionate cost to produce. Details of the total number of deregistrations over the period in question may be found in HM Customs and Excise annual reports for the respective financial years.

Barnett Formula

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under the application of the multiplier to each area of comparable expenditure under the Barnett formula, which spending areas contributed to a reduction in Scotland's allocation in the last financial year. [12190]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Increases in Scotland's allocation for 2000–01 were announced following the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review. Details of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review were announced in the spending plans published in July 1998 (Cm 4011) and the Barnett formula comparability factors used in the Comprehensive Spending Review were published in the Statement of Funding Policy in March 1999.

Euro

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on euro preparations. [13250]

Ruth Kelly: The Fifth Report on Euro Preparations was published on 4 November. Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the current level of Treasury research into whether the United Kingdom has passed the five economic tests for membership of the euro zone; who will undertake the final tests; and how long the analysis will take; [13022]

(2) if it is the assessment of his Department that the United Kingdom qualifies for membership of the euro zone. [13023]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament.

European Central Bank

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the accountability to EU member states of the European Central Bank. [12554]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the then Economic Secretary to the Treasury, on 11 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 771W.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what options he is considering for the *(a)* reform and *(b)* abolition of the Landfill Tax Credit scheme; [12042]

(2) if he will amend the Landfill Tax Regulations to permit environmental bodies to make direct contributions to recycling schemes; [12045]

(3) when he will publish a consultation document on the future of the Landfill Tax Credit scheme. [12043]

Mr. Boateng: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 624–25W.

Airline Industry

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will bring forward taxation measures to provide emergency support to the airline industry following the terrorist attacks of 11 September; [11969]

(2) if he will bring forward taxation measures to assist the tourism industry; and if he will make a statement. [11970]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keep all taxes under review and decisions will be made as part of the normal Budget process.

Working Hours

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 204W, on excessive hours, if he will state the methodology by which his answer was reached. [11607]

Ruth Kelly: Aggregated data are produced three times a year from information provided by staff on their average working hours. This showed the trend I referred to in my reply to the hon. Member on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 204W.

Railtrack

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guarantees the Treasury is offering to Railtrack plc in administration to enable it to borrow from the market. [11087]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the right hon. Member to the Loan Agreement, copies of which were placed in the House Library on 17 October 2001.

Public-Private Partnerships

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what advice he has received since 7 October concerning additional risk premia that PPP partners might seek; [10770]

(2) what representations he has received since 7 October from *(a)* actual and *(b)* potential PPP partners concerning modifications of standard contractual arrangements; [10771]

(3) what representations he has received since 7 October about the operation of public private partnerships; and if he will publish them; [10769]

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from interested organisations regarding public/private partnerships. [11543]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Ministers and officials regularly receive representations on public-private partnerships (PPP). It is for those making such representations to publish them if they so wish. It would not be appropriate to make public the terms of contractual negotiations in advance of contract signature. The general guidance on "Standardisation of PFI Contracts", published in 1999 and which is available in the Library of the House of Commons, is currently being reviewed by the Office of Government Commerce. It is hoped to issue a revised draft of this guidance for consultation shortly.

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of criminal VAT fraud were reported in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date; how many prosecutions were completed in each year; and how many of those prosecutions were completed successfully. [12208]

Mr. Boateng: The number of reported VAT fraud criminal cases is:

1999–2000: 105

2000–01: 92.

During 1999–2000, 49 prosecutions were completed, of which in 48 one or more defendants were convicted. During 2000–01, 24 prosecutions were completed, of which in 20 one or more defendants were convicted.

Accurate figures for 2001–02 will be calculated after the year in question.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value was of criminal VAT evasion prevented by HM Customs and Excise in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date. [12207]

Mr. Boateng: The value of criminal evasion prevented by Customs while investigating rose from £618 million in 1999–2000 to £993 million in 2000–01. Figures showing the total value of revenue evasion prevented by Customs in 2001–02 will be published in due course.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many traders were dealt with by the VAT large payers unit in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; how many traders are now being dealt with by the unit; and if he will make a statement. [12205]

Mr. Boateng: The number of traders dealt with by the VAT large payers unit was 10,000 in 1997–98, 13,000 in 1998–99, 13,500 in 1999–2000, 14,500 in 2000–01 and is currently around 14,900.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the total value of VAT repayment returns in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; [12203]

(2) what the target of HM Customs and Excise is for effecting VAT repayment returns; and what proportion of VAT returns, representing what sum of money, were effected within the relevant target time in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [12204]

Mr. Boateng: Customs processes around 2 million VAT repayment returns each year, the values of which are set out on a regular basis in the HM Customs and Excise "Value Added Tax Factsheet", available from the House of Commons Library.

A target to authorise 92 per cent. of all repayments within 10 working days of the receipt of a claim in the VAT central unit was set for the year 1997–98, and this was increased to 96 per cent. for 1998–99 and subsequent years. The actual achievement in each of the subject years was over 97 per cent.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the value of *(a)* court fines and costs and *(b)* confiscation and compensation orders following the completion of prosecutions in VAT criminal cases in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date. [12215]

Mr. Boateng: The amount of money realised for each of the periods referred to was, in respect of confiscation orders for VAT cases only, as follows:

	£
(a) 1999–2000	415,585,93
(b) 2000–01	795,020.25
(c) 2001–02[1]	102,411.78

[1] April to September

Customs does not keep details as to the value of court fines or costs orders made nor does it have any record of compensation orders made. Similarly, it does not keep any record of confiscation orders made—only the amount realised through enforcement.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value of VAT civil evasion prevented by HM Customs and Excise was in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [12209]

Mr. Boateng: The value of VAT civil evasion prevented by HM Customs and Excise in the years 1997–98 and 1998–99 are contained in Customs annual reports for these years. Figures for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are:

	£ million
1999–2000	70
2000–01	71

From the current financial year, HM Customs and Excise has ceased to calculate a figure for VAT criminal evasion prevented.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many and what proportion of applications for VAT registration during *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01, and *(d)* 2001–02 to the most recent date for which information is available were (i) refused or (ii) referred for further investigation; [12197]

(2) how many and what percentage of applications for VAT registration were found to be *(a)* invalid or *(b)* potentially fraudulent in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02 to the most recent date for which information is available. [12200]

Mr. Boateng: For 1998–99, information on the proportion of applications falling into these categories is published in appendix B of the HM Customs and Excise annual report 1998–99. For 1999–2000 and 2000–01, this information was not centrally collated and would now involve disproportionate cost to produce. National registration statistics for 2001–02 will be published in due course.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many VAT fraud cases were investigated under the civil penalty procedure in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 to date. [12210]

Mr. Boateng: Prior to 2001–02, HM Customs and Excise has recorded information on the numbers of VAT fraud cases where a civil penalty was imposed but not the number investigated. Figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 were published in Customs annual reports for these years. Figures for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are as follows:

	Number
1999–2000	860
2000–01	729

Accurate figures for 2001–02 will be calculated after the year in question.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses were sent the annual reminder mailshot with VAT returns in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [12201]

Mr. Boateng: The information is as follows:

	Million
1999	1.6
2000	1.7
2001	0

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the value, net of withdrawals and reductions, of the *(a)* default surcharge, *(b)* penalties and *(c)* interest charged by HM Customs and Excise in respect of VAT in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02 to date. [12198]

Mr. Boateng: The information is as follows:

			£ million
Net value of penalty charged	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001*[1]
Default surcharge	117.3	126.9	47.9
Default interest	77.4	71.6	25.8
Other penalties	22.9	29.8	10.8

[1] To 31 August 2001

WALES

NHS (Wales) Bill

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will publish the draft NHS (Wales) Bill. [12679]

Mr. Touhig: The Queen's Speech at the beginning of this parliamentary Session confirmed that the Government intended to draft legislation to reform the provision of health services in Wales. The Government's intention is still to publish a Welsh Bill in draft during this parliamentary Session. My right hon. Friend and I have had close discussions with the National Assembly for Wales Minister for Health and Social Services and with our colleagues in Government on the contents of the draft NHS (Wales) Bill. My officials and Assembly officials are also making good progress on the detail of the Bill.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ozone Depleting Substances

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated cost to British businesses is of the Ozone Depleting Substances Regulation 2000/2037. [11857]

Mr. Wilson: EC Regulation 2037/2000 on substances which deplete the ozone layer is a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Minister for the Environment. A Regulatory Impact Assessment was prepared by his Department in relation to this Regulation, and was placed in both Libraries of the House on 3 December 1998.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effects of the ozone depleting substances Regulation 2000/2087 on the design and manufacture of fridges and freezers. [11856]

Mr. Wilson: EC Regulation 2037/2000 on substances which deplete the ozone layer is a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Minister for the Environment. The manufacture of fridges and freezers will need to comply with the restrictions placed by the Regulation on the use of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs). Use of HCFCs as refrigerants in domestic fridges and freezers has been banned since 1 January 1996. Regulation 2037/2000 additionally bans use of HCFCs for the production of polyurethane foams for appliances from 1 January 2003.

Small Business Service/Business Link

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking *(a)* to ensure effective co-operation and *(b)* to avoid duplication between the work of the Small Business Service and Business Links. [11847]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service and the Business Link Operators are part of the same network. They are not two different competing organisations. Business Link is the customer facing brand of the Small Business Service. The Business Link Service encompasses a national contact centre and website and the network of 45 local Business Link Operators.

The Small Business Service manages the network of local Business Link operators through its regional teams. They are responsible for encouraging effective local and regional collaboration and building a learning network.

End-of-life Vehicles Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated cost to British businesses is of the end-of-life vehicles directive. [11861]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI Consultation Paper on options for implementing the Directive, copies of which were placed in the Libraries of both Houses, includes a partial regulatory impact assessment. A fuller assessment of the cost to businesses will be made when the precise method of implementation has been decided, following consideration of responses received in the consultation exercise.

Small Businesses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of UK registered businesses employ fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20, *(d)* 10 and *(e)* five people. [12156]

Nigel Griffiths: The percentage of UK registered businesses by employee size band is as follows:

Less than 100: 99.0

Less than 50: 98.2

Less than 20: 95.8

Less than 10: 90.3

Less than five: 79.7

Source:

Inter-departmental Business Register (IDBR), Start 2001

Economic Development

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the potential of the environmental industries to generate economic development. [9821]

Mr. Wilson: The most recent available figures relating to the environmental industries indicate that the global environmental market was worth about $335 billion in 2000 rising to $640 billion by 2010. A new study to up date these figures has been commissioned by the Department and is due for completion at the end of November 2001. This will also provide information on the UK's share of the global market.

The Department is also in the process of establishing an Innovation and Growth Team (IGT) for the UK environmental industry. The primary role of the IGT will be to identify new trends and emerging factors which could impact on competitiveness within the industry, and to identify new market opportunities.

Nuclear Sites (Security)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to install anti-aircraft batteries at Sellafield and other nuclear plants; and what discussions she has had with her French counterpart following the French Government's decision to place anti-aircraft missiles around French reprocessing facilities. [10674]

Mr. Wilson: The UK's civil nuclear sites apply stringent security measures regulated by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS), the security regulator. The security regulator works closely with the Health and Safety Executive, the safety regulator, which provides advice on the safety implications of events, including external hazards such as plane crashes, at nuclear installations. Security and safety precautions at nuclear sites are kept under regular review and the Government are reviewing all precautions in the light of the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September. It is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken at civil nuclear sites. Officials have discussed security issues with their French counter-parts.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 7W, on nuclear security, if the Office for Civil Nuclear Security was asked to make a special assessment of the security provisions for the Sellafield MOX Plant and the transport of MOX fuel to overseas customers following the terrorist events of 11 September. [10673]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1152W.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the personnel who comprise her Department's Office for Civil Nuclear Security, along with the qualifications they have for their roles. [8763]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI's Office for Civil Nuclear Security comprise 34 staff headed by Michael Buckland-Smith, Director of Civil Nuclear Security. Staff have a range of relevant experience including work in the security and intelligence agencies, the armed services and the police. Training and competences required for OCNS—as for all parts of DTI—are kept under continuing review in the light of changing needs.

European Coal and Steel Treaty

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policy on the proposals of the European Commission to allow state aid to the coal industry to continue beyond the expiry of the European Coal and Steel Treaty in 2002. [11564]

Mr. Wilson: The Government currently have no plans to subsidise the UK coal industry beyond the expiry of the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty in July

2002. However, we are prepared to accept that continued State aid be permitted by the new European regime after this date, provided that it is in the context of appropriate limiting conditions and provided it does nothing to undermine greater liberalisation of energy markets. In particular we would like to see a cap on aid payments, degressivity in aid payments, and rules to prevent subsidies reducing domestic prices of delivered coal below international prices.

Given the geopolitical diversity of coal sources, we are not convinced by the security of supply justification for subsidies as detailed in the current Commission proposals. We would instead like to keep open the possibility of member states paying operating or investment aid to make further progress towards economic viability.

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policy towards the renewal of the European Coal and Steel Treaty. [11557]

Mr. Wilson: The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Treaty comes to an end in July 2002, and there are no plans for it to be renewed. However the European Commission has published a proposal for a new European coal state aids regime. Our policy regarding this proposal is discussed in my answer today to my hon. Friend (PQ No. 11564), at columns 160-61W.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received regarding the impact of new regulations on British manufacturing in the last 12 months. [11005]

Mr. Wilson: Ministers meet and correspond regularly with manufacturing companies and business organisations representing them on a range of issues, including the impact of new regulations.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the factors responsible for the changes in competitiveness of British manufacturing in the last three years. [10993]

Mr. Wilson: Competitiveness depends on a wide range of factors which we keep under close review. My Department published, in February 2001, its latest assessment of the UK's competitiveness against the world's leading economies in the second edition of the UK Competitiveness Indicators. In addition, we have a rolling programme of sector competitiveness analyses which seek to examine all the factors that may influence the competitiveness of companies in a particular industrial or business sector.

Electricity Trading Arrangements

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the operation of the New Electricity Trading Arrangements. [10992]

Mr. Wilson: Ofgem published on 31 August a review of NETA's performance over the first three months. Their key findings were that:

Wholesale electricity prices are 20–25 per cent. below prices that would have been produced under the Pool.

Market liquidity has been established with a threefold increase in the volume of trades, and a doubling of the number of contracts struck compared to this time last year under the Pool.

The National Grid Company is working well to keep the electricity system in balance. Its daily costs of balancing the system have halved, which will also benefit customers.

The impact of NETA on smaller generators continues to be a concern. Ofgem also published a report on the impact of NETA on smaller generators in the first two months of its operation. This report highlighted the areas where further action was needed to assist smaller generators. I have issued a consultation document aimed at addressing these concerns, and copies have been placed in both Libraries of the House.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact of the new Electricity Trading Arrangements on the generation of electricity by wind power. [10118]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The impact of NETA on smaller generators, including renewables such as wind power, was and continues to be of great concern. Ofgem published on 31 August 2001 a report on the impact of NETA on smaller generators, based on the first two months of NETA operation, as well as a report on NETA operation generally.

Ofgem's key findings on the initial impact of NETA on smaller generators, including wind generation, included:

(a) That the prices achieved by smaller generators are 17 per cent. lower than under the Pool. This is a somewhat smaller reduction than for generation prices overall. Ofgem reports, however, that wind plant have seen the largest drop in the price paid for their exports, 27 per cent.

(b) Smaller generators' output has fallen substantially. Ofgem suggests the lower export prices for electricity are one factor, but also speculates that higher costs (especially gas prices) may also have contributed. Exports for wind generation, however, are only down by 13 per cent.

(c) In its report Ofgem has singled out the position of wind generators within the renewables community as especially unpredictable. Other than wind power, the output of smaller generators does not appear to be significantly less predictable than for other generators.

The Government issued proposals specifically aimed at addressing the concerns of the smaller generators community, including wind generation. Copies have been placed in both Libraries of the House.

The Government remain committed to their target for 10 per cent. of electricity sales from licensed suppliers to come from renewables which are eligible for the Renewables Obligation by 2010, subject to the costs being acceptable to the consumer.

Coal

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has security of supply concerns about coal production; and if she will make a statement. [10373]

Mr. Wilson: Domestic supplies constitute about 50 per cent. of our current coal use, competing in a diverse and active international market. I believe this market provides a secure and diverse choice of coal supplies in which I would expect UK production to continue to play a significant role.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what risk assessment she has made about the potential for disruption to coal supply to the UK. [10378]

Mr. Wilson: No formal risk assessment has been made about the potential for disruption to coal supply to the UK. However, the current Coal Aid Code, the European Commission's Security of Supply Green Paper and the Commission proposal for state aid to the coal industry all acknowledge that the geopolitical diversity of coal sources is such that the risks of disruption to supply are minimal.

In terms of a physical threat to coal assets or the freight transport infrastructure, the Government and relevant companies are working with the security services to ensure that the risk of terrorist attack is properly assessed and that appropriate measures are in place to reduce the risk of disruption.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to promote the capping of EU state aid to the UK coal industry at 2001 levels. [10375]

Mr. Wilson: On 25 July 2001, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Council regulation on state aid to the coal industry. There is no specific cap in this proposal. However, to see levels of aid increase on current levels would contradict aims for greater liberalisation in EU markets, and run counter to the commitment given by member states at the Lisbon Council to reduce the level of state aids, shifting the emphasis from supporting individual companies or sectors. The Government would therefore at least like to see payments by each member state capped at the levels of aid it granted in 2001. We are pursuing this objective in Council negotiations.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to promote amendments to reduce EU state aid to the UK coal industry on a year-by-year basis. [10374]

Mr. Wilson: The European Commission proposal for a Council regulation on state aid to the coal industry beyond 2002 requires aid to be reduced in a "continuous and significant manner". It is very important that this is achieved so that we progress to a liberalised market without aid, and honour the commitment given at the Lisbon Council to reduce the level of state aids. Therefore we would like to see amendments clarifying that the total level of aid which may be granted by any member state must be reduced in a significant manner on a year-by-year basis. We are pursuing this objective in Council negotiations.

Nuclear Power (Finland)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the Government of Finland about nuclear power generation. [7378]

Mr. Wilson: I have had no recent discussions but, as with other international energy issues, am aware of developments in the nuclear sector in Finland.

Screening Centre (Wrexham)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* medical examinations by doctors and *(b)* screening tests by nurses were carried out at Healthcall's screening centre at Grosvenor road in Wrexham in each month between June and September inclusive. [8711]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The number of screening spirometry tests completed at Wrexham test centre each month, from June to September inclusive was:

	Number
2001	
June	3
July	20
August	0
September	22
Total tested at Wrexham at end September	480

The number of medical assessments completed at Wrexham test centre each month was:

	Number
2001	
June	3
July	6
August	6
September	11
Total tested at Wrexham at end September	197

Miners' Compensation

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many compensation claims made by miners suffering from vibration white finger and mining-related lung diseases are still waiting to be processed; and how many of the claimants in this group have received an interim payment, in Bassetlaw constituency. [9881]

Mr. Wilson: In the Bassetlaw constituency, with regards to Vibration White Finger, VWF, there have been 4,153 claims registered to date, 1,355 interims have been made and 877 full and final payments have been made. The total amount paid in damages is £14.2 million.

In relation to respiratory disease, 3,602 claims have been initiated in the Bassetlaw constituency. There have been 609 interim payments and 264 full and final payments have been made. The total amount paid in damages is £3.7 million.

Constituency statistics will be available on the www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth website in the next three to four weeks.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many compensation payments to sick miners and their dependants for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* respiratory diseases have been made by means of

(i) fast track settlements and (ii) full settlements, broken down by parliamentary constituency. [9851]

Mr. Wilson: The information is not yet available in the format requested. The Department is working closely with its claims handlers to produce a breakdown of headline statistics by parliamentary constituency for both respiratory diseases and vibration white finger. It is anticipated that the information will be available on the Department's coal health website www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth—in the next three to four weeks.

In the meantime breakdowns by postcode and region are currently available on the website.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* claims were received in respect of respiratory disease, *(b)* interim and expedited awards were made in respect of respiratory disease broken down by (i) number and (ii) value, *(c)* claims were received in respect of vibration white finger and *(d)* interim and general damage awards were made in respect of vibration white finger by (A) number and (B) value, broken down by region. [12065]

Mr. Wilson: The breakdown of progress, on a regional basis, for both compensation for respiratory disease and vibration white finger is as follows:

Regional breakdown as at 30 September 2001

	Wales	*Scotland*	*Nottinghamshire*	*Yorkshire*	*North-east*	*North-west*	*Midlands*	*South*
Vibration White Finger								
Number of claims	16,812	8,297	22,377	41,292	19,983	4,232	12,783	1,987
Interim payments								
Number of payments	3,869	2,562	6,642	12,357	7,263	1,204	3,014	488
Value of payments (£ million)	20.3	12.8	36.6	70.8	44.8	5.6	15.2	2.8
Settlements								
Total number of general damages settlements	5,097	2,619	4,773	7,925	5,222	1,118	2,054	379
Value of settlements (£ million)	24.0	11.5	31.0	43.6	34.2	4.1	9.3	1.6
Respiratory disease								
Number of claims	34,497	12,837	20,706	43,477	23,615	8,829	15,552	3,942
Interim payments—post spirometry and post MAP								
Number of payments	8,733	3,280	3,679	8,621	4,906	1,837	4,071	843
Value of payments (£ million)	35.8	13.3	13.2	32.8	20.8	7.0	14.2	3.3
Expedited payments post spirometry								
Total number of expedited offers made	2,235	1,576	2,033	4,965	2,238	946	1,799	422
Value of payments (£ million)	6.1	5.7	7.4	17.9	6.8	3.5	7.0	12.9

Regional breakdowns are available on the Department's website on www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims her Department has received in respect of respiratory disease; in respect of how many claims spirometry has been completed; in how many claims a medical assessment process has been started; and in how many claims a medical assessment process has been completed, in the last four years. [12063]

Mr. Wilson: The Handling Agreement was formally signed on 24 September 1999 and claims submitted before would not have begun to be processed until after this date.

IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have registered 167,559 claims, to date, of which 104,783 are from live claimants. In total, 97,880 appointments have been made and of these, 92,272 claimants have undergone the initial spirometry test.

Both claims from miners and their estates can proceed through the full Medical Assessment Process, MAP. There have been 123,641 claims questionnaires and mandate packs, which authorise access to claimants' medical records, issued by IRISC to claimants' solicitors, of which 85,591 have been returned. The number of claimants who have undergone the medical assessment is 43,390.

Pylons

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will review the Government's policy on the future construction of pylons in this country on the basis of international research published since April. [9651]

Mr. Wilson: We are always interested to note and consider relevant research. There are no plans for a general review of policy at this juncture.

Underground Gas Storage

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Government policy is on the construction of underground gas storage facilities. [11077]

Mr. Wilson: Gas storage facilities (including underground) will have an increasingly important role, as Great Britain becomes increasingly dependent on imported gas and as the "swing" capability of North Sea gas fields declines, in helping gas suppliers to meet peak demand requirements. In this way they contribute to security of supply. They can also help to keep prices down by enabling suppliers to purchase additional gas, to put into storage, when wholesale prices are low.

The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, acting under its duties to protect the interests of consumers, supports the development of new gas storage projects. Proposals for new storage projects are subject to regulatory

consents, notably planning permission and under health and safety legislation. Energy security, including gas storage, is a key element of the energy policy review currently being undertaken by the Performance and Innovation Unit of the Cabinet Office. The review is due to conclude at the end of the year.

Tyre Manufacturing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to safeguard the future of the tyre manufacturing industry in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [9063]

Mr. Wilson: The Government strongly support all types of manufacturing. We do this by:

Providing a stable macro-economic framework, investing in education and skills, investing in Britain's knowledge base, ensuring a decent infrastructure, helping business boost productivity, securing effective competition and supporting business by creating a culture in which enterprise can flourish.

In common with other industrial countries the tyre industry in the UK is under great competitive pressure. We will continue to maintain close contact with tyre manufacturers in the UK and make sure that they are fully aware of our manufacturing policy.

Work and Parents Taskforce

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to publish the findings of the Work and Parents Taskforce. [12248]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The Work and Parents Taskforce is due to report to me this month. Once I have received the report I hope to be able to publish it soon after.

OPEC

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on OPEC's oil reserves. [9945]

Mr. Wilson: OPEC-11 (i.e. including Iraq) proven oil reserves[1] are estimated to be around 800 billion barrels, approximately 80 per cent. of proven world reserves (Source: US DoE, Energy Information Administration website). Current OPEC-11 spare oil production capacity is approximately 4.7 million barrels per day, compared to production of 27.2 million barrels per day and world oil demand of around 76 million barrels per day (Source: International Energy Agency, October Oil Market Report). Information on the level of oil stocks held by OPEC countries is not available.

[1] Proven reserves of oil are generally taken to be those quantities that geological and engineering information indicates with reasonable certainty can be recovered in the future from known reservoirs under existing economic and operating conditions.

Plutonium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what quantities of plutonium have been *(a)* sold and *(b)* loaned to the European Commission, on behalf of the European Communities, by the United Kingdom (i) prior to and (ii) since the United Kingdom joined the European Community; and if she will provide details of dates and reasons for such transactions. [8870]

Mr. Wilson: Information available to us indicates that small samples of material have been transferred to the European Commission for purposes such as safeguards measurements and research. The details requested cannot be provided because the information is held largely on paper records dating back over 40 years and could be provided only at disproportionate cost to the Department.

Wind Farms

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if legislation is required to allow offshore wind farms to be built in British waters more than 12 miles from the coastline; and if she will make a statement. [9765]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has recently reviewed the consent requirements for offshore windfarms within English and Welsh territorial waters and is currently reviewing the legislation for developments outside territorial waters but within the United Kingdom continental shelf area. Until this review has been completed, we are not in a position to say whether further legislation will be required.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will hold a public inquiry into the Cefn Croer wind farm proposals. [9604]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has yet to receive the views of the National Assembly for Wales. Until their views are known she will not take her decision, including whether or not to hold a public inquiry on the application.

Gas Prices

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what means she will measure the effectiveness of her strategy to address high gas prices; and over what timescale. [10430]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The Government's three point strategy to address high gas prices is:

1. to work to for greater market liberalisation in Europe
2. to work for improvements in the British gas market
3. to take action against any anti-competitive activity.

We shall monitor the market regularly to see how effective this strategy has been in enabling British consumers to access gas at competitive prices without damaging price spikes.

There has already been good progress with the strategy. The publication in March by the EU Commission of a revised draft Gas Directive was a positive step towards greater European liberalisation. On 10 September we held a joint workshop with the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association (UKOOA) to consider how greater information flows between the offshore and the onshore could improve the market and I intend to maintain the momentum on this issue.

Interconnector (UK) Ltd. now publishes details of flows with a one day lag instead of the previous six week delay. We have also been working with IUK and interconnector shippers on improvements to interconnector governance and marketing arrangements. I understand that the European Commission's competition inquiry into the operation of the interconnector, which was instituted at the request of the Government, is now in its final stages.

However, I should warn against expectations of immediate success as this strategy is liable to be a lengthy process.

Oil Companies

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will review the advice given by his Department to British companies involved in oil extraction in Southern Sudan; and if she will make a statement. [11154]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* We have no ongoing campaign to promote investment in the Sudanese oil industry. We provide full and frank advice to companies that approach us about oil extraction in southern Sudan. We keep this advice under constant review.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the British companies which are involved in oil and gas pipelines between the Caspian and Europe. [11480]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The information is as follows:

Operational Pipelines

BAKU (Azerbaijan)—SUPSA (Georgia/Black Sea): BP plc has a 34.14 per cent. holding in the consortium, and is the operator of the pipeline. No other British oil companies are involved.

Tengiz (Kazakhstan)—Novorossiysk (Russia): BP, Shell and BG Group all have small equity holdings of between 2 and 6.25 per cent.

Planned Pipelines

Baku (Azerbaijan)—Tbilisi (Georgia)—Ceyhan (Turkey): BP plc currently has a 25.72 per cent. holding in, and is the operator for, two consortia planning parallel oil and gas pipelines. The final ownership structures have not yet been decided. No other British oil companies are currently involved.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the British oil industry companies which operate in *(a)* Tajikistan, *(b)* Turkmenistan, *(c)* Uzbekistan, *(d)* Kyrgstan and *(e)* Kazakhstan. [11481]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The information is as follows:

Tajikistan and Kyrgistan—None.

Turkmenistan—Shell and Burren Energy have offices.

Uzbekistan—Shell have an office. Trinity Energy have a holding in a consortium operating an exploration asset.

Kazakhstan—BG Group, Shell, BP and Enterprise Oil all have holdings in consortia operating exploration and production assets.

Employment Directive

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government are committed to implementing Article 13 of the EC Employment Directive by 2 December 2003; and what plans the Government have to ensure that faith schools comply. [11065]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* We intend to implement the Directive's provisions on religion or belief and on sexual orientation by 2 December 2003; and those on disability and age by 2 December 2006. The implementing legislation will cover all employers, including faith schools.

We believe the current arrangements for the employment of teachers at state maintained religious schools, as set out in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (sections 58–60), are compatible with the requirements of the Directive, given the special provisions within the Directive for organisations whose ethos is based on religion or belief.

We will publish a consultation document about our plans for new legislation within the next three months. We intend to issue guidance to help employers understand the new provisions.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Chess

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to recognise chess as a sport. [12330]

Mr. Caborn: There are no current plans to recognise chess as a sport.

National Stadium

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the money from Sport England for the Wembley stadium project will be repaid. [13017]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 21W.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 816W, on the national stadium, if she will give details of the spending by Sport England on the development of the national athletics centre project, indicating how much of this expenditure is recoverable. [12628]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Sport England has spent £1.57 million on the development of the national athletics centre project. All of the funding was committed for feasibility and outline design work, which has been completed. The issue of recoverability does not, therefore, arise.

Palliative Care (Children)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money from the new opportunities fund was devoted to palliative care for children in each of the last three years. [12713]

Mr. Caborn: Money to support palliative care for children was allocated in the new opportunities fund (Specification of Initiatives) Order 2001. From early 2002, the fund will provide £48 million to palliative care projects for children as part of its £84 million palliative care programme.

In the period 1998–99, £1,835,136 of lottery money went to provide palliative care and support to children and young people with terminal illnesses, in five grants made by the community fund. In 1999–2000, the community fund made three grants totalling £902,145 and in the period 2000–01 four grants totalling £655,727.

SCOTLAND

Small Business Sector

5. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the Scottish Executive's Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning to discuss the prospects for the Scottish small business sector. [10313]

Mr. Foulkes: I have regular discussions with Scottish Executive Ministers on a number of issues relating to business and industry including those of relevance to small businesses.

Performance and Innovation Unit

6. **Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Scotland Office has made a submission to the PIU energy review. [10314]

Mr. Foulkes: The Scotland Office has made a submission to the performance and innovation unit's energy review. In addition I represent Scotland on the review's advisory group. The Scotland Office submission, along with all other submissions received by the PIU team, is available on the PIU website www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/innovation.

Personal Care (Elderly People)

7. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions regarding transferring attendance allowance resources to the Scottish Executive in order to ensure that free personal care for elderly people is implemented from April 2002. [10315]

Mrs. Liddell: I have frequent discussions with my right hon. Friend on a wide range of issues.

Boundary Commission

8. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met officials from the boundary commission for Scotland. [10316]

Mrs. Liddell: I have not met either the Commissioners or the Secretary of the Boundary Commission for Scotland. My officials are, however, in regular contact with its secretary since the Scotland Office is the Commission's sponsoring department.

Railtrack

9. **Sir Robert Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions as to the consequences for rail travel in Scotland of the decision to put Railtrack into administration. [10317]

Mr. Foulkes: My right. hon. Friend and I are in regular contact with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on a range of transport matters affecting Scotland.

Scottish Parliament

10. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans the Government have to adjust the number of Members of the Scottish Parliament. [10318]

11. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will consult *(a)* the Scottish Parliament and *(b)* others on the size of the Scottish Parliament. [10319]

20. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has for amendments to the proportional representation element of the system of election to the Scottish Parliament. [10329]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (Mr. Robertson), at column 91.

Tourism

12. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the First Minister about her visits abroad to promote tourism in Scotland. [10320]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular contact with the First Minister about a range of issues.

Both the First Minister and I are aware of the importance of the tourism industry to the Scottish economy, particularly at this time. I shall be continuing to use every opportunity to promote to overseas audiences the attractions of today's Scotland in all its vibrant diversity and to support the efforts of the tourism agencies in that regard.

Employment Trends

13. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on employment trends in Scotland since September. [10321]

Mr. Foulkes: Latest statistics show that there are 2.384 million people in work in Scotland, a fall of 0.6 per cent. over the previous month. The number of people out of work and claiming benefit rose by 800 in September, but remains at its lowest level since October 1975.

Barnett Formula

14. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last discussed the future of the Barnett formula with Treasury Ministers. [10323]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and other Treasury Ministers on a wide range of issues. The Government have no plans to review the Barnett formula.

23. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has held with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on the operation of the Barnett formula. [10332]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussion with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on a wide range of issues. The Government have no plans to review the Barnett formula.

Army Installations

15. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the Secretary of State for Defence to discuss the future of Army installations in Scotland. [10324]

Mr. Foulkes: I have regular contact with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on a range of issues. I and my right hon. Friend are conscious of the important contribution that Army installations in Scotland make to the defence of the United Kingdom and to the Scottish economy.

Ferry Services

16. **Mr. Alan Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to issue tender documents for the ferry service between Campbeltown and Ballycastle. [10325]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department is in the process of finalising evaluation of the initial expressions of interest received to operate the ferry service. It is also important that other issues including the value for public money in relation to potential benefits are fully investigated before any decision is taken.

A decision whether and, if so, how to proceed with tendering for this ferry service will be taken shortly in conjunction with the Scottish and Northern Irish Executives.

Nuclear Reactors

17. **Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action she has taken to ascertain public opinion on the possible siting of new nuclear reactors in Scotland. [10326]

Mr. Foulkes: The performance and innovation unit review will consider how energy policy can contribute to meeting longer-term objectives for the environment and for security of supply. This will include consideration of the future role of nuclear power generation.

Consent is required for new power station developments under the Electricity Act. In Scotland, the power to grant consents is a devolved matter and the procedures are the responsibility of Scottish Ministers.

Rural Employment

18. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she next expects to meet representatives of the Scottish Executive to discuss rural employment. [10327]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with the Scottish Executive to discuss a wide range of issues including employment. Employment in Scotland remains high with 2,384 million people in work. There are, however, still some areas of Scotland which suffer from persistently high levels of unemployment. We are addressing this inequality through measures like the new deal which has helped over 60,000 people from all areas of Scotland back to work; and the action teams for jobs initiative which is tackling high levels of localised unemployment in the Highlands and Islands, East Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire, Dundee, North Lanarkshire and Glasgow.

Terrorism

19. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action she has taken since 11 September relating to security against terrorist attacks. [10328]

Mrs. Liddell: Like all Departments, we are currently reviewing our resilience to potential terrorist attacks.

Business Support

21. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent action she has taken to support business operations in Scotland. [10330]

Mr. Foulkes: Local action to support economic development and business operations is devolved. This Government have put in place macroeconomic policies that are delivering low inflation and sound public finances. As a consequence businesses in Scotland and the rest of the UK are better placed than ever before to cope with changes in the economic environment.

Airport Security

22. **John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action the Government are taking to improve security at Scottish airports. [10331]

Mr. Foulkes: All UK airports, including those in Scotland, are in receipt of statutory directions from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. These set out the security responsibilities of airport managers.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his office took in recognition of Energy Efficiency Week. [11513]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 592W.

The Home Office has achieved a reduction of 15 per cent. on the non-Prison estate between 1990–1991 to 1999–2000 in energy consumption (kwh/m^2), taking into account weather changes and estate changes. The Home Office (non-Prison estate) has benchmarked all key office buildings, with a view to reducing their individual consumption. The Prison Service has invested £300,000 in energy efficiency schemes. It circulates a regular 'Energy News' bulletin to all prison establishments to encourage energy saving schemes, and the Construction Unit frequently gives presentations to outside organisations to publicise the Prison Service's initiatives in the field of energy reduction.

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason his review of section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 is not yet complete; and when he will announce the conclusions. [11804]

Angela Eagle: Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 prevents the disclosure by Home Office Ministers and officials of information about the use of animals in scientific procedures that has been provided in confidence. Following the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, all statutory bars to the disclosure of information are being reviewed, including section 24 of the 1986 Act.

The Government have a clear commitment to freedom of information and are equally committed to the maintenance of necessary protections for individual scientists and their research institutions. I am considering very carefully how these commitments can best be met. A decision on whether to appeal or amend section 24 will not be made until later this year.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the review of the working of ethical review processes in establishments designated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement. [13248]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate has completed a thorough review, after extensive consultation with stakeholders, including certificate holders and licensees under the 1986 Act, animal welfare organisations and others.

The findings, which the Government accept, are that the ethical review process has generally worked well and as intended since its introduction in April 1999, in the interests of the welfare of animals used in licensed scientific procedures. There are variations between establishments, more related to the efficiency than the effectiveness of the process, but overall the picture to emerge is positive and encouraging, given that the ethical review process is relatively new and still evolving.

There is increased awareness both of compliance issues and, more importantly, of the need for full application of the 3Rs at all stages of a project—replacement of animal use wherever possible, reduction of the number of animals used when there is no alternative, and refinement of procedures to minimise animal suffering.

The main Inspectorate recommendations are that the ethical review process in establishments should continue to develop on the basis on which it was introduced, with account being taken of observations offered in the review report on best practice. We accept these recommendations.

We shall ensure the widest possible circulation of the review report, within both the scientific and animal welfare communities, with the aim of encouraging all research establishments to examine and improve their own ethical review processes. To help achieve those aims we will, making use of additional resources recently provided to the Inspectorate, initiate a number of awareness-raising activities and events. These will ensure that those involved with local ethical review processes, and those with responsibility for the welfare of animals produced for and used in laboratories, benefit fully from the advice on best practice that the report contains. We will as part of this activity be urging greater use of lay members in ethical review processes.

A copy of the review report will be placed in the Library.

Cannabis

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests were made for possession of cannabis; and how many prosecutions followed, in each police force in England, in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [11958]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Arrest data are not collected centrally by individual offence.

Information from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database showing the number of persons proceeded against for the possession of cannabis by police force area in England during the period 1996–2000 is given in the table.

Number of persons proceeded against at magistrates courts for the possession of cannabis by police force area in England 1996–2000

Police force area	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Avon and Somerset	180	149	219	283	340
Bedfordshire	155	274	300	255	223
Cambridgeshire	80	163	172	156	88
Cheshire	384	395	534	578	401
Cleveland	60	85	134	222	221
Cumbria	195	234	267	217	166
Derbyshire	146	173	219	268	222
Devon and Cornwall	330	540	633	555	505
Dorset	123	113	238	308	306
Durham	158	113	114	102	223
Essex	405	501	571	575	617
Gloucestershire	145	160	209	222	199
Greater Manchester	589	614	783	856	918
Hampshire	407	558	813	960	785
Hertfordshire	229	273	244	262	257
Humberside	150	159	230	241	248
Kent	362	565	929	923	774
Lancashire	456	709	929	869	760
Leicestershire	187	262	327	265	239
Lincolnshire	216	325	340	196	183
London, City of	88	75	103	76	26
Merseyside	866	1,064	1,399	1,322	1,022
Metropolitan Police	3,233	4,112	5,452	5,355	4,933
Norfolk	274	329	168	265	245
Northamptonshire	31	3	5	25	113
Northumbria	210	338	717	947	1,007
North Yorkshire	195	256	383	363	165
Nottinghamshire	238	275	258	292	277
South Yorkshire	326	453	521	622	635
Staffordshire[1]	214	281	314	239	[2]—
Suffolk	177	238	248	244	173
Surrey	152	230	263	329	390
Sussex	338	371	363	341	309
Thames Valley	576	600	765	712	615
Warwickshire	63	77	84	76	77
West Mercia	212	286	329	295	222
West Midlands	556	871	1,325	1,213	1,312
West Yorkshire	908	1,149	1,335	1,142	947
Wiltshire	91	142	178	211	182
England	13,705	17,515	22,415	22,382	20,143

[1] Estimates made for Staffordshire Police Force, who were only able to submit data for a sample of weeks for year 2000, have been included in the total

[2] Not available

Note:

All data are given on a principal offence basis

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been relocated from the Isle of Thanet under the Government's dispersal programme. [11665]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not available.

The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) currently does not hold statistics on the location of asylum seekers before they are dispersed by NASS. Statistics are only available on the areas that asylum seekers are dispersed to.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the case for increasing the length of time given to asylum seekers to complete statement of evidence forms; [11761]

(2) what recent representations he has received on the length of time given to asylum seekers to complete statement of evidence forms; [11760]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of statement of evidence forms on the numbers of asylum applications rejected on the grounds of non-compliance. [11757]

Angela Eagle: We have received a number of representations from hon. Members and from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) about the length of time given to asylum seekers to complete their statement of evidence forms. There is concern that 10 working days is insufficient time for an asylum seeker to find help completing the detailed Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) in English, and to gather and translate evidence in support of the application.

Asylum seekers are expected to comply with the asylum process and I consider the length of time given to asylum seekers to complete the SEFs to be reasonable. The original 14 day time limit for the return of the SEF was changed to 10 working days, so applicants are not disadvantaged by public holidays.

We do not propose therefore to increase the current 10 day time limit. Most asylum applicants do return their SEF on time. Discretion is exercised where applicants need extra time to obtain translations or submit extra material, such as a medical report, in support of their claim.

A higher proportion of applications was refused on grounds of non-compliance in 1999 and 2000 than had previously been the case. The increase was due partly to the stricter enforcement of the 10 day deadline for return of the SEF and partly to administrative problems which led to a backlog of correspondence within the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and some flawed refusals as a consequence. We have made a number of changes over the past 12 months to improve our administrative processes and reduce flawed refusals. These include the introduction of a dedicated PO Box for the return of completed SEFs, and adjustments to internal procedures to ensure that the receipt of SEFs is registered on a database.

We have also taken steps to improve asylum applicants' understanding of the asylum process and of the importance of meeting the time limit. We have done this by simplifying the explanatory leaflet which is sent out with the SEF, and by making it available in the 33 languages spoken by most asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. The SEF form has also been simplified. NGOs were consulted about these improvements.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* asylum applications and *(b)* asylum applications rejected on the grounds of non-compliance there have been in each month of the last three years, indicating the (i) monthly and (ii) yearly change expressed as a percentage; [11759]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of *(a)* the number of asylum applications rejected on the grounds of non-compliance, *(b)* the number of cases waiting to be processed by the Appeals Tribunal and *(c)* the relationship between the two. [11756]

Angela Eagle: The requested information on refusals to grant asylum on grounds of non-compliance over the last three years is provided in the table.

Non-compliance refusals rose by over 21 times in 2000, due to seven times as many refusals and a three times higher proportion of refusals on non-compliance grounds. Provisional figures show the proportion of refusals made on non-compliance grounds has fallen from 32 per cent. in 2000 to 25 per cent. in the first seven months of 2001.

Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) statistics show the number of asylum 'cases in progress' increased by 168 per cent. over the past 15 months. From 7,735 cases awaiting a final promulgation at the end of June 2000, outstanding cases have risen to 20,751 at the end of September 2001. This is due to the increase in asylum appeals received from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate over the same period, during which the IAA also expanded.

Analysis of cases for which data are available shows that, in percentage terms, refusals on non-compliance grounds result in fewer appeals to the IAA than other refusals.

Applications for asylum to the UK and refusals on grounds of non-compliance, for cases decided under normal criteria[1], not including dependents, 1998–2001[2]

Month/year	Asylum applications	Percentage change on previous month/year	Total refusals	Non-compliance refusals[3]	Percentage change on previous month/year	Non-compliance percentage of total refusals
1998	46,015	42	22,315	2,995	–17	13
1999	71,160	55	11,025	1,085	–64	10
2000[4]	80,315	13	75,680	24,295	2,139	32
2001[4,5]	39,280	*—	61,965	15,780	*—	25

Applications for asylum to the UK and refusals on grounds of non-compliance, for cases decided under normal criteria[1], not including dependents, 1998–2001[2]

Month/year	Asylum applications	Percentage change on previous month/year	Total refusals	Non-compliance refusals[3]	Percentage change on previous month/year	Non-compliance percentage of total refusals
1998						
January	2,860	−8	2,130	360	47	17
February	2,650	−7	2,240	250	−31	11
March	3,200	21	2,270	280	12	12
April	3,135	−2	1,850	250	−11	14
May	3,110	−1	1,690	260	4	15
June	3,575	15	1,790	255	−2	14
July	4,215	18	1,840	340	33	18
August	4,420	5	1,595	225	−34	14
September	4,455	1	1,885	230	2	12
October	5,010	12	2,290	245	7	11
November	4,620	−8	2,100	275	12	13
December	4,770	3	645	25	−91	4
1999						
January	4,700	−1	540	5	−80	1
February	4,185	−11	810	40	700	5
March	5,060	21	945	50	25	5
April	4,905	−3	1,060	25	−50	2
May	5,370	9	830	45	80	5
June	6,130	14	780	20	−56	3
July	6,440	5	840	30	50	4
August	7,120	11	835	200	567	24
September	7,355	3	830	45	−78	5
October	6,295	−14	1,370	150	233	11
November	6,420	2	1,325	245	63	18
December	7,180	12	855	220	−10	26
2000						
January	6,110	−15	2,390	245	11	10
February	6,110	0	5,025	920	276	18
March	6,680	9	7,570	2,115	130	28
April	6,855	3	4,205	[6]	[6]	[6]
May	6,725	−2	5,455	1,520	[6]	28
June	6,545	−3	6,565	2,035	34	31
July	6,870	5	6,280	1,895	−7	30
August	6,770	−1	7,155	2,895	53	40
September	6,790	0	6,160	2,610	−10	42
October	7,230	6	7,105	2,965	14	42
November	7,500	4	10,060	4,325	46	43
December	6,125	−18	7,710	2,770	−36	36
2001						
January	6,380	4	10,935	3,495	26	32
February	5,520	−13	11,235	3,460	−1	31
March	5,810	5	14,180	3,110	−10	22
April	5,000	−14	7,030	1,415	−55	20
May	5,290	6	7,180	1,625	15	23
June	5,300	0	5,970	1,400	−14	23
July	5,975	13	5,435	1,285	−8	24

[1] Exclude cases decided under the backlog clearance exercise, aimed at reducing the pre-1996 asylum application backlog.
[2] Figures (other than percentages) rounded to the nearest five.
[3] Failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, including failure to respond to invitation to interview to establish identity.
[4] 2000 and 2001 data are provisional
[5] 2001-January to July
[6] Not available

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government began requiring asylum seekers to be fingerprinted. [11742]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The power to fingerprint asylum seekers and their dependants was introduced in the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. However, the introduction of a computerised fingerprint storage system in December 2000 has allowed for the quick and effective electronic checking of prints of all asylum seekers against the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's records. Remote checking of fingerprints has been made possible which was not the case under the paper system. The introduction of smart cards will build on this technology to tackle fraud.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken was from first application to initial decision in asylum cases in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [9444]

Angela Eagle: For decisions made in the 12 months to July 2001, the average time between application and initial decision was 15 months. This average includes older cases decided as part of the reduction of the number of cases outstanding (see table).

Average time[1] between application and decision, for cases decided in the 12 months to July 2001:

	Average time in months[2]	*Number of cases*[2,3]
All applications	15	127,060
of which:		
Application pre 1996[4]	80	3,315
Application 1996	55	2,740
Application 1997	43	4,410
Application 1998	30	13,450
Application 1999	18	28,740
Application 2000	6	50,310
Application 2001	2	24,095

[1] Calculated using all available data from the date the application is lodged to the date of the initial decision
[2] These data are still subject to revision following quality checking
[3] Figures are provisional and rounded to the nearest five. The number of cases quoted differs from published figures due to uncertainty concerning date of application in a small minority of cases
[4] Cases decided as part of the backlog clearance exercise, as part of measures outlined in the July 1998 White paper entitled "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum"

The corresponding figure for cases decided in April 1997 was 20 months.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases were waiting to be processed by the Appeals Tribunal in each month of the last three years, indicating the *(a)* monthly and *(b)* yearly change expressed as a percentage. [11758]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The numbers of cases where work was in progress within the Immigration Appellate Authority, and the change expressed as a percentage, for each month of the last three years are as follows:

	Number of cases	*Percentage change*
2001		
January	14,729	–4
February	15,326	4
March	16,451	7
April	17,741	8
May	18,932	7
June	19,417	3
July	18,815	–3
August	19,960	6
September	20,751	4
2000		
January	6,083	–7
February	5,614	–8
March	5,495	–2
April	5,256	–4
May	5,898	12
June	7,735	31
July	10,500	36
August	12,494	19
September	13,859	11
October	14,962	8
November	15,437	3
December	15,347	–1
1999		
January	13,891	–13
February	12,289	–12
March	9,744	–21
April	8,423	–14
May	7,590	–10
June	7,294	–4
July	7,170	–2
August	6,187	–14
September	5,597	–10
October	4,911	–12
November	3,362	–32
December	6,572	95
1998		
January	24,098	–2
February	23,831	–1
March	23,760	n/a
April	23,814	n/a
May	23,639	–1
June	23,757	n/a
July	22,531	–5
August	22,165	–2
September	20,994	–5
October	19,098	–9
November	17,371	–9
December	16,028	–8

The yearly changes in case load expressed as a percentage were:

	Percentage
2000	134 increase
1999	59 decrease
1998	35 decrease

Afghanistan

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to prevent the re-entry into the United Kingdom of those leaving the country to fight against British and American forces in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [12461]

Angela Eagle: Under existing immigration and nationality law we may refuse entry to the United Kingdom where a person subject to immigration control does not meet the requirements set out in the Immigration Rules governing leave to enter but not the re-entry of a British citizen, who by definition has right of abode in the United Kingdom. Criminal sanctions may be applied to a British citizen returning to the United Kingdom who is suspected of having committed a criminal offence. It would be for the Crown Prosecution Service to decide whether prosecution was justified in an individual case after a full police investigation.

Passport Agency

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the new information technology systems at the Passport Agency are fully rolled out; what has been the estimated total cost of the new systems; what was the original planned cost; and if he will make a statement. [13028]

Angela Eagle: Yes; with the successful implementation in the Glasgow Passport Office on 5 November, the United Kingdom Passport Service's new passport issuing arrangements have been fully rolled out. As indicated in the service's 2000–01 annual accounts the estimated cost of the contracts awarded to Siemens Business Services, and Security Printing and Systems Ltd. for the new system remains at £230 million. With completion of the roll out the service will now be conducting a post implementation review which, among other things, will fully evaluate actual and planned costs. The review should be completed in early 2002.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Passport Agency has conducted a feasibility study into a national identity card system; what it cost; and if he will make a statement. [12874]

Angela Eagle: The United Kingdom Passport Service is carrying out studies to explore a range of policy, cost and implementation options for a Passport Card Scheme. Results will be employed to support policy decisions in due course.

Passport Application Fees

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change *(a)* the fees charged for processing passport applications and *(b)* the charging structure for passport applications; and if he will make a statement. [13027]

Angela Eagle: There is a requirement to review passport fees annually as the costs of the United Kingdom Passport Service must be recovered through fees. The review has now been completed and I will be making an announcement shortly.

Drugs Education Programmes

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effects of *(a)* Operation Charlie and *(b)* other anti-legal and illegal drugs education programmes in reducing drugs use. [12059]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Project Charlie (Chemical Abuse Resolution Lies in Education), as it became known, was implemented in primary schools in Hackney between 1991 and 1993. This drugs education programme was delivered to 44 children and its effects compared with standard education for 233 children. The Project Charlie pupils received a lesson of at least 30 minutes each week for 39 weeks.

The Project was assessed in terms of self-esteem, decision making, peer pressure resistance, drug knowledge and self-reported drug-taking and was found to have a positive impact on all areas, except self esteem. Four years after the programme both tobacco and illegal drug use were significantly less common among the Project Charlie pupils.

Under the Government's 10-year strategy 'Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain' we support a holistic approach to the delivery of drug education in schools through Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and the National Healthy Schools Standard. However, decisions on the detailed organisation and content of health and drug education are best taken at a local level, in order to take account of the specific needs and circumstances of the pupils in that area.

In terms of measuring the effectiveness of different forms of drug education the Department for Education and Skills, in partnership with the Department of Health and the Home Office, will be starting a long term study which will inform future policy. The study will run for three to five years.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to answer the letter to him dated 14 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. M McDonagh. [12229]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 30 October.

Ministerial Meetings (EU)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the dates of the European Union meetings attended by Ministers in his Department from 1 January onwards, indicating what issues were discussed at each meeting. [11753]

Mr. Blunkett: There have been two formal Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Councils and one informal JHA Council under the Swedish Presidency, and four formal JHA Councils and one joint JHA/Ecofin Council under the Belgian Presidency since 1 January.

With regard to the Councils under the Swedish Presidency, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 46W.

Under the Belgian Presidency, Ministers from my Department have attended the following Justice and Home Affairs Council meetings: a special JHA Council on 13 July which my hon. Friend the Member for Conventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) attended; a special Council on 20 September in response to the terrorist attacks on the United States, which I attended; a Council meeting on 27–28 September which I, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) attended; and a joint JHA/Ecofin Council followed by a JHA Council on 16 October which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs attended. Copies of the agendas of these Council meetings will be placed in the Library. The Government reported the outcome of these meetings to the European Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the usual arrangements.

In addition, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey attended the Belgian Presidency's Ministerial Conference on Migration, held in the European Parliament on 16–17 October.

National Experience Corps

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for members of the National Experience Corps to contribute to the delivery of sport in schools. [12227]

Angela Eagle: The Experience Corps initiative aims to encourage more people aged 50 and over to become or to remain active in their local communities. It is hoped that those who volunteer through the Experience Corps will be able to participate in a wide range of volunteering opportunities.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) with the assistance of funding from the Active Community Unit is undertaking a programme for the training of volunteers in sport. The aim is to train 50,000 volunteers, of which around 8,000 will be older people, during the two year programme, which starts in April 2002. The aim is to target schoolchildren from 14 years of age with older volunteers providing mentoring and support to them. The DCMS is discussing with the Experience Corps how its work might link in with its own programme.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to review information technology systems, with specific reference to the Asylum and Immigration Directorate. [8559]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office Head Office has a Planned Office Information System Environment (POISE). This is being made available to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) and the work will be completed by the end of the 2001–02 financial year.

The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) system has been enhanced and the redevelopment of the Warnings Index continues. An enhanced standard build for all desktop PCs, the availability of the Asylum Casework Information Database (ACID) and similar databases for recording both general and nationality casework are enhancements to the Team-Based Caseworking (TBC) Information Technology system used by caseworkers. Within the Immigration Service (IS), the initial phase of a management system for Detention Centres has been completed.

We will further review our IT systems to accommodate the changes to Immigration policy as in the Home Secretary's statement of 29 October.

Yarls Wood Immigration Detention Centre

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 615W, on Yarls Wood immigration detention centre (1) how many detainees are expected at the centre in *(a)* the first month, *(b)* the second month and *(c)* subsequently for the next four months; and if he will make a statement; [12625]

(2) how many contractors' personnel there are, broken down by occupation; [12627]

(3) how many of his Department's personnel are employed at the centre, broken down by occupation; and what were their respective dates of first employment at the centre. [12626]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The following identifies the numbers of contractors personnel broken down by occupation:

	Number
Construction Related Trades:	
Project Managers	24
Modular Specialists	3
Mechanical, electrical and public health engineers	73
General Construction Trades (Joiners, painters and decorators, flooring specialists, furniture installers)	141
External Works—landscaping, road repairs	22
General labourers	19
Caterers	3
Operational Activities	
Senior/Middle Managers	17
Supervisors	20
Detention Custody Officers	263
Administrative Staff	6
Facilities Staff	16
Chaplaincy	2
Education/Activities Department	17
Project Managers	3
Medical Services	24
Catering and cleaning services	77

The centre has an agreed incremental build up rate for detainees in the first four months, leading to operational capacity, as follows:

Month 1: 185

Month 2: 206

Month 3: 239

Month 4: 270.

Following this the centre will be capable of holding up to 900 detainees at any one time.

The following Home Office Staff are employed at the centre:

Immigration Service Operational Staff: 16

Administrative Support Grades: 7.

The dates of first employment for departmental personnel cannot be given as information regarding individual employees is confidential.

Bribery

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions for the *(a)* offer and *(b)* taking of bribes have been brought under (i) the Prevention of Corruption Acts and (ii) common law in each year since 1997. [12650]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Statistics held centrally do not distinguish between the offer of or taking of bribes and neither do they enable offences under common law to be reliably identified.

The following table shows the number of persons proceeded against under the Prevention of Corruption Acts 1889 to 1916 in England and Wales.

	Number
1997	19
1998	31
1999	16
2000	17

Charities (Voluntary Registration)

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the review of the criteria for the voluntary registration of charities. [13196]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 93W, that he had asked the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) of the Cabinet Office to undertake a broad-ranging review of the legal and regulatory framework for charities and the wider voluntary and community sector. Subsequently, the PIU confirmed that the position of charities excepted from registration with the Charity Commission, was one of the areas that was to be looked at as part of its review. The work by the Home Office and the Charity Commission on the way forward, has therefore been discontinued pending the outcome of the PIU review. The PIU is expected to complete its review early in 2002.

Terrorist Attacks

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional measures have been taken to guard Britain's *(a)* oil rigs and *(b)* nuclear power stations from terrorist attack, following the events in the USA on 11 September. [11544]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

Stringent security measures apply at oil industry installations and civil nuclear sites and these are kept under regular review. We are reviewing these precautions in the light of the recent terrorist attacks in the United States.

It is not our policy to disclose details of security measures taken in connection with these facilities.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to introduce *(a)* a shorter attendance allowance claim form and *(b)* an attendance allowance freephone claim line; and what plans he has to increase take-up of attendance allowance. [12437]

Maria Eagle: Last April we reduced the attendance allowance claim pack by nine pages with no loss of essential information. We are continuing to look at what further changes can be made to make the form shorter and easier to complete while ensuring we obtain all the necessary information about a person's care needs.

We have no plans to introduce a separate freephone line for attendance allowance claims, as experience shows that it is not normally possible to make a full and sufficient telephone claim for benefits requiring detailed evidence of the needs arising from disability.

We have no plans for a specific take-up campaign of either benefit.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase take-up of minimum income guarantee among attendance allowance and disability living allowance *(a)* claimants and *(b)* entitled non-recipients. [12436]

Mr. McCartney: We are investigating how best to identify pensioners aged 60 or over who are awarded attendance allowance or disability living allowance and inviting them to claim the minimum income guarantee.

We are working in partnership with organisations for older people to improve access to benefits and take up of the minimum income guarantee (MIG). This includes projects on a national good practice guide and a survey of local take-up initiatives.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of minimum income guarantee (i) claimants, (ii) eligible non-recipients and (iii) claimants and eligible non-recipients who are entitled to the minimum income guarantee as a consequence of their eligibility for the severe disability premium; [12613]

(2) what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of minimum income guarantee (i) claimants, (ii) eligible non-recipients and (iii) claimants and eligible non-recipients who are entitled to the severe disability premium. [12607]

Mr. McCartney: As at May 2001, there were 1.7 million pensioners receiving the minimum income guarantee (MIG). This is nearly 16 per cent. of the pensioner population. Of these MIG recipients, 405,000 (24 per cent. of the total) receive the severe disability premium.

The latest available figures on the number of people entitled to the MIG who are not claiming it are set out in the publication "Take-Up of Income Related Benefits—Statistics for 1999/2000", copies of which are available in the Library.

Neither figures for the number of eligible non recipients who are entitled to the severe disability premium, nor figures for the number of eligible non recipients who are entitled to the MIG as a consequence of their eligibility for the severe disability premium, are available.

Foreign Nationals (Benefits)

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what state benefits foreign nationals are entitled to when given exceptional leave to remain in the UK. [9965]

Malcolm Wicks: Foreign nationals who are granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom (UK) are generally eligible to claim the same range of social security benefits, subject to the same rules of entitlement, as any UK citizen.

The only exceptions to this are people who are admitted to the UK on the condition that they do not have recourse to public funds, and those who are admitted on the condition that a relative who is an existing UK resident gives a written undertaking to support them.

Invalidity Care Allowance

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimates he has made of the number of carers in work during term time who do not qualify for invalidity care allowance for looking after an invalid student during college vacations because of the operation of the rules governing the calculation of earnings. [9991]

Maria Eagle: This information is not available.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many suspected cases of *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax benefit fraud there were in the financial year 2000–01; how many of these led to a prosecution; and how many of these prosecutions were successful. [10412]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The information is in the table:

Local authority fraud investigations 2000–01

	Number
Cases referred to the fraud/investigation section:	
For further action	460,000
For further action that were investigated by the fraud section	370,000
Cases referred for prosecution	2,300
Successful prosecutions	1,100

Notes:

1. The data refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple
2. The figures have been rounded to two significant figures
3. Data are not available for all 409 local authorities. These totals include estimates for local authorities that have not responded which are based on historical and regional data. This type of estimate is standard practice in reporting totals where there have been non-respondents

Source:

Housing Benefit Management Information System Quarterly Administration Returns April 1999 to March 2000

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have been successfully prosecuted for benefit fraud in the last year for which figures are available, broken down into those prosecuted *(a)* for the first time, *(b)* for the second time and *(c)* for the third or subsequent time. [10413]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* In 2000–01, 24,112 people were prosecuted or sanctioned by Benefits Agency fraud investigators and local authorities reported that they prosecuted or sanctioned 1,650 people[1]. These are more than double the numbers in 1997–98.

9,030 successful prosecutions were undertaken by the Benefits Agency and 1,100 successful prosecutions were reported by local authorities[1]. Our research suggests that approximately 5 per cent. of prosecutions involve a person with a previous conviction for benefit fraud. We are putting in place mechanisms to identify second and further convictions.

[1] *Notes:*

1. Figures for local authorities are taken from management information returns.
2. It is possible that there could be some double counting with Benefits Agency data if there were cases which involved a joint prosecution.
3. Data are not available for all 409 local authorities. The total for Great Britain includes estimates for local authorities that have not responded. These estimates are based on historical and regional data. This type of estimate is standard practice in reporting totals where there have been non-respondents.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been spent in the development and maintenance of the "Targeting Fraud" website to date. [11256]

Malcolm Wicks: The total cost so far has been £35,631.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to investigate the allegations of benefit fraud committed by a person whose name has been communicated to him; and if he will make a statement. [9640]

Malcolm Wicks: It is not appropriate to disclose details of investigations into individual cases of alleged benefit fraud.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average processing time is for repeat benefit claims for *(a)* jobseeker's allowance and *(b)* income support. [11258]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on repeat benefit claims is not collected separately. The average time taken to clear a new or repeat benefit claim to jobseeker's allowance is 9.3 days; and for income support it is 7.6 days.

Source:

Validated data from the Income Support Computer System, April to July 2001

Benefits (Northampton)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which of the specific directions issued to Northampton borough council on 21 August 2000 concerning the delivery and accuracy of housing benefit and council tax benefit payments was implemented by the deadline of 22 August; which directions were not met by this deadline; and what further action is to be taken against the council. [7903]

Malcolm Wicks: Northampton borough council attained, by the specified date, the standard set out in the directions relating to the examination of cases referred for fraud investigation. The council failed to attain the standards relating to the speed of processing claims and reported changes of circumstances, and to the correct classification of overpayments, by 22 August 2001.

The Department subsequently provided assistance from the housing benefit help team to work in partnership with the council to develop service improvement initiatives. Following assistance from the help team, the council has recently provided the Department with a report on the current situation, together with an action plan for improving its benefit administration. We are now considering what further action is necessary following study of the report and plan, and completion of the help team's work with the council.

Disability Benefits

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average waiting time for clearing new claims was over the last 12 months in each disability benefit centre. [11904]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is collated on a year-to-date basis. The figures for disability living allowance (DLA) and attendance allowance (AA) new claims for each disability benefits centre (DBC) are in the table:

Disability Benefit Centre (DBC)	*DLA and AA new claim actual average clearance times in days January to September 2001*
Edinburgh	34
Newcastle	33
Leeds	27
Manchester	28
Bootle	36
Midlands	38
Bristol	33
Wales	30
Wembley	36
Sutton	34
Glasgow	34

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on *(a)* the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended and *(b)* the level of compliance with its provisions. [11319]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Most provisions of the DDA have been implemented. The final provisions of part III will be implemented in October 2004. The provisions on education come into force in September 2002, with some reasonable adjustment duties on responsible bodies in the post-16 sector coming into force in 2003 and 2005.

Only courts and tribunals can decide whether a particular action complied with the DDA or not and then only if a complaint is made. Emerging findings from research indicate that awareness levels are increasing and fewer than one per cent. of people covered by the parts II and III have complained to tribunals and courts. Compliance with the accessibility regulations for transport vehicles has generally been good.

Independent Living Fund

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the findings of his review of the independent living fund. [9870]

Maria Eagle: We intend to announce the results of the quinquennial review of the independent living fund in due course.

Incapacity Benefit

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, (1) pursuant to his answer of 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 684W, on incapacity benefit, how many incapacity reviews were undertaken in each of the last five years; and if he will estimate the annual additional number of reviews that will be undertaken once his plans for reviews every three years are fully implemented; [7996]

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that the average length of time to complete a review of incapacity benefit will be no higher over the three years beginning in 2002–03 than in the previous three years. [7997]

Malcolm Wicks: We are introducing jobcentre plus interviews in jobcentre plus pathfinder offices to enable incapacity benefit recipients to discuss with their personal adviser the help, benefits and opportunities available to them.

Jobcentre plus interviews will be conducted by a trained personal adviser who will discuss with people their skills, qualifications and ability to work, barriers which may preclude them from working, and their plans, aspirations and interests in training and taking up work in the future. This is entirely separate from the reviews undertaken as part of the incapacity benefit medical testing regime. The Department always aims to carry out such reviews as quickly as possible.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the total advertising costs for promoting the stakeholder pension scheme. [7580]

Mr. McCartney: We are not specifically advertising stakeholder pensions. Stakeholder information is included as part of the wider pensions education campaign. This campaign seeks to promote information about the full range of pension options available, including stakeholder pensions, and cost £6.5 million in 2000–01. This included development of the new campaign, press, cinema and TV advertising, research and evaluation, the costs of running the pensions information line, website development, printing leaflets and other campaign materials.

The Department has also written to employers with five or more employees with information explaining what stakeholder pensions are; whether those employers are affected by the new rules on providing access to a stakeholder pension scheme for their employees; and if so, what they need to do.

Fibromyalgia Syndrome

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his Department has to improve the knowledge of doctors representing the Benefits Agency regarding the condition known as Fibromyalgia Syndrome; and if he will ensure that information relating to the illness is sent to all appropriate agencies. [9741]

Maria Eagle: All medical service doctors who carry out assessments on behalf of the Benefits Agency have received comprehensive training on fibromyalgia within the past year. Fibromyalgia is covered in the disability handbook for disability living allowance and attendance allowance, which is available to decision-makers. Information on the condition will also be included in new training material for decision-makers which is currently being developed.

Benefit Recovery (Accident Victims)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much benefit was recovered from accident victims by way of recoupment from damages awards in each of the last four years. [9609]

Maria Eagle: The current compensation recovery scheme is working in accordance with the principles and objectives set when the reformed scheme was introduced in October 1997.

The amount recovered is in respect of benefits already paid to the claimant in consequence of their accident, injury or illness and is recovered direct from the compensator, and never from the claimant.

The amount recovered purely in respect of accident is given in the tables.

£

Financial Year	*Amount*
1997–98	157,436,635
1998–99	188,724,849
1999–2000	186,678,400
2000–01	171,539,293

Income Support

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many lone parents have claimed income support in each quarter since August 1996, broken down by lone parents with *(a)* at least one child under five and *(b)* all children over five years. [9645]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Lone parent income support claimants by age of children

Thousand

	At least one child aged under 5	*All children aged 5 or over*
1996		
August	531	530
November	517	506
1997		
February	514	506
May	508	505
August	505	507
November	492	490
1998		
February	488	484
May	480	482
August	475	480
November	466	472

Lone parent income support claimants by age of children

Thousand

	At least one child aged under 5	*All children aged 5 or over*
1999		
February	465	475
May	463	473
August	464	476
November	460	470
2000		
February	454	465
May	450	460
August	446	463
November	440	454
2001		
February	440	456
May	437	452

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Totals may not sum due to rounding
2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error
3. Lone parents are defined as single people who have dependants but do not receive a pensioner or a disability premium

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries, August 1996 to May 2001

State Pension

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners had a reduction in their state retirement benefit as a result of a stay in hospital; by what amount the state retirement benefit is reduced in these circumstances; and how much was saved by his Department as a result of reduced benefit payments in the last full year for which figures are available. [8678]

Mr. McCartney: At 31 March 2001, there were about 33,000 retirement pensioners with reductions in their retirement pension due to a stay in hospital[1].

The hospital downrating rules led to an estimated £57 million reduction on expenditure on the basic state pension in 2000–01.

From 9 April 2001, a £14.50 reduction for a person with a dependant applies after a six-week stay in hospital. This reduction was £13.50 at 31 March 2001.

From 9 April 2001, a £28.30 reduction for a person with no dependant applies after a six-weeks stay in hospital. This reduction was £27.00 at 31 March 2001.

After 52 weeks retirement pension recipients get the £14.50 "pocket money" rate.

[1] *Source:*

5 per cent. from the Pension Strategy Computer System at March 2001. Rounding to nearest hundred

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with Age Concern about the equalisation of state pensions; and if he will make a statement. [9381]

Mr. McCartney: We have discussions with a variety of pension organisations from time to time. These discussions generally cover wide-ranging issues which are of concern to them.

Residential Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate for each local authority how many residents in *(a)* nursing homes and under 65-years-old, *(b)* nursing homes and over 65-years-old, *(c)* residential care and under 65-years-old and *(d)* residential care and over 65-years-old, will be covered by preserved rights in April 2003. [10507]

Mr. McCartney: There will be no residents covered by preserved rights in April 2003. From 8 April 2002 people who had preserved rights to the higher rates of income support and all new customers going into residential care or nursing homes will receive normal income support or minimum income guarantee allowances and premiums.

No one will lose out as a result of these changes as local authorities will be able to make up any shortfalls in fees. At the moment about half of all preserved rights customers do not have enough public support to cover their fees. Many have to pay some of their personal expenses allowance, currently £16.05 a week, towards their fees. The new arrangements will mean customers will no longer have to do this.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to amend the industrial injuries disablement benefit qualifications to include those unable to work through conditions caused through work processes but which are not the result of an accident or prescribed disease; and if he will make a statement. [13041]

Malcolm Wicks: The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council considered the question of injury by process in 1981. At that time it felt unable to recommend any changes to the industrial injuries scheme to allow claims in these circumstances, because the medical knowledge which could connect a process with a non-prescribed disease is not generally available. The council looked again at the issue in 1995 but was still unable to recommend any changes to the scheme.

The council continues to monitor the position but we have no current plans to change the existing legislation.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for industrial injuries disablement benefit have been refused each year since 1995 as a result of the applicant's condition being caused through work processes and not as a result of an accident or prescribed disease; and if he will make a statement. [13042]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available.

"Removing the Barriers"

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how his Department ensured that the report "Removing the Barriers" published by the Local Government Association, was taken into account during the 1997–98 comprehensive spending review; and which of its recommendations have been implemented. [8051]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 October 2001]:* Since the report "Removing the Barriers" was published in 1997 we have made, and continue to make, radical changes to the mechanisms through which welfare is delivered. Many of the improvements introduced by our reforms address concerns set out in the report.

We are taking a single approach to work and benefits designed to make work pay, make work possible and to support those who are unable to work. The jobcentre plus pathfinder offices are now delivering a single, integrated service to benefit recipients of working age with a clear focus on work.

From April 2002, the Pension Service will provide a dedicated service for pensioners, working in partnership with local agencies and acting as a gateway to other services pensioners receive.

PRIME MINISTER

International Anti-terrorist Coalition

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the political, diplomatic, financial and commercial commitments that have been given on behalf of Her Majesty's Government to the Governments of other states in the course of assembling and strengthening the international coalition to combat terrorism. [10898]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The international coalition to combat terrorism has come together out of a shared recognition that only a global response can succeed. Governments across the world have willingly taken on commitments, for example of military help, or the obligation to tackle terrorism imposed by the UN Security Council Resolution 1373, because all have recognised the essential nature of the task.

Of course, the act of building the coalition has strengthened our relationship with several countries. But the British Government have not offered financial or commercial commitments to states explicitly to reward adherence to the international coalition. That coalition has been built because its members recognise the need for a determined and united response by the international community.

House of Lords

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what further plans he has to reform the basis of membership of the House of Lords. [11809]

The Prime Minister: We shall publish our proposals for completing the reform of the House of Lords on Wednesday 7 November 2001.

Conflict (Northern Ireland)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the necessity of a visible demonstration that the conflict is over in Northern Ireland. [12674]

The Prime Minister: Securing an end to politically motivated violence and the stable operation of democratically based institutions of Government commanding cross-community support will provide the most visible demonstration that Northern Ireland has put the past behind it.

Decommissioning, verified by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, is a key part of achieving that goal.

Afghanistan

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister which Muslim leaders in the United Kingdom have expressed support for the coalition's military action against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. [12931]

The Prime Minister: All the main British Muslim organisation have condemned the attacks in the USA on 11 September. They and other Muslim leaders around the world have declared that such acts of infamy are wholly contrary to the Islamic or any other world religion.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Modernisation

48. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the President of the Council what plans he has for wider consultation of the public on modernisation of the House. [10358]

50. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on progress in the modernisation of the House. [10360]

53. **Anne Picking:** To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to improve the parliamentary scrutiny of Bills. [10363]

55. **Joan Ryan:** To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to make proposals for greater involvement of Select Committees in pre-legislative scrutiny. [10365]

Mr. Robin Cook: During its current investigations into Select Committees, the Modernisation Committee has decided, for the first time, to take evidence in public. It has already heard from the Hansard Society, Professor the Lord Norton of Louth and from Lord Sheldon, the Chair of the Liaison Committee in the previous Parliament.

The Modernisation Committee has asked me to provide a strategy paper setting out the broader objectives for Commons reform, which I will present to the Committee at the end of the month.

I hope that the Modernisation Committee's proposals for reform will result in a Parliament that is relevant to voters, reflects their concerns and re-engages the public with the political process.

Legislative Scrutiny

49. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to make proposals to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to improve the scrutiny of legislation. [10359]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: It is essential that Bills leave this House properly scrutinised by MPs. I hope that we can build on the Modernisation Committee's report from the last Parliament on the legislative process. We have made efforts to ensure that more Bills are published in draft form and subject to Committee scrutiny before they are presented to Parliament.

I hope that the Modernisation Committee will return to these issues to assess how we might improve pre and post-legislative scrutiny. However, we must also address the issue of scrutiny by MPs during a Bill's passage and how we might improve legislation by finding ways to overcome the bottlenecks in the parliamentary process.

Grand Committees

51. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to improve the legislative function of Grand Committees. [10361]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Standing Orders already provide for Bills to be referred to Grand Committees, and for Standing Committees on Welsh or Scottish Bills to contain Members from those countries, although I agree there is a great deal of variation in Grand Committee powers, and they might usefully be looked at in the light of devolution.

The Procedure Committee has said that it will keep the consequences of devolution under review, and the hon. Gentleman might wish to raise this with them.

Information Technology

52. **Mr. Salter:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what proposals he has for using IT to improve access to the business of the House to the public. [10362]

Mr. Kirkwood: A wide range of information about the business of the House can be viewed on the Parliament website. The proceedings of both Houses and sittings in Westminster Hall will be webcast on a pilot basis from January 2002.

57. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make proposals to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on further ways in which information technology might aid the work of hon. Members in the course of their Standing Committee work. [10367]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: As I indicated in July, the Modernisation Committee may well wish to look at the use of IT in the House in general, although I understand that it has not yet included this in its programme. Routine responsibility for order in Standing Committees rests with the Chairmen's Panel.

Computer Contract

54. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on the operation of the new computer contract for hon. Members. [10364]

Mr. Robin Cook: The advisory panel on the Members' Vote continues to monitor the system. I am pleased to be able to report substantial progress since my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 323W.

I am told that by close of play on 2 November 2001, a further 110 orders had been fulfilled, and a further six had been partly met, making a total of 272 orders fully completed and 61 part completed. During the same period, a further 32 Members had ordered equipment,

bringing the total of Members who have placed orders to 500. I understand that all Members who ordered during the recess have been offered delivery dates before the end of November.

Peerages

56. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Council when the House of Lords Appointments Commission is to hold its next roadshows to encourage people to apply for peerages. [10366]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I understand that the House of Lords Appointments Commission is currently considering when to hold its next set of regional events.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judicial Appointments

33. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will establish a judicial appointments commission. [10343]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor has established a Commission to oversee the judicial appointments process and the First Commissioner, Sir Colin Campbell, was appointed on 15 March 2001. Further to that appointment, around 10 Deputy Commissioners will be appointed to assist Sir Colin.

Lay Magistrates

34. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the work to develop a national strategy for the recruitment of lay magistrates. [10344]

35. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to encourage recruitment to the lay magistracy; and if he will make a statement. [10345]

Mr. Wills: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor hopes to be able to announce proposals for the creation of a national strategy for recruitment early next year. This will seek to identify a range of activities which will bring more fully to the attention of the public and employers, the role of the lay magistrate and the need for recruits from all walks of life.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many chairmen of lay magistrates are in post; and how many of them are *(a)* from the ethnic minority communities, *(b)* under 45 years and *(c)* women. [12076]

Mr. Wills: The chairman of each magistrates bench is elected by the magistrates of the bench at the bench annual general meeting in October. Apart from providing, through subordinate legislation, the framework within which the elections may take place, their appointment is not a matter for my noble and learned Friend, the Lord Chancellor, and his Department does not keep the figures sought.

Auld Report

36. **David Taylor:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what changes he expects in the role of magistrates in response to the Auld proposals. [10346]

Mr. Wills: The Government are grateful to Sir Robin Auld for his very substantial and important review of the criminal courts at every level. In his report he gave the lay magistracy a huge vote of confidence. Sir Robin Auld makes some radical recommendations, which will need the most careful consideration. The Government have taken no decisions on his report and we are keen to encourage wide debate on these issues before we reach decisions.

Courthouse (Colchester)

37. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the establishment of a new courthouse in Colchester. [10347]

Mr. Wills: Work on completing the outline business case for the provision of new and refurbished magistrates courts across Essex is in progress. It is anticipated that work will be completed early in the new year and that a new courthouse in Colchester will be ready for use during 2005.

Tribunals (Access)

38. **Ms Walley:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what research she has planned in respect of the effect of the award of costs on access to tribunals. [10348]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor has no research planned at present in respect of the effect of the award of costs on access to tribunals. The Government note that Sir Andrew Leggatt has made recommendations in this area. We will be taking these recommendations forward as part of our examination of tribunals in light of the Leggatt report.

Westminster Coroner

39. **Mr. Pond:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations she has received concerning the performance of the Westminster coroner. [10349]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor has received a letter from solicitors representing the Marchioness action group asking what steps had been taken to review the Westminster coroner's performance of his judicial duties, given criticisms of him in Lord Justice Clarke's report. There have also been requests for meetings to discuss, among other matters, criticisms of the Westminster coroner raised in the report. While accepting Lord Justice Clarke's conclusion that the Westminster coroner acted at all times in good faith, the Lord Chancellor considered that the Westminster coroner's actions on this occasion fell below the standard to be expected of a judicial officer and he issued a formal admonishment.

Employment Tribunals

40. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the future role of the community legal service fund in employment tribunals. [10350]

Mr. Wills: None.

Social Exclusion

41. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what part the new community legal service partnerships play in reducing social exclusion. [10351]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Community legal service partnerships are responsible for co-ordinating the funding and delivery of legal and advice services in their area. Through an analysis of local legal needs, CLS partnerships can ensure that resources are more effectively targeted to help the socially excluded and other vulnerable groups and individuals.

CLS partnerships are also able to tackle social exclusion by forging links with other Government programmes. CLS partnerships are therefore starting to link with social exclusion initiatives such as local strategic partnerships where they have a key contribution to make to the delivery of the neighbourhood renewal strategy.

In order to raise awareness of how legal and advice services, through the CLS, can help combat social exclusion, the Lord Chancellor's Department has been working with the Law Centres Federation on a joint paper, to be entitled "Legal and Advice Services—A Pathway out of Social Exclusion". The paper will be launched in November and is to be made widely available.

Magistrates Courts (Ceredigion)

42. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his response to Ceredigion county council's proposals for magistrates courts in the county. [10352]

Mr. Wills: I responded by letter to Ceredigion county council on 26 September 2001. My response detailed the Department's position with regard to the issues raised and reiterated the responsibilities of magistrates courts committees for the effective and efficient management of courts in their area.

Jurors

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if jurors have the optior of being escorted in and out of court *(a)* by separate entrances and *(b)* at different times from the rest of the public. [12428]

Mr. Wills: Twelve Crown court centres have separate entrances used only by jurors, but most other courts can arrange for them to use a separate entrance if it is felt necessary. Arrangements can also be made for jurors to be escorted in and out of the building, and at different times from the rest of the public, if the need arises.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is done to prevent threatening behaviour from the families of convicted defendants toward jurors *(a)* in and *(b)* outside court. [12427]

Mr. Wills: Separate accommodation is made available for jurors until they are ready to leave the court building. If there is any threat of retribution, or if the jurors are concerned about their safety, arrangements can be made to transfer them safely away from the vicinity of the court.

District Judges

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many district judges (magistrates' courts) are in post, broken down by the ethnic minority communities; and how many of them are *(a)* under 45 years and *(b)* women. [12075]

Mr. Wills: The figures have not changed from those shown in my noble and learned Friend's Judicial Appointments Annual Report (Cm 5248) published on 30 October 2001. This shows that as at 1 April 2001 there were 98 district judges (magistrates courts) in post including the senior district judge and her deputy. Of this total number, 82 are males (86 per cent.) and 16 are females (14 per cent.). Two of these district judges are Asian, one man and one woman, and two women are under 45.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many executive NDPBs there have been in existence each year from 1978; and what the total expenditure by these bodies was in each year in *(a)* real and *(b)* actual terms. [11808]

Mr. Leslie: Information on the number and expenditure of executive NDPBs for each year from 1979 (when the classification was introduced) to 2000 is published in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 2000". Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. Information on the number and expenditure of executive NDPBs during the 2000–01 financial year will be published in the new year.

Regional Co-ordination Unit

Mr. Moss: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the budget of the regional co-ordination unit *(a)* last year and *(b)* this year; and what the projected figure is for next year. [12522]

Mrs. Roche: The regional co-ordination unit's (RCU) budget for administrative running costs is £9.716 million in 2001–02. Funding for 2002–03 has yet to be finalised, but is expected to be in the region of £9.116 million.

The RCU was formed during 2000–01 and overall expenditure on the RCU and its predecessor unit, the Government office co-ordination unit (GOCU) for that year totalled £5.55 million.

A large element of the budget of the RCU and its predecessor unit is for funding that is managed centrally on behalf of the Government office network as a whole, such as for IT and communications systems. For the current financial year, £6.689 million is in respect of centrally managed budgets.

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action his Department took in recognition of energy efficiency week. [11508]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 592W.

My Department's initiatives to improve energy efficiency will be listed in the Green Ministers report to be published on 27 November 2001. This will include efforts by the Cabinet Office and its agency, the Government Car and Despatch Agency (GCDA), to improve energy awareness among staff. Since October 2001, 100 per cent. of electricity used at 10 Downing street and the Cabinet Office buildings at 70 Whitehall and Admiralty Arch are now being generated by renewable energy (CCL exempt) sources.

Equitable Life

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will refer to the parliamentary ombudsman the cases of those civil servants who took out additional voluntary contribution policies with the Equitable Life Assurance Society in 1999 and 2000 under the civil service AVC scheme; and if he will make a statement. [12824]

Mr. Leslie: No. The Cabinet Office, as managers of the civil service AVC scheme and acting on behalf of the civil service as employer, has wished to see that the appointed scheme providers remain suitable for AVC investment. To that end, the Cabinet Office appointed Bacon and Woodrow some years ago to provide expert and professional advice in this role. Bacon and Woodrow have conducted regular reviews of the civil service AVC providers and their continuing suitability for the civil service AVC scheme, as well as providing advice on specific developments. The Cabinet Office has acted throughout on the independent advice of Bacon and Woodrow. It believes it has met its responsibilities as manager fully and properly.

The civil service AVC scheme, provides members with a choice of provider and wide choice of investment route. AVC investment carries the same risks as any other investment and benefits are not guaranteed.

In acting on independent advice from Bacon and Woodrow, the Cabinet Office has been acting in the same way as other pension schemes affected by the problems of Equitable Life. It has not been in a privileged position and has not had access to information which is not available to the pensions industry more widely. There is a clear difference between the role of the Cabinet Office as managers of the civil service AVC scheme and the regulatory role carried out elsewhere in Government. The Cabinet Office believes it has exercised its duty of care responsibilities fully and properly.

The Government, in their wider role, announced on 31 August an independent inquiry into Equitable Life, to be headed by Lord Penrose. This will look at the circumstances leading to the current situation at Equitable Life and identify any lessons to be learned for the conduct, administration and regulation of life assurance. The inquiry will report to Treasury Ministers.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many civil servants took out new additional voluntary contributions policies with the Equitable Life Assurance Society in 1999 and 2000 under the civil service AVC scheme; and what advice he is giving them about possible redress for maladministration. [R] [12825]

Mr. Leslie: The information is not held centrally. However, I will write to the hon. Member about the numbers of civil servants who began to pay AVCs with Equitable Life in 1999 and 2000 under the civil service AVCs scheme shortly. The Cabinet Office has been pro-active in keeping civil service employers and staff informed of developments as they occur, and, through its adviser Bacon and Woodrow, has made available generic guidance. I have seen no evidence of failure, on the part of the civil service as employer, in this matter. The Government, in their wider role, have of course announced the inquiry led by Lord Penrose.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many publications were issued by his Department in each of the last four years. [11840]

Mr. Leslie: The publications issued or sponsored by the Cabinet Office between May 1997 and October 2001 are listed in the table. Because of the restructuring of the Department in May 1997, any information relating to before this date can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. This answer does not include publications which were issued in electronic form only.

Cabinet Office publications May 1997–October 2001

	Number
May to December 1997	97
January to December 1998	127
January to December 1999	139
January to December 2000	177
January to October 2001	151

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by his Department; if he will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans he has to sell further such assets over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review; and if he will make a statement. [10835]

Mr. Leslie: The National Asset Register (CM 5221, July 2001) provides full details of the departmental asset holdings across all categories of assets, including heritage assets, along with details of major acquisitions and disposals since the publication of the last register in 1997. The information published in the National Asset Register for the Cabinet Office includes No. 10 Downing street.

HEALTH

Departmental Buildings

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the total annual running costs for buildings used, owned or rented by his Department for each nation and region of the United Kingdom, and estimate the average cost per square metre for properties used by his Department as a whole, and by region and nation of the United Kingdom. [6867]

Ms Blears: The table shows an estimate for the total running costs for financial year 2000–01 for buildings used, owned or rented by the Department and its agencies for England. It also estimates the average cost per square metre for properties used by the Department as a whole for England. It does not include any costs associated with the national health service.

Region	*Total running costs (£ million)*	*Average cost per square metre*
Northern	0.646	268.92
Yorkshire and Humberside	5.311	275.10
North West	2.709	132.19
East Midlands	0.614	123.42
West Midlands	0.909	304.99
Eastern	0.735	162.30
South West	1.328	222.80
South East	1.188	243.78
London	26.051	350.16
Total	39.491	282.25

Running costs include capital charges, rents, service charges, rates, unitary charge (as appropriate), cleaning, decoration, building maintenance, utilities (including refuse collection), security, reception and porters.The Department does not occupy any properties in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Meningitis

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent steps he has taken to reduce the incidence of meningitis B; and what further steps he plans to take in the next 12 months. [9087]

Ms Blears: As the recent success with meningitis C vaccine has demonstrated, the best way to reduce the incidence of meningococcal Group B disease is through an effective meningitis B vaccine. Unfortunately, we are some years away from having such a vaccine. Work to find a vaccine against Group B is much more difficult than for Group C, although early indicators for a Group B vaccine are encouraging. The Department is investigating Group B vaccines in collaboration with RIVM, the Dutch national vaccine manufacturer, and funds Group B vaccine dedicated work at the Centre for Applied Microbiology Research.

In the meantime, it remains essential for parents and health professionals to be aware of the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease and alert to act quickly should they recognise any of these symptoms. Information on recognising meningococcal disease is included in all the childhood immunisation materials produced by Health Promotion England which are given to parents. Health professionals have been reminded to be alert to the expected winter rise in meningococcal cases in a letter from the Chief Medical Officer, Chief Nursing Officer and Chief Pharmacist issued on 15 October.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to deal with changes in the incidence of meningitis in the last four years. [9855]

Ms Blears: Meningitis and septicaemia can be caused by a number of viruses and bacteria. Illness caused by bacteria is the most serious and meningococcal disease is the commonest cause of bacterial meningitis and septicaemia in the United Kingdom

The incidence of meningococcal disease had been increasing in the second half of the 1990s. However, the introduction of a new vaccine against Group C meningococcal infection in November 1999 has reduced the incidence of meningococcal Group C disease by up to 90 per cent. in those age groups immunised.

The vast majority of meningococcal disease is now caused by Group B infection. The success of the meningitis C vaccine has demonstrated that the best way to reduce the incidence of Group B disease is through an effective meningitis B vaccine. Unfortunately, we are some years away from having such a vaccine. Work to find a vaccine against Group B is much more difficult than for Group C, although early indicators for a Group B vaccine are encouraging. The Department is investigating Group B vaccines in collaboration with RIVM, the Dutch national vaccine manufacturer, and funds Group B vaccine dedicated work at the Centre for Applied Microbiology Research.

Groundwater Protection

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the EC directives relating to groundwater protection and indicate in each case how compliance is *(a)* monitored and *(b)* enforced. [11382]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Groundwater Directive (80/60/EEC) is the principal EC measure for the protection of groundwater. As competent authority in England and Wales the Environment Agency has powers under the Water Resources Act 1991, the Environment Act 1995, the Groundwater Regulations 1998 and the Anti-Pollution Works Notices Regulations 1999 to enforce this directive's authorisations. The Environment Agency has also developed a strategic monitoring network to determine groundwater status.

Infant Mortality Rate (Worcester)

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the infant mortality rate in Worcester was in each year since 1992. [10405]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Michael Foster, dated 6 November 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the infant mortality rate in Worcester in each year since 1992(10405).

The information requested is provided in the attached table.

The rates for Worcester county district (which are calculated from fewer than 20 deaths) may be unreliable due to the small number of events and should be treated cautiously. Any variation they show over time, or difference from National or county or health authority rates are likely to be due to chance.

Infant mortality numbers and rates for Worcester CD, 1992–2000

Calendar Year	*Number*	*[1]Rate*
1992	11	8.7
1993	9	7.1
1994	8	6.6
1995	13	10.2
1996	10	8.0
1997	8	6.1
1998	8	6.3
1999	10	7.7
2000[2]	9	7.4

[1] Per 1,000 live births

[2] Provisional

Source:

1992–94 and 2000 unpublished

1995–99 figures are published in the National Statistics publication 'Key Population and Vital Statistics', series VS Nos 22–26

Power Lines

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made since April of international research on the health effect of living close to overhead transmission lines; and what review he plans of the health effects of pylons on human beings. [9650]

Ms Blears: The Department obtains advice on the possible health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields, including the extremely low frequency fields (ELF) associated with power lines, from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB).

In June, on behalf of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a working group of scientific experts from 10 countries published its review on the health effects of static and extremely low frequency (ELF) electric and magnetic fields. The IARC working group concluded that ELF magnetic fields are possibly carcinogenic to humans based on a statistical association between higher level magnetic field exposure and the risk of childhood leukaemia.

This conclusion of the IARC working group is consistent with that of the NRPB Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR), which issued a report in March 2001. AGNIR stressed, however, that there was insufficient evidence to justify a firm conclusion that magnetic fields cause leukaemia in children. In responding to the advisory group report the board of NRPB considered there was a need to understand better the factors that might result in higher residential exposures to magnetic fields, noting also the recent evidence from the United Kingdom childhood cancer study that suggested the higher levels of magnetic fields are not attributable solely to proximity to power lines. The Government and NRPB are currently planning a study into the factors that result in certain households having higher levels of exposure to power frequency magnetic fields.

The AGNIR is also further considering the possible effects on health of corona ions generated by power lines. A first meeting to consider this issue has taken place and researchers on this topic have been invited to make presentations at future meetings. Information about the work of the advisory group is to be posted on the NRPB website www.nrpb.org.uk. A final report will be published by NRPB.

In July, the California Health Department released a draft report for public comment and this will also be considered by AGNIR.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a Government inquiry into the health effects of power frequency electric and magnetic fields. [11366]

Jacqui Smith: The Department obtains advice on the possible health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields, including the extremely low frequency (ELF) fields associated with power lines, from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). The Board of NRPB has set up an independent Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR) chaired by the eminent epidemiologist Sir Richard Doll. Members are some of the United Kingdom's leading experimental scientists and epidemiologists. The AGNIR has prepared a number of reports on the possible health effects of exposure to power frequency electric and magnetic fields. Its most recent report was published in March 2001 and provided a comprehensive summary of sources of exposure to ELF electromagnetic fields and methods of measurement as well as reviews of experimental and epidemiological (human health) studies.

AGNIR continues to monitor research on this topic.

In June, the International Agency for Research in Cancer (IARC) based in Lyon, France, brought together an international team of experts to review the evidence for the possible carcinogenic effects of exposure to static and ELF electric and magnetic fields. It concluded that magnetic fields are "possibly carcinogenic" to humans based on a statistical association between higher level magnetic field exposure and the risk of childhood leukaemia. This conclusion is consistent with the views expressed by AGNIR.

These two reviews by teams of eminent scientists are consistent in their findings and provide the most up to date published reviews of this subject.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the health risks of a *(a)* cancer and *(b)* non-cancer nature and other health consequences of electro-magnetic fields situated near to overhead power lines. [11416]

Jacqui Smith: The Department obtains advice on the possible health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields, including those associated with power lines, from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). The Board of NRPB has set up an independent Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR) "to review work on the biological effects of non-ionising radiation relevant to human health and to advise on research priorities".

Most of the research carried out on possible health effects of exposure to electromagnetic fields and radiation has concentrated on cancer risk. In March this year, the AGNIR published a report on the potential risks of cancer from exposure to extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields that includes those from power lines. The report provides a comprehensive review of experimental and epidemiological studies relevant to an assessment of the possible risk of cancer as well as information on sources of exposure and their measurement.

An assessment has been carried out by AGNIR of the potential neurodegenerative effects of exposure to electromagnetic fields. A report has been prepared and publication is imminent.

The AGNIR is also further considering the possible effects on health of corona ions generated by power lines. A first meeting to consider this issue has taken place and researchers on this topic have been invited to make presentations at future meetings. A final report will be published by NRPB.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an assessment of the possible links between childhood leukaemia and magnetic field exposures above 0.4 mircotesla. [11187]

Jacqui Smith: The Department obtains advice on the possible health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields, including those associated with power lines, from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB).

In March this year NRPB's Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR) published a review of extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields and the risk of cancer, which included an assessment of the possible link between childhood leukaemia and average magnetic field exposures of 0.4 microtesla or more.

AGNIR concluded that recent large and well-conducted epidemiological studies, both in this country and overseas, have provided better evidence than was available in the past on the relationship between power frequency magnetic field exposure and the risk of cancer. Taken in conjunction, they suggest that relatively heavy average exposures of magnetic fields at 0.4 microtesla or more are associated with a doubling of the risk of leukaemia in children under 15 years of age. However, the evidence is not conclusive because of the small number of children exposed, and other features related to the design of the studies.

NRPB have noted that, if the association between magnetic fields and the risk of cancer was causal, of the 500 cases of childhood leukaemia occurring in the United Kingdom each year an additional 2 cases might result from exposure to magnetic fields at exposures above 0.4 microtesla.

AGNIR have pointed out that, in the UK, very few children (perhaps 4 in 1000) are exposed to 0.4 microtesla or more. The UK study (United Kingdom Childhood Cancer Study), with much the largest number of direct measurements of exposure, found no evidence of risk at lower levels.

Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will reconsider his decision to accept the early resignation of Mr. Harold Musgrove from the chairmanship of the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS trust; and if he will make a statement; [10155]

(2) what discussions his Department had with Mr. Harold Musgrove about the announcement of his resignation from the chairmanship of the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS trust prior to that announcement; what the nature of any such discussion was; and if he will make a statement. [10156]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* The acceptance of Mr. Musgrove's resignation is a matter for the national health service Appointments Commission, which now has responsibility for appointments to NHS boards. Mr. Musgrove contacted the NHS Regional Director for the West Midlands to inform him of his decision to resign. His formal letter of resignation was submitted to the chair of the NHS Appointments Commission on 1 October. He subsequently had discussions with the Appointments Commissioner for the West Midlands about the timing of his departure, which was mutually agreed as 31 December 2001, allowing sufficient time for recruitment of his successor.

Haemophiliac Patients

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision by NHS trusts of recombinant clotting factors to haemophiliac patients. [10733]

Mr. Hutton: We asked health authorities and national health service trusts to provide recombinant clotting factors for new patients and children under 16 from April 1998 and are considering the case for providing these products, subject to availability, for all haemophilia patients.

Treatment Overseas

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on *(a)* the outstanding legal questions relating to the treatment of NHS patients abroad, *(b)* when he anticipates those legal questions will be resolved and *(c)* how patients will be selected for treatment abroad. [10704]

Mr. Hutton: The main legal issue on the principle of treating patients abroad has been decided. Health authorities and national health service trusts must be free to commission services in Europe. What remains to be resolved are the practical and legal issues flowing from that decision, in particular, the legal consequences for commissioners and patients should things go wrong.

Our aim is to address these various legal, clinical and quality issues over the coming few weeks so that the first patients are able to travel for treatment before the end of the year.

Selection of patients is a matter for local commissioners and the patients themselves. No patient will be forced to travel against his or her will. Commissioners and clinicians will need to satisfy themselves that patients are fit for travel and are at low risk of post-operative complications.

Orthopaedic Waiting Lists

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on *(a)* orthopaedic waiting lists in Leeds and *(b)* what action will be taken to reduce these in the short term. [10705]

Jacqui Smith: At the end of August 2001 there were 1,714 patients waiting for orthopaedic inpatient or day case treatment at Leeds teaching hospitals national health service trust.

There has been substantial investment of £3.7 million in orthopaedic services in Leeds this year. This is funding an additional ward and theatre for orthopaedic services and will help to fund an additional five orthopaedic consultant posts:

two spinal surgeons

one foot and ankle surgeon

one lower limb surgeon

one hand surgeon.

Bed Blocking

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of acute beds are blocked in each acute national health service hospital trust. [11096]

Jacqui Smith: The information available is shown in the table.

Delayed discharges—first quarter activity

Blocked beds health authority	*Percentage Delayed discharge rate*[1]
Bradford	1.7
Durham	7.5
East Riding	1.6
Gateshead and South Tyneside	6.4
Leeds	3.9
Newcastle and North Tyneside	3.9
North Cumbria	13.8
Northumberland	2.4
Sunderland	3.7
Tees	5.5
Wakefield	4.5
North Yorkshire	5.6
Calderdale and Kirklees	2.4
Barnsley	1.5
North Derbyshire	1.9
South Derbyshire	0.9
Doncaster	3.0
Leicestershire	2.4
Lincolnshire	2.2
North Nottinghamshire	3.4
Nottingham	2.9
Rotherham	2.9
Sheffield	3.8
South Humber	6.3
Birmingham	14.7
Coventry	5.4
Dudley	8.5
Herefordshire	5.8
Sandwell	4.4
Shropshire	3.2
Solihull	7.0
North Staffordshire	7.7
South Staffordshire	12.4
Walsall	5.9
Warwickshire	5.4

Delayed discharges—first quarter activity

Blocked beds health authority	*Percentage Delayed discharge rate*[1]
Wolverhampton	4.1
Worcestershire	5.8
South Lancashire	4.2
Liverpool	5.3
Manchester	2.3
Morecambe Bay	8.3
St. Helens and Knowsley	6.8
Salford and Trafford	3.2
Sefton	5.3
Stockport	1.8
West Pennine	3.0
Bury and Rochdale	2.9
North Cheshire	4.6
South Cheshire	4.6
East Lancashire	0.2
North West Lancashire	10.6
Wigan and Bolton	—
Wirral	2.0
Bedfordshire	3.9
North Essex	—
South Essex	—
Suffolk	13.6
Cambridgeshire	5.4
Norfolk	5.5
Hertfordshire	—
Hillingdon	16.1
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	—
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	10.0
Croydon	5.0
Kingston and Richmond	5.4
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	2.1
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	3.7
Barking and Havering	9.2
Brent and Harrow	18.2
Camden and Islington	6.8
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	7.7
East London and City	2.6
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	7.4
Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich	—
Berkshire	13.3
Buckinghamshire	17.4
East Kent	4.8
West Kent	4.3
East Surrey	6.5
West Surrey	12.8
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	—
West Sussex	7.8
Northamptonshire	12.3
Oxfordshire	5.4
North and Mid Hampshire	18.6
Southampton and South West Hampshire	14.3
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	4.8
Somerset	—
South and West Devon	6.5
Wiltshire	5.6
Avon	9.7
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	9.5
Dorset	6.1
North and East Devon	5.5
Gloucestershire	9.3
	9.0

[1] All ages

NICE (Compulsory Guidance)

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on providing funding to health authorities to meet the cost of implementing compulsory guidance issued by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. [11094]

Mr. Hutton: We expect national health service bodies to fund treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence from their general allocations which increased on average by 6.25 per cent. in real terms for 2001–02.

We are preparing to implement our manifesto commitment that

> "local health authorities and trusts will be directed to fund drugs and treatments recommended by NICE",

and expect to announce further details shortly.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists there were in the Northamptonshire constituencies in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2001. [11273]

Ms Blears: The number of general dental service dentists in Northamptonshire health authority is shown in the table at 30 June for the years *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2001.

General dental service: Number of dentists in Northamptonshire health authority at 30 June

Northamptonshire HA	*All dentists*
June 1992	138
June 1997	153
June 2001	167

Data are not available centrally by constituency.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists were taking on new patients on 1 September. [11117]

Ms Blears: There are some 16,000 general dental service dentists in England. Some of these dentists have no patient registrations including specialist dentists such as those with practices limited to orthodontics. 14,000 dentists took on at least one new registration during August 2001.

In addition, there were 400 personal dental service dentists, 100 salaried dentists and 1,300 dentists in the community dental service who may have been taking on some new national health service patients.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the provision of dentistry and the number of dentists in *(a)* Lincolnshire and *(b)* Boston and Skegness. [11550]

Ms Blears: In September 1999, we gave a commitment that, within two years, everyone would be able to access National Health Service dentistry if, and when, they wanted it via NHS Direct. All health authorities in England now have in place dentistry action plans to ensure that everyone in their local area can access NHS dentistry if they want it, within a reasonable time and distance. These plans identify shortfalls in service provision and ways of tackling user demand.

Action is being taken to improve the situation in Lincolnshire and Boston and Skegness. Lincolnshire is one of the third wave personal dental service pilots. The pilot will see the development of a dental access centre at six sites across the county, including Boston and Skegness, through a combination of new buildings and conversion of existing Community Dental Services. £877,000 capital and £340,000 revenue were allocated to the pilot in 2000–01 with a further £270,000 capital and £91,000 revenue in the current financial year.

In addition, Lincolnshire has received dental care development funding amounting to £95,000 in 2000–01 and £185,000 in 2001–02 for expansion and modernisation of practices in areas of poor access which are already offering significant NHS commitment and are prepared to increase numbers of NHS patients. A further allocation of £407,000 has been made from the dental modernisation fund to modernise premises and upgrade equipment and from the dental practice. £17,000 has been allocated from the dental practice grant to set up quality assurance systems in each dental practice.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many salaried dentists are employed *(a)* by the national health service and *(b)* by the personal dental service. [11913]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The latest information on the number of salaried dentists employed in the national health service in England is shown in the table for each of the dental services. The figures are on a headcount basis rather than whole-time equivalent.

Personal dental services are one of the ways in which the NHS provides dentistry and may be used both for NHS trust based projects with salaried dentists and for arrangements which are similar to the general dental service, with self employed dentists.

Number of salaried dentists employed in 2000–01

England	*Number*
a) By the NHS (excluding personal dental services)	
Hospital dental service[1]	2,190
Community dental service[1]	1,340
Salaried GDS dentists[2]	101
b) By the personal dental services[2,3]	
Dentists in pilots managed by trusts	392
Total[4] NHS salaried dentists	4,023

[1] Number of dentists at September 2000.

[2] Number of dentists at June 2001.

[3] Excludes 200 dentists in pilots not managed by trusts where most dentists are self employees of the contract holders.

[4] Some dentists work in several services and are counted in each service.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the gross fee is paid for *(a)* an MOD amalgam and *(b)* a root canal filling on the lower first molar to an independent contractor dentist in the NHS; [11914]

(2) what is the unit cost of provision by the salaried dental service of *(a)* an MOD amalgam and *(b)* a root canal filling on the lower first molar, taking into account all management, rental and other overheads. [11915]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The item of service fee currently paid to a dentist providing treatment in the general dental services (GDS) is £17.60 per tooth for an amalgam filling in permanent or retained deciduous teeth for three or more surfaces where the mesio-occlusal and disto-occlusal surfaces are involved. If pin or screw retention is involved there is an additional fee of £5.40. The fee for the root filling of each root canal of a permanent tooth per first molar tooth is £68.65.

The total fees claimed by general dental practitioners are intended to cover all costs including management, rental and other overheads. Under the personal dental service's arrangements, treatments are not remunerated on an item of service basis but are included as part of the overall contractual arrangements. We have no reason to expect that in the salaried services similar item of service treatments would differ significantly in cost from the GDS, taking into account the range of patients treated.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people, and what proportion of the population, had no access to an NHS dentist in May of each year since 1997. [11916]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* About 24 million people, almost half of the population, are registered with a general dental services (GDS) dentist in England at any one time. This has been broadly constant over the last three years (figures before this time are not comparable because of changes to the registration period). Registration figures represent people who have been seen by a GDS dentist within the past 15 months. Excluded from these figures are people who have chosen not to attend their dentist in the latest 15 months as well as people who have been treated within the GDS but are not registered and those who have used other NHS dental services, such as the community dental services.

Information on the number of people who sought national health service dentistry unsuccessfully in each year since 1997 is not available.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what date he expects to be able to provide universal access to an NHS dentist. [11917]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* In September 1999, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pledged that within two years, everyone would be able to access national health service dentistry by phoning NHS Direct.

All callers to NHS Direct should now be able to gain access to NHS dentistry either to receive emergency dental treatment, urgent treatment to relieve pain or have an oral examination followed by a course of treatment for identified dental problems.

For each of these kinds of treatment, health authorities have set local standards for times and distances, for both rural and urban locations, for dentistry to be available for their populations.

Child Abuse

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will request local authorities to provide statistics on the abuse of disabled children as a subset of the annual figures collected regarding the total number of children registered for abuse. [11413]

Jacqui Smith: We already collect statistical information about the abuse of disabled children. Information on the numbers of disabled children in need known to local authority social services departments, and the reason for their being in need (including abuse/neglect), was collected by the Department as part of the first children in need survey in February 2000. The report is published on the Department's Home Page of the Internet at www.doh.gov.uk/cinresults.htm. A copy of the report is also available in the Library. The survey is being repeated in late 2001, and the results are likely to be available in mid 2002.

Child Protection Register (Disabled Children)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authorities *(a)* have fulfilled their obligations to provide a register of disabled children and *(b)* are able to provide information on the numbers of disabled children on the child protection register. [11410]

Jacqui Smith: We do not keep a list of authorities which have a disabled children's register. However, this years' national overview report on the 2001–02 "quality protects" management action plans, reports that most councils currently have up-to-date registers of disabled children.

All local authorities should be able to provide information on the numbers of children on the child protection register although we do not hold it centrally. However, local authority returns from the children in need census, currently taking place, will mean this information will become available.

Drinking Water

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what priority he gives to multi-barrier approaches to protect drinking water quality; and if he will make a statement in respect of hazard assessment critical control points. [11381]

Ms Blears: There is a regulatory requirement for all public water supplies in England and Wales to be treated before entering supply. If the raw water comes from a surface water derived source, the treatment has to be appropriate to the classification of the raw water as specified by the European Community Directive on the quality required of surface water intended for the abstraction of drinking water (75/440/EEC). This could involve a multi-barrier approach.

There are separate regulations relating to Cryptosporidium oocysts in drinking water, which require water companies to carry out risk assessments at all treatment works site. Companies may either install treatment capable of continuously removing particles greater than one micron in diameter or install continuous sampling for Cryptosporidium oocysts at sites considered to be at significant risk.

These regulations are enforced by the Drinking Water Inspectorate on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for the National Assembly for Wales.

Zyban

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines have been given to health authorities for the prescribing of the anti-smoking drug Zyban; and which health authorities allow GPs to prescribe this drug; [11100]

(2) if he will calculate the number of people who have been prescribed the anti-smoking drug Zyban since its release on prescription basis; and how many deaths have been attributed to the use of Zyban; [11101]

(3) what changes have been made to the recommended dosage of Zyban by the manufacturers GlaxoSmithKline during the last 12 months; and for what reasons these alterations were made; [11102]

(4) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness and safety of Zyban in the treatment of people addicted to smoking; and if he will make a statement. [11103]

Ms Blears: Since Zyban (bupropion) was marketed in the United Kingdom in June 2000, at least 440,900 prescriptions of Zyban have been dispensed, based on the prescription cost analysis (PCA) data for England.

To date, there have been 53 reports to the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM)/Medicines Control Agency (MCA) of suspected adverse reactions in relation to Zyban with a fatal outcome. The contribution of Zyban to these fatal cases is unproven and in the majority of cases the individual's underlying condition may provide an alternative explanation. In 14 of these reports the individual was not taking Zyban at the time of death. Smoking itself is the single greatest cause of premature deaths in the UK and is responsible for 120,000 deaths per year, which is equivalent to more than 13 people an hour.

Zyban has been authorised in 14 European member states via the mutual recognition procedure. At the time of licensing our independent expert scientific advisory body, the CSM, advised that Zyban met appropriate standards of quality, safety and efficacy to justify its licence for use as an aid to smoking cessation in combination with motivational support in nicotine-dependent patients.

Since marketing, the safety of Zyban has been closely monitored by the MCA/CSM, particularly the accumulating evidence from spontaneous reports of suspected adverse drug reactions received in association with its use. The CSM has advised that the balance between the effectiveness of Zyban in helping people to stop smoking, and the health benefits that this brings, with the risk of adverse effects remains favourable.

Guidance on prescribing and use of Zyban is provided in the authorised Summary of Product Characteristics for health professionals and Patient Information Leaflet. These documents provide information on use of Zyban, contraindications, warnings and possible adverse effects. Key prescribing information is also included in the British National Formulary which is sent by the Department to doctors and pharmacists.

Zyban was made available on national health service prescription in June 2000 in all health authorities. Since then a number of communications have been issued to health professionals. In March 2001 the MCA and CSM reminded general practitioners and health professionals in smoking cessation clinics about the safety profile of bupropion and provided information on safe prescribing, in particular predisposing factors for seizures. This information was distributed to doctors and pharmacists in the MCA/CSM drug safety bulletin "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance".

In May 2001, the CSM issued new guidance (strengthened warnings particularly about potential interactions with other medicines) and advised a slower increase in the dose of Zyban in order to minimise the risk of side effects especially seizures (the lower 150mg dose should be prescribed for the first six days, increasing to 150mg twice daily on day seven rather than day four). This new guidance was issued in order to allow more time for the drug levels to stabilise, to help minimise the risk of adverse reactions, particularly seizures.

The Department provided information to all doctors concerning the safety of Zyban, via an article in the Chief Medical Officer's Update 30 (May 2001), entitled "Safety of Zyban as an aid to smoking cessation". A copy of the CMO's Update 30 can be found in the Statistics Section, in the Library. Updated information on the safety profile of Zyban can also be found on the MCA website.

General Practitioners

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of general practitioners in the national health service in England and Wales in each of the last four years. [11868]

Mr. Hutton: The number of general practitioners in the national health service in England in each of the last four years is shown in the table. Information relating to Wales is a matter for the devolved Administration.

General medical practitioners in England as at 1 October 1997 to 1999 and 30 September 2000

Headcount

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
All practitioners (excluding GP retainers)[1]	29,389	29,697	29,987	30,252
of which:				
Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[2]	27,099	27,392	27,591	27,704

[1] All practitioners (excluding GP retainers) includes UPEs, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (para. 52 SFA) and PMS other. GP retainers were not collected until 1999. In 1999 there were 972 GP retainers; in 2000 there were 1,117.

[2] Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs) includes GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the definition of excessive as applied to GP list sizes; what measures he plans to take to ensure that areas which experience sudden population growth have sufficient numbers of medical practitioners; and what measures he will encourage the National Clinical Assessment Authority to take against doctors with excessive list sizes. [12767]

Mr. Hutton: From 2002 health authorities will be responsible for determining how many general practitioners are needed in their areas. List size and population change are among the factors they will consider. The National Clinical Assessment Authority's role is to assess the clinical performance of a GP if a health authority raises concern.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the number of general practitioner vacancies in each *(a)* health authority and *(b)* primary care trust in the last two years. [12775]

Mr. Hutton: The number of general practitioner vacancies reported by health authorities in the Department's annual general practitioner recruitment retention and vacancy surveys for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are shown in the table. Information on vacancies in primary care trusts is not held centrally.

Health Authority[1]	*2000*	*2001*
Avon	33	67
Barking and Havering	2	1
Barnet Enfield & Haringey HA	17	40
Barnsley	8	10
Bedfordshire	19	20
Berkshire	19	29
Bexley, Bromley & Greenwich HA	5	29
Birmingham	7	65
Bradford	17	37
Brent & Harrow	8	29
Buckinghamshire	[2]—	38
Bury & Rochdale Health Authority	7	12
Calderdale & Kirklees	12	26
Cambridgeshire	1	6
Camden & Islington	1	15
Co. Durham & Darlington	[2]—	26
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	0	22
Coventry	4	17
Croydon	8	25
Doncaster	12	26
Dorset	25	38
Dudley	12	9
East London & City	31	38
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	4	2
East Kent	13	29
East Lancashire	6	28
East Riding and Hull	7	23
East Surrey	12	10
East Sussex, Brighton & Hove	[2]—	[2]—
Gateshead and South Tyneside	10	8
Gloucestershire	17	28
Herefordshire	6	10
Hertfordshire	3	60
Hillingdon	5	19
IoW, Portsmouth & SE Hampshire	16	18
Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster	11	17
Kingston & Richmond	8	17
Lambeth Southwark & Lewisham	33	72
Leeds	19	55
Leicester	15	48
Lincolnshire	19	46
Liverpool	19	16
Manchester	10	24
Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth	[2]—	[2]—
Morecambe Bay	4	7
Newcastle & North Tyneside	23	26
Norfolk	21	53
North and East Devon	14	19
North Cheshire	10	16
North and Mid Hampshire	9	18
North Cumbria	8	19
North Derbyshire	11	16
North Essex	7	17
North Nottinghamshire	24	27
North Staffordshire	12	30
North West Lancashire	3	26
North Yorkshire	[2]—	33
Northamptonshire	18	31
Northumberland	8	18
Nottingham	13	29
Oxfordshire	24	62
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	16	21
Rotherham	7	7
Salford & Trafford	11	26
Sandwell	6	16
Sefton	6	17
Sheffield	13	33
Shropshire	4	16
Solihull	10	11
Somerset	4	28
South & West Devon	20	7
South Cheshire	19	27
South Essex	31	34
South Humber	15	22
South Lancashire	9	13
South Staffordshire	15	23
Southampton and SW Hampshire	17	18
Southern Derbyshire	[2]—	27
St. Helens & Knowsley	10	22
Stockport	10	11
Suffolk	10	17
Sunderland	13	22
Tees	34	43
Wakefield	20	29
Walsall	6	10
Warwickshire	14	25
West Kent	31	60
West Surrey	23	35
West Sussex	31	45
Wigan & Bolton	17	19
Wiltshire	17	22
Wirral	9	13
Wolverhampton	4	5
Worcestershire	1	4

[1] This table reflects the health authorities as at April 2001.
[2] Not provided

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of general practitioners due to retire in each of the next five years. [12774]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect information about retirement intentions of general practitioners. All unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs) have to retire as a principal by the age of 70. Around 480 UPEs will reach 70 by 2006.

Waiting Lists (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were on the waiting list in Buckinghamshire for hospital treatment in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [11865]

Ms Blears: The numbers of patients waiting for hospital treatment between March 1997 and March 2001 are shown in the table.

Inpatient waiting list data for Buckinghamshire health authority

Quarter	*Size of inpatient waiting list*
March 1997	14,039
June 1997	14,253
September 1997	15,276
December 1997	16,154
March 1998	16,149
June 1998	15,706
September 1998	14,878
December 1998	14,679
March 1999	13,069
June 1999	13,795
September 1999	14,000
December 1999	13,854
March 2000	12,604
June 2000	12,937
September 2000	13,252
December 2000	13,535
March 2001	13,332
June 2001	13,604

Source:
QF01 quarterly waiting times return, Department of Health.

NHS Plus

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his proposals for NHS Plus with particular reference to *(a)* income generation, *(b)* avoiding unfair competition with private sector consultants and *(c)* improving awareness of occupational health issues among health professionals and private employers. [11310]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* NHS Plus will be launched on 19 November as a national network of National Health Service Occupational Health Departments who will be selling occupational health services to the private or other parts of the public sector, particularly small and medium sized businesses. Occupational health services are not part of the statutory NHS provision: NHS Plus will be provided as an income generating service. Under the rules of income generation, such services have to recover their full costs as well as making a surplus which is reinvested in the health service. Our aim is that NHS Plus will help to raise awareness of the importance of occupational health to businesses as well as helping to improve the quality of occupational health available to NHS staff themselves.

Social Services (London)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received that local authority social services provision *(a)* as a whole and *(b)* other than those which have been specifically targeted for priority increased provision by his Department, have been disproportionately affected in London; and if he will make a statement. [11845]

Jacqui Smith: The Department receives many representations from various sources and in various forms about the level of funding for social services in London and elsewhere.

Between 1996–97 and 2001–02 total provision made available by the Government for social services in London has increased by 28 per cent., including a 24 per cent. increase in the personal social services standard spending assessment. These substantial increases in provision demonstrate our commitment to London's social services.

Health Authorities (Efficiency)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimates he has made of variations in the efficiency of health services across different health authorities; and if he will make a statement. [11067]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The national health service performance indicators were published in July 2000, and can be found on the Department's website: *www.doh.gov.uk/nhsperformanceindicators*. This includes a comparison of the performance of health authorities across a number of different aspects of performance, including efficiency.

The information we have published shows there is variation in performance, including for day case rates, length of stay, and prescribing. Publishing comparative information of this sort is key to both improving performance and strengthening public accountability.

Staff Retention

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve the retention of staff working in the professions allied to medicine. [12157]

Mr. Hutton: "Meeting the Challenge" sets out our plans for developing and supporting allied health professions and the central role they have to play in delivering the NHS plan's key priorities. A copy has been placed in the Library. The NHS plan also introduced the improving working lives standard to ensure that national health service employers create well-managed, flexible working environments that support all NHS staff.

Nurses

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of nursing vacancies were filled by nurses trained *(a)* in the UK, *(b)* in the remainder of the EU and *(c)* elsewhere in each of the past five years for which figures are available. [12037]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire, dated 11 August, forwarded to him by the Department of Education and Skills on 21 August, and the reminder letters of 20 September, concerning training programmes for the managers of care homes. [11960]

Jacqui Smith: I replied to the hon. Member on 1 November.

Heroin Addicts

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many heroin addicts are receiving their heroin from the NHS; and what percentage that represents of the estimated total of heroin addicts. [12060]

Ms Blears: There are currently no centrally held figures on the number of deaths as a result of heroin abuse.

There were 2,943 deaths records in 1999 where drugs were recorded as a primary cause of death. However, the database from which these figures derive cover accidents and suicides involving drugs, as well as poisonings due to drug abuse and drug dependence, but not other adverse effects of drugs. The range of substances these statistics cover are wide, including legal and illegal, prescribed substances and over the counter medications such as paracetamol.

For each death the database includes every mention of a substance recorded on the death certificate or mentioned by the coroner.

The Department is developing a comprehensive strategy to reduce drug-related deaths which is to be launched shortly.

Health Campaigns

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Government campaigns in the past 15 years in reducing the consumption of *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* tobacco. [12286]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The aim of the Department's health promotion campaigns on alcohol during the period in question has been to encourage sensible drinking and to promote knowledge of the risks of alcohol misuse. Current advice is that men should drink no more than 3–4 units of alcohol per day and women should drink no more than 2–3 units of alcohol per day. There has been a consistent increase in recent years of the proportion of drinkers who were aware of the sensible drinking advice: a rise from 54 per cent. in 1997 to 64 per cent. in 2000.

Our tobacco education campaign, launched in December 1999, is aimed at persuading smokers to give up and non-smokers, particularly children, not to start.

Between October 1992 and May 1994 a prospective controlled trial was conducted in four television regions in central and northern England. Evaluation showed that the campaign was effective in reducing smoking and preventing relapse but as part of a prolonged campaign. We concluded that anti-smoking TV advertising should be undertaken routinely as an essential component of any tobacco reduction strategy.

A number of different measures are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the "Don't Give Up Giving Up" TV advertising campaign, which has been running since December 1999. Quarterly surveys of smoking attitudes and awareness of the campaign are being carried out and results indicate that the campaign is well recalled and is communicating effectively with the target audience.

There is a clear link between advertising and the number of calls to the helpline. In non-advertising periods there is a background level of around 1,000 calls per week to the helpline, this increases to approximately 4,000 a week when there is advertising activity.

The website "givingupsmoking.co.uk" has had over 4.4 million "hits" since its launch in December 1999.

Earlier this year the World Health Organisation, in partnership with the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, published a report entitled "Smoking Media Cessation Campaigns from Around the World". The study evaluated the results of mass media campaigns from nine nations (including England) and six states from the United States of America. The report concluded that comprehensive media campaigns are working and that successful campaigns

"maintained a strong media presence for extended periods of time."

Lymphoedema

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of treatment for lymphoedema is available *(a)* nationally, *(b)* within the West Midlands and *(c)* in Walsall. [11998]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Data on the number of lymphoedema clinics across the United Kingdom are not collected either centrally or regionally.

We are aware of the following services available to patients in Walsall: Little Bloxwich day hospice has a full time specialist lymphoedema nurse who runs lymphoedema clinics; St Giles hospice has two lymphoedema nurses providing services.

Nuclear Accidents (Iodine)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what stocks of iodine doses are held against the possibility of nuclear accidents. [12616]

Jacqui Smith: The exact figure is not held centrally by the Department as stocks are held in locations close to operating nuclear installations, however, I have been advised that nearly three million tablets were produced in 1998 and are held by the various parts of the nuclear industry throughout the United Kingdom including Ministry of Defence sites.

Partnership Grant

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been paid to local authorities in 2001–02 under the partnership grant; and how much is allocated for 2002–03. [12363]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The partnership grant was last paid in 2000–01. It has been subsumed in the promoting independence grant, which amounts to £296 million in 2001–02 and is provisionally £862 million in 2002–03.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accountants there are in the planned establishment for the inspection function of the National Care Standards Commission; and how many have been recruited. [12342]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* There are no plans to recruit accountants within the inspection function of the National Care Standards Commission. The headquarters of the Commission has two posts requiring qualified accountants, one of whom has already been recruited. The Commission may seek external accountancy advice as necessary.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many claims for clinical negligence against the

NHS which went to trial were successful; and of these how many were *(a)* legal aid cases and *(b)* pursued on a no win, no fee basis, for the latest year for which figures are available; [11950]

(2) how many claims for clinical negligence against the NHS went to trial; and of these how many were *(a)* legal aid cases and *(b)* pursued on a no win, no fee basis for the latest year for which figures are available; [11949]

(3) how many claims for clinical negligence were *(a)* made against the NHS and *(b)* settled out of court; of these how many were (i) legal aid cases and (ii) pursued on a no win, no fee basis; how many went to trial; and of these how many were legal aid cases in the latest year for which figures are available. [11948]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Comprehensive data on the total number of clinical negligence claims are not collected centrally.

However, the national health service litigation authority handles clinical negligence claims made against the NHS under two risk pooling schemes, but only those at above certain values. Of the claims held by the NHS litigation authority on its database, there were 4,570 reported to the relevant NHS body in the year 2000–01.

The NHS litigation authority's database does not show whether cases are settled out of court or go to trial. However, the NHSLA estimates that approximately 95 per cent. of cases which they settle are done out of court. It is also not possible to distinguish from NHSLA data whether a case is funded by legal aid or under a conditional fee arrangement (no win, no fee). However, the NHSLA estimate that approximately 95 per cent. of all cases are legally aided, while the number being pursued under a conditional fee arrangement is limited to around a dozen.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost was to the NHS of clinical negligence cases in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and in each year what was the proportion paid in legal fees. [11953]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Figures on the amounts included in the National Audit Summarised Accounts for clinical negligence expenditure for the latest available years are as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1996–97	235
1997–98	144
1998–99	221
1999–2000	373

Source:
National health service summarised accounts for health authorities, NHS trusts and NHS litigation authority

Figures prior to 1996–97 are not available because clinical negligence was not separately identified in the accounts before that date.

Changes to accounting policies mean that these amounts are not directly comparable.

The summarised accounts do not show, and it is therefore not possible to break down, separately what proportion of these figures are for legal fees.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his latest estimate is of the annual cost to the NHS of a no-fault compensation scheme for clinical negligence. [11954]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* There are no reliable estimates of likely costs of no-fault compensation.

No-fault compensation is among the issues now being considered by the Chief Medical Officer's advisory committee looking at the options for reforming the system for dealing with clinical negligence claims. The Department has recently commissioned Professor Paul Fenn, Professor of insurance policy at the University of Nottingham, to conduct a study evaluating the potential cost of alternative systems for compensating patients.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many claims for clinical negligence were made against the NHS in each of the last five years, for which figures are available. [11951]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Comprehensive data on the total number of clinical negligence claims are not collected centrally.

However, the national health service litigation authority handles clinical negligence claims made against the NHS under two risk pooling schemes, but only those at above certain values. The NHS litigation authority does not hold data on whether a case is funded by legal aid or under a conditional fee arrangement (no-win no-fee). Of the claims held by the NHS litigation authority on its database, the information requested is set shown in the table:

Clinical negligence claims against the NHS

Year	*All claims*
1996–97	4,017
1997–98	6,711
1998–99	6,415
1999–2000	5,973
2000–01	4,570

Doctor Suicides

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the suicide rate was among NHS doctors in the latest 12 month period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [12600]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Avon Health Authority

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the proportion of the administrative budget of Avon health authority that will be transferred to *(a)* primary care trusts, *(b)* the Strategic Health Authority and *(c)* the regional Government office from April 2002. [12368]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Avon health authority is undertaking preliminary work on the transfer of budgets from the authority to those organisations that are assuming its functions. It is not, however, possible to provide robust estimates on final allocations until the functions and structures of each organisation are agreed in the new year.

Beta Interferon

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the mechanism by which patients will be able to participate in the extended clinical trials of the beta interferon drug. [12344]

Ms Blears: We are currently holding discussions with the manufacturers to consider a range of options under which drugs for multiple sclerosis might be made available under the national health service. One option is a risk-sharing scheme which will evaluate their clinical and cost effectiveness, and until these discussions are concluded we cannot provide the information requested.

Overseas Doctors

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what disciplinary regimes overseas doctor applicants to the NHS will be subject to while employed in the UK. [12709]

Mr. Hutton: In order to practise in the United Kingdom, all doctors must be registered with the General Medical Council.

Overseas hospital doctors employed in the national health service are subject to exactly the same disciplinary regimes as all other doctors. Also, overseas doctors working as general practitioners in the NHS are subject to the same disciplinary systems as other GPs.

Prescription Charges

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reassess the list of conditions exempt from prescription charges. [12721]

Ms Blears: We have no current plans to do so.

Mental Health Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many 24-hour mental health staff beds are in operation. [12768]

Jacqui Smith: Returns received indicate that there were approximately 4,300 24 hour staffed mental health beds at 31 March 2001. This is the latest date for which validated information is currently available.

24 hour staffed beds

		31 March 1999 position	*31 March 2000 position*	*Additional 24 hour staffed beds from 1998–99 to 1999–2000*	*31 March 2000 position (adjusted for changes in definition, boundaries and errors)*	*31 March 2001 position*	*Additional 24 hour staffed beds from 1999–2000 to 2000–01*
England		4,074	4,396	322	4,010	4,304	294
Northern and Yorkshire	Y01	938	1,074	136	872	829	–43
Trent	YO2	242	257	15	257	283	26
West Midlands	YO7	278	205	25	276	270	–6
North West	YO8	414	419	5	407	451	44
Eastern	YO9	313	439	126	439	557	118
London	Y10	774	881	107	703	832	129
South East	Y11	595	622	27	605	600	–5
South West	Y12	520	499	–21	451	481	30

Source:
Common Information Core 1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many assertive outreach mental health teams are in operation. [12769]

Jacqui Smith: Returns received indicate that there were 173 assertive outreach teams in operation as at 30 June 2001. This is the latest date for which information is currently available.

Children's Homes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were being looked after in children's homes in each year since 1997. [12706]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of children looked after by local councils in England at 31 March 1997–2001[1]

Years ending 31 March	*All children looked after*	*Children's homes*	
		Number	*Percentage*
1997	51,100	6,200	12
1998	53,300	6,100	11
1999	55,500	6,100	11
2000	58,100	6,300	11
2001	58,900	6,200	10

[1] Figures in this table exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements

Source:
CLA 100
SSDA 903

NHS National Plan

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the sponsors of the NHS national plan consultation leaflet and the public consultation to inform the NHS national plan. [12722]

Mr. Hutton: The Department funded the NHS national plan consultation leaflet and the public consultation to inform the NHS national plan. There were no sponsors involved.

Logos

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of developing the new logo for the Commission for Health Improvement. [12723]

Mr. Hutton: The cost of developing the logo for the Commission for Health Improvement was £2,115.

Prescription Pricing Authority

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the gross expenditure of the Prescription Pricing Authority was in relation to the monitoring of prescriptions in the last 12 months. [10781]

Ms Blears: The annual gross expenditure of the Prescription Pricing Authority for the financial year 2000–01 was £62,340,000. Included in this was the sum of £1,238,000 for monitoring patient compliance with the current prescription charging arrangements.

Chiropodists

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on behalf of independent private sector chiropodists and podiatrists in respect of the draft Health Professions Council Order; and if he will place them in the Library. [12782]

Mr. Hutton: We hope shortly to lay before the House a report on the outcome of consultations. We have no plans to publish individual responses, but their authors are free to do so.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to amend the draft Health Professions Council Order to provide for independent private sector chiropodists and podiatrists to be represented on the Health Professions Council; [12783]

(2) if he will appoint a representative of independent private sector chiropodists and podiatrists to the Health Professions Council. [12781]

Mr. Hutton: No. There is scope on the Health Professions Council for one registrant member of each profession regulated by the council. The council will be able to recruit additional members to its committees including its professional advisory panels, and will be encouraged to cover all sectors of the professions.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the level of expertise of chiropodists and podiatrists trained by the SMAE Institute. [12784]

Mr. Hutton: The assessment of qualifications for the purposes of state registration is a matter for the Chiropodists Board of the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine.

I can confirm however that officials have been facilitating meetings with the registered and unregistered sector, which includes the SMAE Institute, to open dialogue between the two sectors. An agreement was reached at the last meeting in October for the unregistered sector to submit their course documentation for assessment. So far no documentation has been received.

Cancer Services

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's target is, under the National Cancer Plan, for the number of CT scanners per thousand of the population. [11887]

Jacqui Smith: In 2000 there were approximately five machines per million head of population in England. By the time the investment programme in computer tomography scanners is completed in 2004 that figure will have risen to seven per million.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the criteria employed in determining which *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* cancer centres will receive help from the Cancer Capital Modernisation Fund CT Scanner Replacement Programme 2000 to 2003. [11886]

Jacqui Smith: The clear criterion announced in January 2000 was based on the age of the scanners in the national health service at that time. By 2004 all computer tomograpy scanners in the NHS will be no more than 10 years old.

No distinction was made in applying the above criterion between scanners for cancer centres and those for other hospitals.

Adoption

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were placed for adoption in each year since 1998 broken down by local authority as a percentage of the number *(a)* in care and *(b)* of the total population of 18 years and under. [12925]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table. The answer to part *(b)* of the question has been expressed as rates per 10,000 resident population aged 17 and under.

The numbers of adopted children increased from 2,200 in 1998–99 to 2,700 in 1999–2000 and 3,100 in 2000–01. This equated to 4.0 per cent. in the looked after population in 1998–99, 4.7 per cent. in 1999–2000 and 5.2 per cent. of the looked after population in 2000–01.

Number of looked after children placed for adoption at 31 March 1998 to 2001

England — *Number, percentage and rates per 10,000 population*

	1998			1999			2000			2001		
	Number	*% of all looked after children*	*Rate per 10,000 population*	*Number*	*% of all looked after children*	*Rate per 10,000 population*	*Number*	*% of all looked after children*	*Rate per 10,000 population*	*Number*	*% of all looked after children*	*Rate per 10,000 population*
England	2,410	5	2	2,880	5	3	3,135	5	3	3,420	6	3
North East Shire Counties												
Durham	15	3	1	15	3	1	10	2	1	35	7	3
Northumberland	20	6	3	20	6	3	10	3	1	10	3	1
Unitary Authorities												
Darlington	[1]—	1	[1]—	5	4	3	10	9	4	15	13	7
Hartlepool	10	11	4	5	6	3	10	9	4	10	7	4
Middlesbrough	20	11	5	10	5	2	5	3	2	20	8	5
Redcar and Cleveland	10	4	2	10	6	3	15	9	4	15	9	5
Stockton On Tees	15	10	4	10	6	2	10	4	2	10	4	2
Metropolitan Districts												
Gateshead	0	0	0	5	3	2	15	6	4	15	5	3
Newcastle Upon Tyne	40	10	7	45	10	7	25	5	4	40	9	7
North Tyneside	20	7	4	25	9	6	25	9	6	35	10	8
South Tyneside	5	2	2	10	3	3	25	8	6	15	5	4
Sunderland	35	9	5	40	10	6	40	9	6	45	9	7
North West Shire Counties												
Cheshire	10	2	1	20	4	1	30	7	2	35	8	2
Cumbria	40	7	4	30	7	3	40	8	4	30	6	3
Lancashire	20	2	1	40	3	1	50	3	2	60	5	2
Unitary Authorities												
Blackburn and Darwen	0	0	0	5	2	2	10	4	3	15	5	3
Blackpool	[1]—	1	1	10	4	3	5	2	2	30	10	10
Halton	0	0	0	5	5	2	10	5	3	10	5	3
Warrington	5	4	1	10	6	2	15	10	4	15	10	3
Metropolitan Districts												
Bolton	30	10	5	15	4	2	25	8	4	25	8	4
Bury	5	4	2	10	5	3	5	4	2	5	3	1
Manchester	30	3	3	55	5	5	65	5	6	85	7	8
Oldham	5	2	1	20	7	3	15	5	3	20	7	4
Rochdale	20	11	4	25	10	5	20	7	3	15	6	3
Salford	20	5	4	30	6	5	30	5	5	35	6	7
Stockport	20	8	3	20	6	3	15	5	2	20	5	3
Tameside	15	7	3	10	5	2	15	5	2	25	10	5
Trafford	10	6	2	15	8	3	5	3	1	10	6	2
Wigan	20	6	3	15	4	2	20	5	3	30	7	4
Merseyside Metropolitan Districts												
Knowsley	0	0	0	15	6	4	15	6	4	10	5	3
Liverpool	20	2	2	25	2	2	40	3	4	65	6	6
Sefton	10	4	1	10	4	2	10	3	1	15	5	3
St. Helens	20	8	5	25	9	6	25	10	6	30	11	8
Wirral	10	4	2	15	4	2	10	3	2	15	4	2
Yorkshire and Humberside Shire Counties												
North Yorkshire	30	9	2	20	6	2	5	1	[1]—	15	4	1
Unitary Authorities												
East Riding Yorkshire	[1]—	1	[1]—	10	5	1	10	5	2	20	10	3
Kingston Upon Hull	50	6	8	35	5	5	20	3	3	30	5	5
North East Lincolnshire	15	5	3	10	4	3	10	4	3	15	5	3
North Lincolnshire	20	10	6	5	3	2	10	4	2	5	3	2
York	15	13	4	10	7	2	20	14	5	10	7	3
Metropolitan Districts												
Barnsley	15	5	3	15	4	3	20	6	4	15	4	3
Bradford	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	8	4	30	5	3
Calderdale	5	2	1	5	2	1	10	5	2	10	4	2
Doncaster	15	4	2	30	8	4	25	6	4	35	8	5
Kirklees	10	4	1	15	5	2	25	8	3	35	11	3
Leeds	65	5	4	60	5	4	55	4	4	60	5	4
Rotherham	25	7	4	25	7	4	25	7	5	25	6	4
Sheffield	35	7	3	40	7	4	50	7	5	40	6	4
Wakefield	10	3	2	15	3	2	10	3	2	20	5	3
East Midlands Shire Counties												
Derbyshire	25	5	2	20	4	1	15	2	1	25	4	1
Leicestershire	10	4	1	10	4	1	10	3	1	10	3	1
Lincolnshire	10	2	1	50	10	4	65	13	5	85	16	6
Northamptonshire	35	6	2	35	6	3	45	8	3	35	6	2
Nottinghamshire	50	11	3	80	16	5	70	13	4	60	11	4
Unitary Authorities												
Derby	[1]—	1	1	10	3	2	15	3	2	30	7	5
Leicester	35	8	4	35	8	4	40	9	5	25	5	4
Nottingham	70	11	10	60	10	9	65	11	10	90	14	13
Rutland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	[1]—	8	1

Number of looked after children placed for adoption at 31 March 1998 to 2001

England — *Number, percentage and rates per 10,000 population*

	1998			1999			2000			2001		
	Number	% of all looked after children	Rate per 10,000 population	Number	% of all looked after children	Rate per 10,000 population	Number	% of all looked after children	Rate per 10,000 population	Number	% of all looked after children	Rate per 10,000 population
West Midlands Shire Counties												
Shropshire	10	7	1	20	11	3	10	5	2	5	4	1
Staffordshire	20	3	1	25	4	1	25	4	1	35	7	2
Warwickshire	5	2	1	10	3	1	15	4	1	10	3	1
Worcestershire	25	5	2	25	4	2	35	5	3	40	7	4
Unitary Authorities												
Herefordshire	10	5	3	10	5	3	15	7	3	—	2	1
Stoke-On-Trent	—	1	1	20	6	4	20	6	4	15	4	2
Telford and Wrekin	15	8	5	5	4	2	10	5	2	—	1	1
Metropolitan Districts												
Birmingham	75	5	3	70	4	3	95	6	4	80	5	3
Coventry	—	1	1	0	0	0	25	5	3	15	3	2
Dudley	10	4	2	10	3	2	10	2	1	20	6	3
Sandwell	20	4	3	15	3	2	10	2	1	20	4	3
Solihull	—	2	1	10	6	2	5	3	1	10	5	2
Walsall	0	0	0	25	7	4	25	7	4	25	6	4
Wolverhampton	—	1	1	10	3	2	20	5	3	30	7	5
South West Shire Counties												
Cornwall	25	4	2	30	6	3	40	7	4	20	3	2
Devon	35	6	2	40	6	3	35	5	2	30	4	2
Dorset	10	3	1	5	3	1	15	5	2	5	2	1
Gloucestershire	—	1	—	15	3	1	15	3	1	—	—	—
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Somerset	15	4	1	20	5	2	20	5	2	5	2	1
Wiltshire	5	2	1	10	4	1	—	1	0	5	2	1
Unitary Authorities												
Bath and NE Somerset	0	0	0	5	5	2	—	1	1	—	3	1
Bournemouth	15	7	5	10	5	3	0	0	0	—	1	1
Bristol	15	3	2	25	4	3	30	6	4	25	5	3
North Somerset	10	7	3	5	5	2	15	11	4	10	6	2
Plymouth	10	3	2	10	3	2	20	5	3	20	4	3
Poole	10	9	3	—	3	1	—	2	1	5	4	2
South Gloucestershire	10	5	1	—	1	—	5	4	1	5	4	1
Swindon	5	4	2	—	2	1	10	5	2	5	4	1
Torbay	—	1	1	5	3	3	5	2	2	10	4	4
Eastern Shire Counties												
Bedfordshire	25	8	3	20	6	2	25	7	3	20	6	2
Cambridgeshire	15	3	1	25	6	2	20	5	2	15	4	1
Essex	60	6	2	70	7	2	80	6	3	75	6	3
Hertfordshire	35	5	2	35	4	1	40	5	2	50	6	2
Norfolk	15	3	1	25	4	2	25	4	2	45	6	3
Suffolk	15	3	1	25	5	2	30	5	2	30	5	2
Unitary Authorities												
Luton	10	5	2	10	4	2	15	5	3	10	3	2
Peterborough	15	5	4	15	5	4	15	4	4	30	9	8
Southend	15	5	3	15	6	4	10	4	2	10	5	3
Thurrock	5	6	2	10	7	4	10	5	3	10	6	3
Inner London												
Camden	30	9	8	25	8	7	30	9	8	35	11	9
City of London	0	0	0	0	0	0	00	0	0	0	0	0
Greenwich	40	10	7	30	7	5	30	7	6	20	4	4
Hackney	10	2	2	10	3	2	20	4	3	15	3	3
Hammersmith and Fulham	25	8	8	20	6	7	20	5	6	25	6	8
Islington	—	1	1	25	5	6	15	3	4	15	3	4
Kensington and Chelsea	10	5	4	10	4	3	15	7	4	5	3	2
Lambeth	30	5	5	35	5	5	40	5	6	30	4	5
Lewisham	25	6	5	30	6	5	15	3	3	25	4	4
Southwark	—	—	—	15	3	3	35	6	6	50	8	9
Tower Hamlets	15	6	3	10	4	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	20	7	4
Wandsworth	25	7	5	15	5	3	20	6	4	20	5	4
Westminster	30	10	8	25	9	7	25	9	7	20	7	5
Outer London												
Barking and Dagenham	—	1	—	10	5	2	10	3	2	10	3	2
Barnet	—	2	—	5	3	1	10	4	1	10	4	1
Bexley	10	5	2	10	6	2	10	6	2	15	8	3
Brent	15	5	3	15	5	2	15	5	3	15	5	3
Bromley	20	8	3	10	4	2	—	1	—	15	5	2
Croydon	30	9	4	15	5	2	20	5	3	15	4	2
Ealing	10	3	1	0	0	0	25	5	3	35	9	5
Enfield	—	1	—	20	7	3	25	10	4	25	9	4
Haringey	10	3	2	10	3	2	15	4	3	20	4	4
Harrow	5	5	1	15	8	3	10	5	2	10	4	2
Havering	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	5	2	—	3	1
Hillingdon	10	3	1	20	6	3	15	3	2	20	5	3

Number of looked after children placed for adoption at 31 March 1998 to 2001

England — *Number, percentage and rates per 10,000 population*

	1998			1999			2000			2001		
	Number	*% of all looked after children*	*Rate per 10,000 population*	*Number*	*% of all looked after children*	*Rate per 10,000 population*	*Number*	*% of all looked after children*	*Rate per 10,000 population*	*Number*	*% of all looked after children*	*Rate per 10,000 population*
Hounslow	0	1	1	15	6	3	10	3	2	15	5	3
Kingston upon Thames	0	0	0	10	10	3	5	5	2	[1]—	4	1
Merton	0	0	0	[1]—	2	1	10	5	2	10	6	2
Newham	10	2	1	20	4	3	25	5	3	25	5	4
Redbridge	10	6	2	20	13	3	15	10	3	20	14	3
Richmond upon Thames	[1]—	2	1	[1]—	4	1	5	5	1	5	6	2
Sutton	20	19	5	10	6	2	10	8	3	10	6	2
Waltham Forest	[1]—	1	1	5	3	1	10	2	1	15	6	3
South East Shire Counties												
Buckinghamshire	20	8	2	25	10	2	10	4	1	10	4	1
East Sussex	20	4	2	20	5	2	45	10	4	35	7	3
Hampshire	55	8	2	40	5	1	45	5	2	50	6	2
Kent	60	5	2	65	5	2	65	4	2	105	6	3
Oxfordshire	30	6	2	45	10	3	35	7	2	45	10	3
Surrey	45	7	2	85	13	4	55	8	2	50	7	2
West Sussex	40	6	3	40	6	2	35	4	2	40	6	3
Unitary Authorities												
Bracknell Forest	5	8	2	5	10	3	10	14	3	5	10	3
Brighton and Hove	20	6	4	25	7	5	20	6	4	30	8	6
Isle of Wight	5	4	2	[1]—	1	[1]—	10	5	3	10	7	5
Medway Towns	5	2	1	25	8	4	35	11	6	15	5	3
Milton Keynes	10	2	2	25	8	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	3	1
Portsmouth	[1]—	1	1	10	5	3	15	6	3	15	6	4
Reading	[1]—	1	[1]—	[1]—	1	1	15	13	5	15	12	5
Slough	0	0	0	[1]—	3	1	5	4	2	15	9	5
Southampton	20	6	4	25	6	5	30	8	7	15	4	3
West Berkshire	5	5	1	5	5	2	[1]—	2	1	5	6	2
Windsor and Maidenhead	[1]—	5	1	[1]—	3	1	10	9	3	5	7	2
Woking	10	12	3	10	11	3	5	7	2	10	9	2

[1] Less than five (for numbers) or 0.5 (for rates or percentages)
Figures have been rounded to the nearest five
n/a = not available

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 7 November 2001

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Consulate (Punjab)

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made to establish the British Consulate Office in Jallander, Punjab. [12540]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 667W.

Visas

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for a visa to visit family members in the UK were refused in each month since 1 October 2000. [13056]

Mr. Bradshaw: Statistical information on the number of family visit applications refused on a monthly basis is only available from those posts that provide monthly statistical information (107 largest posts in 2000 and 110 in 2001). These figures are as follows:

Month	*Received*	*Refused*
2000		
October	11,850	2,022
November	14,334	1,897
December	12,470	1,283
2001		
January	13,612	2,276
February	16,182	1,775
March	20,811	4,205
April	22,486	3,978
May	32,143	5,177
June	32,168	5,610
July	36,866	5,870
August	28,820	5,129
September	15,737	3,225
Total	257,479	42,447

The remaining posts submit information on an annual basis, which is not broken down into months. To answer this question for all 165 posts we would have to ask those additional posts manually to extract the information requested. This could be done only at disproportionate cost.

New Partnership for African Development

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial commitments the Government have made to the New African Initiative; and if he will make a statement. [13120]

Mr. Bradshaw: The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD—formerly known as the New African Initiative) will require a broad international response, ranging from support to some of NEPAD's programmatic elements to action in the EU, OECD, UN and other international forums. No specific financial commitments have yet been made.

The Prime Minister has appointed Baroness Amos as his Personal Representative in developing a G8 Action Plan for Africa to be adopted at the 2002 G8 Summit in Canada. The first meeting of G8 Heads of State Personal Representatives was held in London on 17–19 October. They agreed to consult widely with other development partners, with the private sector, civil society and international organisations. They have further meetings planned which will include dialogue with African partners. The elements in the Action Plan will be evolved in the context of these meetings.

Afghan Women (Suicides)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has *(a)* received and *(b)* made concerning the number of suicides among Afghan women. [13121]

Mr. Bradshaw: Although we have received no specific representations on this issue, we have, through our High Commission in Islamabad, made numerous and regular representations to the Taliban on women's rights in Afghanistan.

International Criminal Court

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are being made to publicise the United Kingdom's policies on international humanitarian law, with particular reference to the International Criminal Court. [13195]

Peter Hain: On 4 October the Foreign and Commonwealth Office issued a publication entitled "United Kingdom and International Humanitarian Law", whose appearance was timed to coincide with United Kingdom ratification of the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court. The publication, which has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, describes the United Kingdom's policy regarding the International Criminal Court itself, in addition to a number of other important areas of international humanitarian law.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Education Funding

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the proportion of total education spending on primary and secondary education delivered through *(a)* Education Standard Spending assessment allocations and *(b)* other central Government funding streams for each of the last five years. [10820]

Mr. Timms: The table provides the information requested. It compares funding through the primary, secondary and post-16 sub-blocks of Education Standard Spending with DfES grant funding through the Standards

Fund (DfES revenue grant only), School Standards Grant, Teachers' Pay Grants, Education Action Zone programme, School Budget Support Grant and Education Budget Support Grant.

Percentage

Year	*Primary, secondary, and post-16 ESS sub-blocks*	*DfES grant funding*
1997–98	99	1
1998–99	98	2
1999–2000	96	4
2000–01	91	9
2001–02	88	12

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 456W, on education spending, what proportion of total spending on education was devolved to schools and colleges in each of the past 10 years. [12163]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not available on a comparable basis across this period.

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cost of performance-related pay is to date, divided between *(a)* payments to staff and *(b)* administration costs; how many teachers have received performance-related pay; how many teachers who applied for performance-related pay failed to meet the necessary criteria; and if she will make a statement. [11486]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Over 200,000 teachers in England applied to cross the performance threshold in the first round, some 80 per cent. of those who were eligible to apply. Of these, nearly 195,000 were assessed as meeting the threshold standards and are now receiving over £400 million per year in associated pay increases.

The Department has contracts with Cambridge Education Associates (CEA) for the provision of threshold assessors and external advisers to governing bodies on heads' performance and with the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) for training in threshold assessment and performance management. For the first round CEA contract costs have been around £22 to £24 million and CfBT contract costs about £12 to £14 million.

Free School Meals

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in each local authority which retains grammar schools, what proportion of children received free school meals *(a)* in that local authority as a whole, *(b)* in each grammar school within the authority and *(c)* in other secondary schools within the authority, at the latest date for which figures are available. [11627]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Information showing free school meals figures for grammar schools and other secondary schools for each local education authority is contained in the following tables.

It is not departmental policy not to release individual school data unless the school has had the opportunity to check it. Schools have not had the opportunity to check their free school meals data.

Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in grammar schools and other maintained secondary school by government office region—January 2001

	Grammar schools				*Other maintained secondary schools*			
	Number of schools	*Day pupils*	*Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Number of schools*	*Day pupils*	*Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*
England	159	141,478	3,393	2.4	3,322	3,085,495	506,283	16.4
North East								
Darlington	0	0	0	0.0	7	6,009	949	15.8
Durham	0	0	0	0.0	36	32,158	5,762	17.9
Gateshead	0	0	0	0.0	10	12,043	2,606	21.6
Hartlepool	0	0	0	0.0	6	6,679	1,726	25.8
Middlesbrough	0	0	0	0.0	11	8,572	3,070	35.8
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	0	0	0	0.0	21	18,071	4,573	25.3
North Tyneside	0	0	0	0.0	20	14,174	2,498	17.6
Northumberland	0	0	0	0.0	60	30,478	3,693	12.1
Redcar and Cleveland	0	0	0	0.0	13	10,352	2,361	22.8
South Tyneside	0	0	0	0.0	11	10,508	2,535	24.1
Stockton-on-Tees	0	0	0	0.0	13	12,793	2,557	20.0
Sunderland	0	0	0	0.0	17	19,837	5,956	30.0
North West								
Blackburn with Darwen	0	0	0	0.0	9	9,501	2,469	26.0
Blackpool	0	0	0	0.0	8	7,824	1,721	22.0
Bolton	0	0	0	0.0	16	19,145	2,973	15.5
Bury	0	0	0	0.0	14	11,731	1,754	15.0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0.0	45	46,239	4,605	10.0
Cumbria	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
Halton	0	0	0	0.0	9	8,688	2,083	24.0
Knowsley	0	0	0	0.0	11	10,240	4,612	45.0
Lancashire	4	3,995	117	2.9	85	70,819	11,065	15.6
Liverpool	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
Manchester	0	0	0	0.0	23	23,477	10,286	43.8
Oldham	0	0	0	0.0	15	16,825	3,693	21.9
Rochdale	0	0	0	0.0	14	14,154	3,565	25.2

Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in grammar schools and other maintained secondary school by government office region—January 2001

	Grammar schools				Other maintained secondary schools			
	Number of schools	*Day pupils*	*Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Number of schools*	*Day pupils*	*Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*
Salford	0	0	0	0.0	16	12,524	3,209	25.6
Sefton	0	0	0	0.0	22	20,676	4,093	19.8
St. Helens	0	0	0	0.0	12	12,159	2,331	19.2
Stockport	0	0	0	0.0	14	16,575	2,325	14.0
Tameside	0	0	0	0.0	18	15,368	3,096	20.1
Trafford	7	6,731	266	4.0	11	9,116	2,175	23.9
Warrington	0	0	0	0.0	12	13,833	1,400	10.1
Wigan	0	0	0	0.0	21	20,855	3,056	14.7
Wirral	4	4,350	237	5.4	19	19,831	6,219	31.4
Yorkshire and the Humber								
Barnsley	0	0	0	0.0	14	13,134	3,240	24.7
Bradford	0	0	0	0.0	27	34,214	9,160	26.8
Calderdale	2	1,988	43	2.2	13	12,896	2,430	18.8
Doncaster	0	0	0	0.0	17	21,378	3,829	17.9
East Riding of Yorkshire	0	0	0	0.0	18	22,627	1,943	8.5
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	0	0	0	0.0	16	16,012	4,324	27.0
Kirklees	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
Leeds	0	0	0	0.0	43	47,168	8,482	18.0
North East Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0.0	12	11,735	2,421	20.6
North Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0.0	14	10,649	1,435	13.5
North Yorkshire	3	1,954	25	1.3	44	38,262	2,554	6.7
Rotherham	0	0	0	0.0	17	19,845	3,145	15.8
Sheffield	0	0	0	0.0	27	29,861	5,974	20.0
Wakefield	0	0	0	0.0	18	21,279	3,619	17.0
York	0	0	0	0.0	11	9,974	887	8.9
East Midlands								
Derby	0	0	0	0.0	14	14,748	2,976	20.2
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0.0	47	47,828	5,109	10.7
Leicester	0	0	0	0.0	16	18,034	4,027	22.3
Leicestershire	0	0	0	0.0	54	44,659	3,081	6.9
Lincolnshire	15	11,987	213	1.8	48	32,006	3,482	10.9
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0.0	60	49,192	5,285	10.7
Nottingham	0	0	0	0.0	20	13,910	5,168	37.2
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0.0	58	54,980	6,978	12.7
Rutland	0	0	0	0.0	3	2,255	113	5.0
West Midlands								
Birmingham	8	6,694	333	5.0	69	62,345	22,554	36.2
Coventry	0	0	0	0.0	19	20,963	4,223	20.1
Dudley	0	0	0	0.0	22	19,938	2,995	15.0
Herefordshire	0	0	0	0.0	14	9,824	779	7.9
Sandwell	0	0	0	0.0	20	19,532	4,740	24.3
Shropshire	0	0	0	0.0	22	17,606	1,422	8.1
Solihull	0	0	0	0.0	13	15,586	1,875	12.0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0.0	69	60,934	5,625	9.2
Stoke-on-Trent	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
Telford and Wrekin	2	898	10	1.1	11	9,280	2,023	21.8
Walsall	2	1,369	32	2.3	18	20,015	3,641	18.2
Warwickshire	5	3,180	31	1.0	32	29,478	2,462	8.4
Wolverhampton	0	0	0	0.0	18	16,541	3,710	22.4
Worcestershire	0	0	0	0.0	61	40,308	4,140	10.3
East of England								
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	0.0	57	36,987	3,735	10.1
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0.0	31	31,023	2,425	7.8
Essex	4	3,014	23	0.8	75	83,237	8,578	10.3
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0.0	86	75,824	5,605	7.4
Luton	0	0	0	0.0	12	12,077	3,251	26.9
Norfolk	0	0	0	0.0	52	44,383	4,759	10.7
Peterborough	0	0	0	0.0	13	12,961	2,271	17.5
Southend-on-Sea	4	3,726	88	2.4	8	7,641	1,401	18.3
Suffolk	0	0	0	0.0	78	53,033	5,566	10.5
Thurrock	0	0	0	0.0	10	8,126	1,243	15.3
Inner London								
Camden	0	0	0	0.0	10	10,870	3,137	28.9
City of London	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Hackney	0	0	0	0.0	9	7,921	3,514	44.4
Hammersmith and Fulham	0	0	0	0.0	8	7,181	2,374	33.1
Haringey	0	0	0	0.0	11	11,391	4,584	40.2
Islington	0	0	0	0.0	9	7,583	3,461	45.6

Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in grammar schools and other maintained secondary school by government office region—January 2001

	Grammar schools				Other maintained secondary schools			
	Number of schools	*Day pupils*	*Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Number of schools*	*Day pupils*	*Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0	0	0.0	4	3,665	1,164	31.8
Lambeth	0	0	0	0.0	10	7,213	3,011	41.7
Lewisham	0	0	0	0.0	13	11,661	4,621	39.6
Newham	0	0	0	0.0	15	17,469	7,839	44.9
Southwark	0	0	0	0.0	13	10,221	5,401	52.8
Tower Hamlets	0	0	0	0.0	15	14,087	9,173	65.1
Wandsworth	0	0	0	0.0	9	9,948	2,670	26.8
Westminster	0	0	0	0.0	8	8,021	2,635	32.9
Outer London								
Barking and Dagenham	0	0	0	0.0	8	11,079	2,879	26.0
Barnet	3	2,531	26	1.0	18	18,542	3,279	17.7
Bexley	4	4,382	151	3.4	12	13,080	2,065	15.8
Brent	0	0	0	0.0	13	14,480	3,554	24.5
Bromley	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Croydon	0	0	0	0.0	21	17,396	3,375	19.4
Ealing	0	0	0	0.0	13	13,940	4,355	31.2
Enfield	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Greenwich	0	0	0	0.0	14	13,834	4,646	33.6
Harrow	0	0	0	0.0	10	8,874	1,556	17.5
Havering	0	0	0	0.0	18	15,904	1,766	11.1
Hillingdon	0	0	0	0.0	17	16,472	2,440	14.8
Hounslow	0	0	0	0.0	14	16,292	3,213	19.7
Kingston upon Thames	2	1,891	15	0.8	8	6,748	775	11.5
Merton	0	0	0	0.0	11	7,754	1,262	16.3
Redbridge	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Richmond upon Thames	0	0	0	0.0	8	7,531	1,180	15.7
Sutton	5	4,629	51	1.1	9	9,951	1,081	10.9
Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0.0	16	12,980	3,887	29.9
South East								
Bracknell Forest	0	0	0	0.0	6	6,022	289	4.8
Brighton and Hove	0	0	0	0.0	10	12,026	2,112	17.6
Buckinghamshire	13	14,513	179	1.2	21	18,703	2,035	10.9
East Sussex	0	0	0	0.0	26	27,807	3,635	13.1
Hampshire	0	0	0	0.0	71	70,564	4,628	6.6
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0.0	21	11,920	1,989	16.7
Kent	33	29,140	634	2.2	72	63,852	8,475	13.3
Medway	6	5,988	186	3.1	14	13,849	1,764	12.7
Milton Keynes	0	0	0	0.0	11	12,058	1,438	11.9
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0.0	45	38,271	3,641	9.5
Portsmouth	0	0	0	0.0	10	10,108	1,629	16.1
Reading	2	1,447	7	0.5	6	4,833	816	16.9
Slough	4	3,585	177	4.9	7	4,340	1,053	24.3
Southampton	0	0	0	0.0	14	12,235	2,110	17.2
Surrey	0	0	0	0.0	53	56,224	3,449	6.1
West Berkshire	0	0	0	0.0	10	11,747	556	4.7
West Sussex	0	0	0	0.0	39	42,818	2,962	6.9
Windsor and Maidenhead	0	0	0	0.0	13	10,207	573	5.6
Wokingham	0	0	0	0.0	9	10,758	509	4.7
South East								
Bath and North East Somerset	0	0	0	0.0	13	12,273	969	7.9
Bournemouth	2	2,077	35	1.7	8	7,693	1,008	13.1
Bristol, City of	0	0	0	0.0	20	17,907	3,669	20.5
Cornwall	0	0	0	0.0	31	32,001	3,905	12.2
Devon	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Dorset	0	0	0	0.0	37	29,245	1,807	6.2
Gloucestershire	7	5,407	100	1.8	35	32,758	2,575	7.9
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0.0	1	95	6	6.3
North Somerset	0	0	0	0.0	10	12,269	958	7.8
Plymouth	3	2,645	82	3.1	15	16,184	2,547	15.7
Poole	2	1,879	32	1.7	7	6,318	560	8.9
Somerset	0	0	0	0.0	39	30,787	2,773	9.0
South Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0.0	14	16,442	1,238	7.5
Swindon	0	0	0	0.0	10	11,561	1,084	9.4
Torbay	3	2,697	101	3.7	5	6,011	1,109	18.4
Wiltshire	2	1,668	8	0.5	32	26,363	1,820	6.9

[1] These local education authorities only have one specialist secondary school. It is Departmental policy not to release individual school level information unless the school has had the opportunity to check or confirm that information. Schools have not had the opportunity to check their free school meals data.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many employees of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* agencies sponsored by her Department work in (i) London, (ii) areas benefiting from EU Objective 1 status, (iii) areas with Objective 2 status and (iv) other areas. [12244]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The number of permanent employees in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) who work in:

(a) London is 2,037;

(b) areas benefiting from EU Objective 1 status is 1,134;

(c) areas with Objective 2 status is 129;

(d) other areas is 972.

711 permanent staff also employed by DfES work throughout the Government office network. A breakdown into the above categories could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

DfEs has no agencies.

High Quality Teaching

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how she will monitor expenditure on rewarding high quality teaching over the next three years; and if she will publish the results. [12310]

Mr. Timms: We are currently providing funding to support teachers' performance pay through special grants paid to local authorities. A requirement of special grants is that they are fully and properly audited. Auditors appointed by the local authority make certain that the funds are spent for the purposes for which they are paid. Local authorities are required to provide me with copies of these audits. The new special grant, providing £250 million to support performance pay across the period April 2002 to 2004, will be subject to these same audit requirements.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list overseas visits undertaken by Ministers in the *(a)* Department for Education and Employment and *(b)* Department for Education and Skills since 1 May 1997. [12333]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The overseas visits undertaken by Ministers since 1 May 1997 are as follows:

Department for Education and Employment—Secretary of State: 18;

Ministers of State for Employment: 48;

Ministers of State for school standards: 5;

Minister of State for education and employment in the Lords: 41;

Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State for school standards:4;

Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State for employment and equal opportunities: 11;

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for lifelong learning: 17;

Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State for learning and technology: 4.

Department for Education and Skills—Minister of State for lifelong learning and higher education: 1;

Minister for school standards: 1.

All travel complied with the requirements of the "Ministerial Code" and "Travel by Ministers".

Qualified Teacher Status

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what minimum level of qualifications is required for teachers without qualified teacher status in maintained schools. [12365]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Decisions on the suitability of the qualifications held by applicants for employment as teachers in maintained schools are matters for the professional judgments of head teachers taking into account the legal requirements of the Education (Teachers' Qualifications and Health Standards) (England) Regulations 1999 as amended.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed sixth forms since 1997. [12403]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Since 1997 proposals have been approved to open 27 school sixth forms and close 13 school sixth forms.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many sixth forms have closed since 1997. [12973]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Thirteen proposals for the closure of school sixth forms have been approved since 1997.

Recruitment

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people, with respect to Annexe A of her Department's press release "Recruitment to Teacher Training Hits Seven Year High" of 1 November, are already registered; and what estimate she has made of how many will be registered in the rest of the year. [13106]

Mr. Timms: The figures published on 1 November comprised the results of the Teacher Training Agency's annual survey of training providers. As in previous years, these included both the numbers of trainees recruited to courses up to and including 11 October 2001, and providers' estimates of the numbers expected to start training later in the 2001–02 academic year. The Agency's survey showed 28,966 recruits to training, including 1,719 people expected to begin their courses in the spring and summer 2002 terms.

The estimate of recruitment for 2000–01 that my right hon. Friend published on 20 November 2000 was 0.25 per cent. lower than final recruitment for that year.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside her Department. [13143]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There have been no detected cases of computer hacking, either by insiders or by persons outside of the Department in either 2000 or 2001. There were four cases of insider fraud in each of the years in question. There were three cases of theft of IT equipment by insiders from Departmental offices in 2000 and one case in 2001.

School Governors (Reports)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will reduce the level of detail required in the annual reports produced by school governors. [13252]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Yes, we shall. Earlier this year we consulted on reducing the requirements within both governor's annual reports and school prospectuses, and on the possibility of schools combining these two documents. Following that consultation, we are proceeding with streamlining the requirements and making it easier for schools that choose to do so to combine the two documents. We aim to amend the relevant regulations and send revised guidance to schools early in the new year.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by her Department; if she will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans she has to sell further such assets over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review; and if she will make a statement. [10847]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The stocks of antiques, paintings and fine wines held by the Department are as follows: There have been no assets sold over the last three years and there are no plans to sell further such assets over the period of the current Spending Review.

Site: Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith street, London.

Assets: Suite of Cuban mahogany furniture, inlaid with holly, currently on loan to "The Lake District Art Gallery and Museum Trust" to provide conference room and office furnishings for Blackwell.

Value: Insurance value of £5,000

Site: Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith street, London.

Assets: Six antique clocks, currently in secure storage.

Value: £500 each

Site: Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith street, London.

Assets: 40 paintings and prints, currently on display throughout the building.

Value: Total value of £7,000

Site: Caxton House, Tothill street, London.

Assets: 118 paintings (mainly student works), currently on display throughout the building.

Value: Total value of £19,451.

Individual Learning Accounts (Bromley)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people in the borough of Bromley had individual learning accounts; how many account holders were the victims of fraud; and what plans there are to allow Beckenham account holders to complete the training plans they had begun. [12697]

John Healey: On the basis of the recorded postcode information available, by 31 October 2001, 12,015 people in the borough of Bromley had opened an individual learning account through the national framework launched on 4 September 2000.

The police have made 30 arrests in England involving four individual learning account (ILA) providers registered at the ILA centre. No allegations of fraud have yet been brought to court.

The individual learning account centre will continue to accept and process bookings for learning up until 7 December 2001, for all present members. The learning start date to which the bookings relate must be within six months of the date of booking. Learners do not have a deadline in which to complete an episode of learning.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if depleted uranium has been used by *(a)* US and *(b)* British forces in Afghanistan. [12694]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 27–28W, to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart).

Service Pensions

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the pension paid is to *(a)* a retired Gurkha and *(b)* a similar ranking British ex-service man, in money terms and as a percentage; [13013]

(2) if he will make a statement on how pensions are paid to retired Gurkhas. [13012]

Dr. Moonie: Because of their different engagements and career structures, comparing Gurkha and British solider pensions in this way is particularly difficult. 87 per cent. of Gurkhas are discharged in Nepal after 15 years' service and receive an immediate pension. British soldiers discharged at this time would receive no pension until they reached the age of 60.

The only British and Gurkha rank likely to be discharged at the same point of service is a Warrant Officer Class 1 after 22 years. In this instance, a Gurkha receives an immediate annual pension of £1,672, or 16 per cent. of the £10,283 paid to comparable British ex-servicemen. The difference reflects the Tripartite Agreement between the Governments of the United Kingdom, Nepal and India, and the cost of living in Nepal, where all Gurkhas are discharged. In the Nepalese economy, Gurkha pensions now compare favourably with professional salaries.

The way in which Gurkha ex-service men receive their pensions depends upon the region in which they live. Those based to the main population centres in Nepal are able to receive their pension either directly into bank accounts or from one of the three Pension Paying Offices

in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Itahari. These are manned on a full-time basis and the majority of ex-Gurkhas opt to receive their pension this way.

Nepal has poor communications, however, and we recognise that the arrangements above do not cater for residents of the more rural and remote areas. For this reason, Gurkha pensions are also paid quarterly, in cash, via Area Welfare Centres. There are 24 of these located throughout Nepal, but concentrated near the main ex-Gurkha populations centres where there are often no banking facilities. Nepal's topography, inclement weather and poor infrastructure, means that it is inevitable that some pensioners will still have to undertake long journeys in order to collect their pension. These difficulties are minimised as far as possible and, where necessary, special arrangements are put in place to enable pensions to be collected on behalf of the sick or infirm.

A400M Project

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent the withdrawal by Italy from the A400M project will mean a change in contribution from the UK; and if he will make a statement. [12913]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W. If Italy stands by the decision it took last month not to continue with the A400M programme at present, the total number of aircraft in the initial order will fall from 212 to 196.

The final price of the A400M aircraft has yet to be agreed with the contractor. While it is reasonable to assume that such a reduction in overall aircraft numbers will increase our contribution to programme costs, reductions achieved in other aspects of the price negotiation may counterbalance that increase. Accordingly, we do not expect to identify a discrete cost increase associated with Italian withdrawal, should that be confirmed in due course.

Future Aircraft Carrier

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much extra funding is needed for the next phase of the UK's Future Aircraft Carrier programme; and if he will make a statement. [11783]

Dr. Moonie: We are currently discussing the CVF procurement strategy with both candidate prime contractors, BAE Systems and Thales Naval Ltd. We hope to be in a position to make an announcement about the way forward in the next few weeks. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment on funding for the programme at this time.

Army Pensions

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the compensation he proposes to pay to *(a)* Army pensioners, *(b)* Army widows and *(c)* estates which have wrongly had income tax deducted by his Department from their invalidity pensions. [13141]

Dr. Moonie: Individuals wrongly taxed receive a refund of tax and an extra amount as compensation for the delay. The Inland Revenue calls this additional payment a repayment supplement. The Income Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (Section 824) governs the way the Inland Revenue calculates the repayment supplement. The precise formula is set out in Statutory Instrument No 1297 of 1989.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he will take to identify *(a)* Army pensioners, *(b)* Army widows and *(c)* estates which have wrongly had income tax deducted by his Department from their invalidity pensions. [13140]

Dr. Moonie: Following the discovery of a taxation error affecting Army invaliding pensions in 1998, we have manually trawled through individuals' pension files, including widows and dependants, and publicised the matter through the ex-service organisations and the War Widows Association. This publicity has included articles in their journals and circulars. All those identified as being incorrectly taxed, except a small number currently under investigation, have received a full refund with compensation. The Ministry of Defence has no plans to undertake further action on this matter.

Territorial Army

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria he uses to determine whether Territorial Army personnel are fit for role. [13142]

Dr. Moonie: Individual members of the Territorial Army (TA) are considered fit for role when they have completed two phases of training. Phase 1 is recruit training, which is either delivered in a two-week package or over a series of weekends. Phase 2 is to prepare them to a standard at which they can train with their unit, and this phase will vary in length depending on an individual's role and trade.

TREASURY

VAT (Home Repairs)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library documents relating to studies concerning the lowering of VAT for home repairs and renovations undertaken by his Department in the last five years. [13058]

Mr. Boateng: It would be inappropriate to publish research relating to internal policy analysis, in accordance with exemption 2 of the code of practice on access to government information.

Excise Duties

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of offences concerning excise duties in the single market how many people were sentenced; what were the total of sentences passed, broken down by months; what the total sum of *(a)* court fines and costs and *(b)* compound settlements was; how many vehicles were seized; and how much was paid for restoration in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02 to date. [11172]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* For vehicle seizures in 1999–2000, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer the Paymaster General gave on 15 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 125W, and for 2000–01 and 2001–02, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave

him on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 624W. Information for 1999–2000, in relation to excise duties or the single market, on how many people were sentenced, what the total of sentences passed was, broken down by months, what the total sum of fines, costs and compound penalties were is contained in the Customs and Excise annual report for 1999–2000, presented to Parliament in March 2000. The same information for 2000–01 will be published in the Customs and Excise annual report for 2000–01, which will be published shortly. The figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of strategic exports to *(a)* strategic and *(b)* other destinations were detected by HM Customs and Excise in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02 to date. [11163]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The number of detections of strategic and proliferation goods to sensitive and other destinations during the financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 were as follows:

	Number
To sensitive destinations	
1999–2000	238
2000–01	188
To other destinations	
1999–2000	245
2000–01	232

The figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were searched by HM Customs and Excise officers under section 164 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date. [11176]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Figures for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are not yet available. In 1999–2000, HM Customs and Excise conducted 19,246 searches under section 164 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of exports involving breaches of UN sanctions were detected by Customs and Excise in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date. [11164]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The number of exports in breach of UN sanctions detected by HM Customs and Excise during the financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 were 27 and 38 respectively. Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the value of revenue evasion *(a)* generally, *(b)* of customs duties and *(c)* of common agricultural policy export refunds, that were prevented by HM Customs and Excise in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [11124]

Mr. Boateng: The total VAT and excise revenue evasion prevented by Customs and Excise in 1999–2000 was published in the Customs and Excise annual report. For the year 2000–01, the figure will be published in the Customs and Excise annual report that will be published in due course.

HM Customs and Excise does not calculate the revenue evasion prevented for customs duties and common agricultural policy export refunds.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* people were sentenced and *(b)* prison sentences were passed, broken down by month and what was the total of (i) court fines and costs and (ii) company settlements in respect of Customs and Excise non-fiscal prohibitions and restrictions in (1) 1999–2000, (2) 2000–01 and (3) 2001–02. [11131]

Mr. Boateng: This information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Terrorism (Departmental Spending)

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what *(a)* proportion and *(b)* amount of all spending by Departments on the action against terrorism he forecasts will be met in the current financial year from funds in the reserves; [10258]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of the costs which he forecasts will arise over the current financial year as a direct result of the war on terrorism for each Department directly affected. [10294]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* It would be inappropriate to forecast the costs of operations and other related activities at this stage.

Railtrack

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the loss to UK pension funds of the suspension of shares in Railtrack. [8394]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The value of Railtrack shares at the time of administration was around £1.5 billion, and no institutional investor held more than 5 per cent. of the shares at the time of administration.

The Government are actively working with the board of Railtrack Group to assist shareholders in achieving fair value for assets they hold.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he was told that a decision had been taken that Railtrack was to go into administration. [8395]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Chancellor was informed of the decision that Railtrack would go into administration on Friday evening, 5 October.

Terrorist Finance Unit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additional expenditure he plans to make to support the work of the new asset tracking unit; how many staff it will have; and when it will be operational. [11268]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The costs of the terrorist finance unit will be met from within existing spending plans. It will initially have eight staff and is expected to become fully operational by 30 November 2001.

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* persons registered for VAT, *(b)* repayment traders, *(c)* new VAT registrations and *(d)* VAT deregistrations there were and what the net increase or decrease in the register was in the financial years (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02 to the most recent date for which information is available. [11376]

Mr. Boateng: The data for the information requested for the year 1999–2000 can be found in Customs and Excise annual report. Figures for 2000–01 will be published in Customs and Excise annual report in November 2001.

The latest information was placed in the House of Commons Library in September 2001 in the form of a VAT fact sheet, which is produced every four months.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportions of average household expenditure were *(a)* taxable at the standard rate of VAT, *(b)* taxable at the reduced rate of VAT, *(c)* taxable at the zero rate of VAT and *(d)* exempt from VAT in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, (iii) 2000 and (iv) at the most recent date for which information is available. [11371]

Mr. Boateng: The figures for 1998–99 are published in table C7 of the tables and statistics accompanying the Customs and Excise annual report. Figures for 1999–2000 are available on the Customs and Excise website www.hmce.gov.uk/general/about/index.htm.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was of each of the structural reliefs for VAT in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01; and what his estimate is of the cost of each such relief in the current financial year. [11377]

Mr. Boateng: Estimates for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 were published in table A3.1 of the Budget Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Estimates for 2001–02 will be published in the annual tax ready reckoner at the time of the pre-Budget report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total yield of *(a)* value added tax and *(b)* excise duty in each of the last four years. [11854]

Mr. Boateng: Receipts of value added tax and excise duty for the financial years 1997–98 to 1999–2000 are published in table A1 of the tables and statistics accompanying the Customs and Excise annual report for 2000.

Details for the year 2000–01 can be found in the national statistics publication "Financial Statistics", table 2.1D.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 625W, on the working families tax credit, (1) how many applications have been selected for further inquiry; [12329]

(2) how many applications have been selected for further inquiry. [12668]

Dawn Primarolo: Since 1 April 2001, 18 WFTC applications have been referred for a full inquiry. Four inquiries resulted in child care being overpaid and the recovery of £4,201.88 of overpaid tax credits.

Equitable Life

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice was given to the Financial Services Authority about the Equitable Life Assurance Society; and when the FSA was given responsibility for the regulation of Equitable Life under the service level agreement dated 18 December 1998. [12822]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the section of chapter 4 of the report of the Financial Services Authority headed "The Inheritance Period". Responsibility for the prudential regulation of the life insurance industry, including Equitable Life, passed to the FSA on 1 January 1999.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he approved the terms and references of the FSA review of the regulation of the Equitable Life Assurance Society. [12821]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA review and its terms of reference were established by the board of the FSA. The terms of reference were published on 22 December 2000.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will instruct the Personal Investment Authority ombudsman to resume investigation of complaints from policyholders of the Equitable Life Assurance Society; and if he will make a statement. [12846]

Ruth Kelly: The service provided by the PIA ombudsman is impartial and independent and the Treasury does not have the power to instruct the PIA ombudsman.

Under the current regime for regulation of investment business, established under the Financial Services Act 1986, the PIA ombudsman provides a complaints resolution service for customers of firms authorised by the PIA, including the Equitable Life Assurance Society. From 1 December 2001, the PIA ombudsman will be replaced by the Financial Ombudsman Service. However, the independence of the ombudsman will remain unchanged.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons Mr. Ronnie Baird and his team have no access to documents held by Equitable Life or its advisers in preparation of the FSA report on the review of the regulation of the Equitable Life Assurance Society. [12820]

Ruth Kelly: The terms of reference drawn up by the FSA board asked the review team to report on the discharge of its functions by the Financial Services Authority and the Personal Investment Authority. The review team had full access to files held by HM Treasury, the Financial Services Authority and the Government Actuary's Department. The review team did not deem it appropriate or necessary to extend the review to include obtaining access to documents in the possession of Equitable Life or any of its advisers. The report will be an important source of evidence to the independent inquiry being undertaken by Lord Penrose, which will be able to look carefully into the actions of Equitable over the years.

Euro Counterfeiting

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Pericles programme will cover euro-counterfeiting in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [12971]

Ruth Kelly: The Pericles programme will cover euro-counterfeiting in all member states, including the United Kingdom.

Counterfeiting of any currency is a serious criminal offence in the United Kingdom. The Government are committed to the principle of protection of the euro against counterfeiting, and to take action to support and supplement anti-counterfeiting measures with appropriate staff training and sharing of information. It is important that the United Kingdom should contribute to efforts to develop and share best practice among member states.

Pensions Mis-selling

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy that penalties imposed by the FSA on insurance companies for mis-selling should be a charge to shareholders and not to with-profits funds; and if he will make a statement. [12843]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to paragraphs 11 and 12 of the Government's response to the Treasury Committee's ninth report 1997–98 session, "The Mis-selling of Personal Pensions", which was published by the Committee as its first special report on 12 January 1998.

Exercise Saif Sareea

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what requests were submitted to the Treasury from the MOD for funds for equipment upgrade for desert conditions relating to exercises in Oman; and if he will make a statement. [12970]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I assume that the hon. Gentleman's question relates to the recent UK armed forces' Exercise Saif Sareea 2 in Oman. The answer is none.

VAT Returns

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was raised by Customs and Excises in 2000–01 from penalties imposed upon VAT-registered traders for late returns of VAT forms; and what is the estimate for 2001–02. [12845]

Mr. Boateng: During 2000–01, penalties totalling £87 million were incurred by traders defaulting on their VAT payments. The amount incurred in 2001–02 will be lower, reflecting the sympathetic approach taken by Customs towards businesses affected by the foot and mouth outbreak, the reform of the penalty regime for businesses with a turnover of up to £100,000, and other recent initiatives to help small businesses to manage their VAT payments.

Economic Cycle

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what definition of the economic cycle he employs for the purpose of calculating the cyclically adjusted budget surplus or deficit; what his assessment is of the typical lengths of an economic cycle; and what assessment he has made of the *(a)* start and *(b)* end date of the last economic cycle. [12869]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury's methodology for assessing trend growth and the output gap is set out in the publication "Fiscal policy: public finances and the cycle", HM Treasury, March 1999.

Paragraphs 2.35 and 2.36 of Budget 2001 set out the assessment of the last cycle; this will be updated in the next pre-Budget report.

Landfill Tax Credits

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the 65 per cent. indicative targets for diverting landfill tax credits towards sustainable waste management are mandatory; and if he will make a statement. [12984]

Mr. Boateng: The indicative targets for diverting landfill tax credits to sustainable waste management are not mandatory. In May this year the Government set the waste industry a challenging target of 65 per cent. of landfill tax credits to be allocated to sustainable waste management projects. The Government will review progress in forthcoming Budget reports.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the performance of organisations seeking to divert 65 per cent. of landfill tax credits towards sustainable waste management projects will be measured. [12985]

Mr. Boateng: Data on the allocation of contributions to projects under the landfill tax credit scheme are reported by environmental bodies to Entrust, the regulator of the scheme. The Government will review progress based on this information in forthcoming Budget reports.

Fuel Duty

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the latest submission from the Road Haulage Association on fuel duty. [12752]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are grateful for all representations and the Road Haulage Association's submission was read with interest. This will be considered in the context of the Chancellor's Budget judgment.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Watts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what impact the introduction of the climate change levy has had on the net tax paid by *(a)* manufacturing industry and *(b)* the service sector. [12817]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy package, including the reduction in employer NICs and support for energy efficiency investments, is expected to be broadly revenue neutral to manufacturing industry and to the service sector.

National Insurance

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees have been paying national insurance contributions in each year since 1995. [3069]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for the number of UK employees paying national insurance contributions (NICs) are given in the table.

Million

	Estimated number of employees paying NICs
1995–96	22.1
1996–97	22.6
1997–98	22.8
1998–99	23.6
1999–2000	24.1
2000–01	n/a

These estimates are based on the national insurance recording system. I regret that information is not yet sufficiently complete for 2000–01 to provide a reliable estimate.

This series reflects the increasing number of people in work who earn more than the lower earnings limit.

For 2000–01 and 2001–02, there should be a reduction in the number of employees paying NICs as the starting point for paying NICs has been increased and aligned with the income tax personal allowance. The benefit entitlement of employees who no longer pay NICs because of this change has been protected.

IT Contracts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the Information Technology contracts in excess of £500,000 let by his Department or its predecessor since April 1991, giving in each case the original estimated cost and original estimated completion date, the actual cost and actual completion date and the names of the contractors involved and consultants retained by his Department. [3509]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 17 July 2001]:* I have arranged for the information requested by my right hon. Friend to be placed in the Library.

Self-Assessment Forms

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was raised by the Inland Revenue in 2000–01 from penalties imposed for late returns by taxpayers of self-assessment forms; and what is the estimate for 2001–02. [12844]

Dawn Primarolo: For the Inland Revenue's accounts year November 1999-October 2000, receipts from self-assessment penalties totalled £33 million. Figures for subsequent accounts years are not yet available.

Corporate Tax Harmonisation

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on EU plans for the harmonisation of corporate taxes by 2005. [12747]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's view is that fair tax competition is the way forward for Europe not proposals for tax harmonisation. The Government will not support any action at European level that will threaten jobs or the competitive position of British business.

Tax Credit System

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of problems that recipients of the tax credit system have in understanding the system; and what steps he will take to ensure that further reforms to the system are easily comprehensible to intended recipients in the lower earning quintiles. [12802]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have established a comprehensive programme to monitor and evaluate the existing system of tax credits. Recipients' experiences with the current system are a part of this process and are being considered in the design of the new tax credits.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the balance of the national insurance fund was *(a)* in total and *(b)* above the Government Actuary's recommended margin (i) in April 2000 and (ii) in April 2001; and what is the forecast on the basis of plans for April 2002. [12651]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General—national insurance fund account 1999–2000 (HC446)—and the report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Benefits Up-rating (No. 2) Order 2000 and the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Funds Payments) Order 2001 (Cm 4933).

These reports are available in the Library of the House.

Tax Evasion

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff in the Inland Revenue were devoted to *(a)* tax evasion in general and *(b)* offshore and international tax evasion in each year since 1996; and what his estimate is for 2001 and his plans for 2002. [12652]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* A substantial number of staff in the Inland Revenue work on countering tax evasion, but for very many of them this is only a part of their job. Similarly, staff dealing with offshore and international tax evasion may also handle domestic issues. I regret therefore that information is not available in the form in which my hon. Friend has asked for it.

Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. will be exempted from levy under the Policyholders Protection Act 1975; and if he will make a statement. [12760]

Ruth Kelly: Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. would be required to pay a levy were one to be raised under the Policyholders Protection Act 1975. However, on 1 December 2001 the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) will supersede the Policyholders Protection Scheme (established under the Policyholders Protection Act 1975). The Financial Services Authority has consulted on the rules for the FSCS and will be issuing the rules shortly.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what comments the Treasury made to the Remuneration Committee of the FSA on the reputation of the FSA after consultation, prior to the decision of the FSA to reduce the chairman's bonus in January; [12847]

(2) what conclusion the Treasury formed by December 2000 on the performance of the FSA since January 1999; and how this was communicated to the Remuneration Committee of the FSA. [13257]

Ruth Kelly: It would not be appropriate to disclose any information, opinions and assessments given in confidence in relation to public employment.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what circumstances an employee of the Inland Revenue is permitted to make an inquiry about a person whose tax affairs were dealt with by another Inland Revenue office. [13216]

Dawn Primarolo: There are many circumstances in which an Inland Revenue officer may need to make inquiries about a taxpayer, some of whose affairs are dealt with by another office. For example, an officer dealing with a company's tax affairs may need information about individual directors. Or a formal inquiry into a tax return may be carried out at a different office from that which issued the return, depending on the availability of staff.

Staff are prohibited from making inquiries or searching for data about any taxpayer except in the performance of their official duties. But those duties may often take them across the boundaries of different offices.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what circumstances an Inland Revenue inquiry about a person's financial circumstances is entitled to lead to further inquiries about that person's immediate relatives *(a)* generally and *(b)* in respect of their financial affairs. [13215]

Dawn Primarolo: In a formal inquiry into a tax return, an officer is statutorily entitled to ask for information which he requires in order to determine whether the return is incorrect and, if so, to what extent. Information about relatives may be relevant to that inquiry. For example, in a case where the business records are incomplete, the best way to measure the true level of income may be to estimate the taxpayer's expenditure. In that case, information about the cost of maintaining dependent relatives and their contribution to household expenses may be relevant, and may be legitimately required by the investigator.

The results of any inquiry into one family member may show that there is a risk of tax evasion by another. There is no bar on the Inland Revenue using that information in deciding whether to inquire into the tax affairs of the second family member.

Princess Diana Memorial Fund

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the loss recorded in the Royal Mint annual report for 2000–01 includes a sum which is owed to the Princess Diana Memorial Fund. [12536]

Ruth Kelly: The loss recorded in the Royal Mint annual report for 2000–01 does not include any proceeds owed to the Princess Diana Memorial Fund.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sum from the proceeds of the minting of £5 coins in 1999 in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales has been paid over to the Princess Diana Memorial Fund. [12537]

Ruth Kelly: The sale of commemorative and collector coins in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales raised £7,393,000 by 25 July 2001. This will be used to offset voted expenditure on projects put forward by the Diana Memorial committee. It was never intended to pay the proceeds into the Princess Diana Memorial Fund.

The main projects are: a playground in Kensington Gardens, opened in July 2000; a walkway running through London's Royal Parks—Kensington Gardens, Hyde Park, Green Park and St. James' Park; a fountain in Hyde Park by the Serpentine, due to be built by summer 2003; and the establishment of eight Diana Nursing Teams, each led by paediatric nurses trained in palliative care, to work in the community providing support to children with life limiting conditions, and their carers, as an alternative to hospital based care.

The total cost of the park projects to date is £6,000,000. The Diana Nursing Teams cost £2,000,000 in 1999–2000 and £2,000,000 in 2000–01, and further expenditure is intended to continue and expand the programme in future years.

Royal Mint

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason the Royal Mint directed banks not to accept £5 commemorative coins from their customers, but to direct customers to the Post Office. [12336]

Ruth Kelly: A Royal Mint team was established in order to review the system for issuing and returning UK circulation commemorative crown coins. This was a result of growing concerns regarding the total volume of returns, a number of 25p (5 shilling) crowns mixed in with consignments of £5 crowns, abuse of the current distribution system and to monitor any counterfeits.

In order for the Royal Mint to log and analyse the returns we agreed with the UK banks and the Post Office that for ease of handling, processing and payment, all commemorative crowns should be returned via the Post Office. So, the UK banks were advised to refer customers wishing to repatriate crowns to their nearest post office whereby they can exchange them for goods and services.

Despite this agreement we continue to receive a small number of these crowns from some banks however, we are trying to encourage them to channel all returns via the Post Office.

This exercise is currently on-going and for the reasons outlined above we would not want to change the arrangement in the immediate future.

Social Security (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the level of social security

contributions in Scotland over each of the last five years *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the United Kingdom total. [12173]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Estimates of social security contributions relating to residents of Scotland can be found in the Scottish Executive publication "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland, 1998–99".

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fireworks

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage compliance by the fireworks industry with the voluntary code of practice on the sale of fireworks prior to 5 November. [11507]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We have held discussions with representative bodies of the fireworks industry and some larger retailers to agree dates for this year's voluntary sales period and to consider its effectiveness. In addition we have asked LACOTS (Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards) to remind trading standards departments of the voluntary code. We intend to review the effectiveness of the agreement after the fireworks seasons, and I would be interested in any evidence about how well the code is working.

Sub-Post Offices

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is proposing to prevent more sub-post offices closing in the next 12 months. [12592]

Mr. Alexander: Implementation of the performance and innovation unit recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Government, will help to modernise and sustain the whole post office network. The Government are committed to providing transitional financial assistance to rural post offices and decisions on this will be taken following advice from the Postal Services Commission, which is expected later in the autumn. In addition, we have made available a £2 million fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas where traditional services would otherwise close. £15 million of ring-fenced money has been earmarked for the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to help sustain and improve post offices in deprived urban areas.

Universal Bank

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress on the universal bank. [12589]

Mr. Alexander: Progress is being made on the detailed implementation for universal banking services and they remain on schedule for introduction when benefit payment migration begins in 2003.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the respective responsibilities are of her Department and the Department for Work and Pensions in relation to the universal bank. [12389]

Mr. Alexander: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is co-ordinating the work to modernise the payment of pensions, benefits and tax credits along with the introduction of universal banking services. The DTI retains shareholder responsibility for Consignia and responsibility for sponsorship of the post office network.

Broadband

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received on cross-border co-operation on broadband capacity purchasing from *(a)* Cumbria, *(b)* the Scottish Borders and *(c)* Dumfries and Galloway; and if she will make a statement. [12315]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* In each of these pathfinder areas the authorities are working with local partners to develop the provision of broadband. Cross-border discussions have taken place, but there have been no specific proposals brought to my attention regarding capacity purchasing.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made towards connection of the UK's rural communities to broadband telecommunications networks. [12731]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The Government are working to make the broadband market more extensive and competitive. The market has developed so far to the point where over 60 per cent. of UK households are able to access one or more of ADSL, cable or wireless broadband technologies. We have already established the £30 million fund for RDAs and the devolved Administrations to develop schemes to extend broadband networks, and will announce a further range of measures in response to the recommendations of the broadband stakeholder group.

3G Technology

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the *(a)* Treasury and *(b)* Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions concerning 3G mobile phone licences. [12411]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The Treasury was a member of the auction steering group that established the auction process leading to the award of the 3G licences. The Treasury and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions were involved in the production of the information memorandum sent to prospective participants in the 3G auction.

My officials also liaise with the DTLR as necessary on planning issues affecting telecommunications, including those related to the installation of masts and other equipment for 3G networks.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates her Department has made of the increase in demand for mobile phone masts that will result from the implementation of 3G technology; and if she will make a statement. [12410]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The number of mobile masts needed for third generation mobile communications systems depends upon a wide range of assumptions about demand and technical issues. These are commercial decisions for the licensees. The Department is encouraging operators to minimise the number of installations needed by sharing facilities as long as this does not disproportionately reduce competition.

Retailer Code of Practice

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce a retailer code of practice; and if she will make a statement. [12359]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 31 October that she had asked the Director General of Fair Trading to seek to obtain undertakings from the four leading supermarket chains to comply with the code of practice on relations between supermarkets and their suppliers. A copy of her announcement and the Code have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Corporate Insolvency Liabilities

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to improve directors' awareness of their corporate insolvency liabilities. [12980]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Service has produced a guide which informs directors of companies what duties and responsibilities they have if their company is subject to insolvency procedures. The Insolvency Service has also ensured that the information provided by Companies House to the officers of newly formed companies contains details of the responsibilities they have while managing limited companies.

In addition, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry successfully applies to have an unfit director disqualified from acting as a director, or accepts an undertaking not to act in that capacity, a press release is issued in local newspapers and trade journals relevant to the insolvent company. This provides details of the director's misconduct complained of in the application to disqualify and this reporting assists greatly in the drive to increase the business community's awareness of the dangers of running a company while insolvent.

The company law review has made proposals for a more general codification of the duties of directors under company law and the Department is studying them.

Energy Consumption

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has in the next edition of the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics, to publish disaggregated data for energy consumption by *(a)* the agricultural sector, *(b)* the public administration sector and *(c)* the commercial sector; and if she will make a statement. [12099]

Mr. Wilson: Energy consumption data by *(a)* the agriculture sector, *(b)* the public administration sector and *(c)* the commercial sector are published each July for the latest three years in the "Digest of UK Energy Statistics", copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House. Data for 1998, 1999 and 2000 appeared in Tables 1.1 to 1.3 in this year's edition, while data for earlier years are available in previous editions of the Digest.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Governments of other countries bordering Afghanistan on the need to reopen their borders to Afghan refugees. [12683]

Clare Short: We are working closely with the UN and other donors to persuade all of Afghanistan's neighbours to open their borders. We continue to urge all neighbouring countries to adopt an open border policy and to allow those seeking refuge safe passage.

We should not underestimate the burden that refugees have placed on these countries. Pakistan and Iran in particular have provided generously for millions of refugees for many years. However, these neighbouring countries have the assurance that donors will provide generously for the care of these refugees. The UK has so far contributed £3 million to UNHCR for its work in the region—a combination of financial and practical support, including specialist personnel and shelter material. We are also supporting the work of a number of NGOs in neighbouring countries.

In addition, we have set aside £11 million for immediate short-term support to the poorer communities of Pakistan, especially those most directly affected by the influx of refugees from Afghanistan. On 18 October, I announced a further £15 million package to support the Government of Pakistan in its continuing reforms and in its efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis for Afghans.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she gives to the UN to enable it to co-ordinate properly the humanitarian operation; and how she will help the UN to fulfil its humanitarian goals in Afghanistan. [12680]

Clare Short: My Department has set aside £40 million to respond to the current crisis affecting Afghans in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries. About £22 million has already been allocated to agencies for their work in the region to fulfil their humanitarian goals.

This includes £14 million to UN agencies. Our financial assistance is complemented by the provision of technical personnel, logistical, material and other practical support.

Co-ordination for humanitarian assistance is the responsibility of the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which has appointed a regional humanitarian co-ordinator based in Islamabad. We have provided £1 million to OCHA in response to the current crisis to support these co-ordination efforts. This includes the provision of technical personnel to set up a humanitarian information centre (HIC) that will collate and communicate humanitarian information on the needs and programmes to all concerned agencies. This contribution will also be used to increase the capacity of the offices of the UN resident co-ordinators in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan.

We have also provided £1 million to support the work of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi as the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, who is charged with the responsibility of supervising the UN humanitarian effort in Afghanistan and negotiating the political settlement necessary to bring the conflict to an end.

Sierra Leone

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what non-governmental organisations and charities her Department supports in Sierra Leone. [12904]

Clare Short: Non-governmental organisations and charities directly supported by DFID in Sierra Leone are listed. This excludes those non-governmental organisations that receive assistance from the international organisations such as the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations, which DFID also supports.

NGOs supported by DFID in Sierra Leone

1. Action Aid
2. Adventist Development and Relief Agency Sierra Leone
3. CARE
4. Catholic Relief Services
5. Children's Aid Direct
6. Christian Aid
7. Concern Worldwide
8. Conciliation Resources
9. International Committee of the Red Cross
10. International Medical Corps
11. Lutheran World Federation
12. Marie Stopes
13. Medical Research Council/Sierra Leone
14. Mercy Ships
15. Rural Aid
16. Save the Children Fund
17. World Relief
18. World Vision.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list her Department's spending in Sierra Leone in the last 12 months. [12905]

Clare Short: Since November 2000, DFID expenditure on the Sierra Leone programme has been as follows:

Sierra Leone programme	*£ million*
Security Sector (includes Police and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme)	11.645
Governance (includes support to Media development, Law Development, Anti-corruption, Governance reform and Elections)	1.838
Humanitarian Assistance	5.679
Budgetary Support	19.500
Other technical cooperation costs	1.936
Total	40.598

Departmental Publications

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if she will make a statement. [12268]

Clare Short: We have since 1997 published all our major strategy documents, including all country and institutional strategy papers, as well as major consultation papers and speeches. Our publishing output has therefore expanded considerably.

We do not produce anything which we would regard as campaign material. Our spending on publications over the period in question is as follows:

Year	*£000*
1995–96	352
1996–97	318
1997–98	166
1998–99	347
1999–2000	570
2000–01	639

We do not have a specific advertising budget. However, the bulk of our paid advertising is in relation to recruitment advertising in newspapers and journals. This costs between £1 million to £1.2 million annually.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the *(a)* humanitarian situation and *(b)* situation of children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [12322]

Clare Short: A recent Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) study on food security reported the DRC as having the world's most dramatic rise in malnutrition. This affects nearly two-thirds of the population. Infant and maternal mortality figures also continue to rise. With some progress on the peace process and a gradual improvement in access for humanitarian agencies, we have this year substantially increased the level of support for humanitarian work.

The children of the DRC have a particularly vulnerable status. School enrolment is low and three out of four of these children drop out before they are able to finish their education. We have been particularly concerned about the

use of child soldiers in the conflict and have repeatedly called on all parties to respect the rights of the child and urge them to initiate disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation programmes for children. We will continue to monitor the situation and call for all parties to respect and promote the rights of the child.

Development Awareness

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what work has been undertaken by her Department with trade unions to promote development awareness. [11832]

Clare Short: Trade unions are one of the groups identified as a priority in our strategy paper on building support for development.

At the level of individual projects, we are supporting the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) to increase awareness and understanding of international development issues among workplace trade union representatives and the TGWU members.

We also support a project administered by Labour and Society International to develop new modules and teaching materials on the theme of international development for officials, educators and members of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union (MSF).

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Lancashire Townscapes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list those industrial townscapes in Lancashire that are being considered by English Heritage for protection; and if she will make a statement. [10390]

Dr. Howells: English Heritage has proposed that the St. Mary's conservation area in Nelson should be extended and has requested that my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts use her reserve powers for this purpose. My right hon. Friend is considering the request. I understand that English Heritage is funding a survey of historic and industrial towns in Lancashire to assist local authorities carry out their functions relating to the historic environment, including the designation of conservation areas. However, English Heritage has no current plans to ask my right hon. Friend to designate any further conservation areas.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans have been made by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* institutions involved in the preparation for Holocaust Memorial Day 2002. [11275]

Dr. Howells: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 851W.

Television

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the Government's policy in relation to the switchover to digital television. [12382]

Dr. Howells: The Government's policy, as set out in the White Paper "A New Future for Communications" is to complete the switchover to digital terrestrial television as soon as possible, and we believe that it is realistic to aim for the period 2006–10. On 12 October, we issued a draft action plan, which is a technical, consultative document aimed at the key stakeholders who will need to work together to make progress towards switchover. The draft plan sets out the issues on which action needs to be taken, both by the Government and by the industry; to enable and encourage take up of digital television, to identify who should lead on those issues, and to set target dates for delivery. We intend to publish an agreed plan by the end of the year.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport by what date she expects *(a)* Channel 5, *(b)* digital terrestrial TV and *(c)* cable TV services to be available in the High Peak constituency. [12334]

Dr. Howells: *(a)* I do not expect the availability of analogue Channel 5 services to be increased because the priority is to use available spectrum for the development of digital terrestrial television (DTT). I understand, however, that these services are available in some areas of the High Peak constituency: coverage details can be found on Channel 5's website at: www.channel5.co.uk. *(b)* The BBC and ITC, who are responsible for the DTT transmission network, are considering, in consultation with Government and stakeholders, how to improve coverage of all DTT multiplexes across the UK and coverage information is available on the Digital Television Group website: www.dtg.org.uk. No date has been set for the provision of DTT throughout High Peak. *(c)* This is a commercial matter for the cable operators: I am not aware that any operator has plans to supply cable across the High Peak area.

Tourism Industry

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the outcome of her recent meeting with senior leaders of the tourism industry. [13126]

Tessa Jowell: I, together with my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting, met leading figures from the tourism industry on 10 and 11 October at Hartwell House in Buckinghamshire. This meeting was convened to discuss the immediate difficulties facing the industry in the wake of the foot and mouth outbreak and the terrorist attacks of 11 September, but also to agree the necessary programme for long term strategic reform of the industry to achieve more consistent high standards and better value for money.

The main conclusions for action from the meeting include: the urgent need for tourism bodies to review their programmes so as best to meet the needs of the current difficulties; the importance of acting in the new spirit of

partnership between industry and Government; the creation of the CBI chaired voice for tourism, the Tourism Alliance; the need to focus public sector resources on improving co-ordination of marketing, rationalising tourism data collection so that it is more useful, improving the quality of product, strengthening service through improved training and skills and developing better tourist information, including through the use of the internet.

The following table sets these conclusions out in more detail.

Tourism Industry Seminar—Outcomes

	Who to lead	*Timescale*
Immediate short term action[1]		
The London Tourist Board and the English Tourism Council have been asked to review their programmes, working with the industry, to meet the new circumstances. DCMS Ministers are ready to see more than £60 million already available directed to marketing to the domestic market. The hotel and major attractions industry are creating packages to offer to the domestic market. DCMS will chase progress and encourage and support co-operation of this sort.	Industry and associations, LTB, ETC, DCMS	Immediate
The British Tourist Authority is re-designing its overseas marketing campaign, in close consultation with key industry partners in the UK and overseas	BTA	End of October
Other measures which might provide effective assistance are being examined. The Industry has made a number of proposals.	DCMS	October
Ministers are strong advocates of and for the industry.	DCMS	October
Ministers and officials are in constant discussion with the tourism industry about the impact of the events in America.	DCMS	Ongoing
Medium term action[2]		
We will create a voice for the tourism sector which reflects the diversity of its main core industries and ensures a coherent view is put to Government on key opportunities and issues of common concern.	CBI-supported Tourism Alliance	Launched October, starts November 2001
Ministers are ready to develop strong and more co-ordinated arrangements for the marketing of English tourism to the domestic market in response to the views of the industry. We are ready to concentrate public sector resources on three areas—marketing coordination, data gathering, and quality assessment. This will mean reducing support on other areas. Marketing co-ordination should have a strong private sector lead and embrace regional and local government spending.	DCMS, ETC and the industry to develop new arrangements.	First discussion at November Tourism Forum. New plan within six months.
We will strengthen regional arrangements. We are committed to closer marketing co-ordination at regional level, development of strong sub-regional brands, and implementation of TIC modernisation.	RDAs, RTBs and local authorities	Proposals to Secretary of State by end of November.
We are ready to develop a "Fitness for purpose" approach to better regulation of hotels and restaurants. The aim is to bring together the many regulatory controls, and make them into a basic and strong assurance to customers. Premises not meeting the standard would be improved or closed. Arrangements for modernising alcohol and entertainment licensing, and gaming, will go ahead in parallel.	DCMS with key Department and Local Government Association.	Report to Secretary of State by end December.
We will bring together the many sources of public sector data on tourism performance and trends and create a partnership with the private sector to give the industry and Ministers the information which is needed to decide policy, make investments, and improve service to the customer. The first step is to rationalise what is there at present and improve coherence and leadership. One objective will be to undertake a public attitude survey, and another to report annually. There will be a regional and local dimension to this but the first phase will look at national information and data.	DCMS, ETC, BTA	Prepare remit for Secretary of State's approval within one month.
We will follow a fresh approach to training and skills. Our ambition is to create a major new skills body embracing the major industries of the sector. It will drive an improvement in service quality and career opportunities. Ministers will back it strongly within Government and ensure a fair share of resources is available to support effective new arrangements.	Industry to convene, Ministers to back it in Government.	To be set up and seek recognition by Government by December.

Tourism Industry Seminar—Outcomes

	Who to lead	*Timescale*
We will ensure wide adoption of the productivity and performance improvement techniques emerging for the Government supported "Productivity for Profit" initiative.	Industry	Launched. Review in 2002.
We will build on the EnglandNet and other e-tourism initiatives to create a strong network of tourist information services and to encourage the take up by small and micro-businesses of electronic means of communication and booking.	ETC, DCMS, Industry, RDAs.	First stage by April 2002.

[1] Our approach will be to ensure Government and industry understands and appraises the impact of current challenges, co-ordinate public sector and private sector responses to those challenges, and for the public sector to make a direct contribution where that is justified.
[2] We will take this action in a new spirit of partnership between industry and Government. The industry will take the lead in modernising, improving quality and product development. Government will support where better regulation and co-ordination of public services is needed. Ministers will review in three months whether the current distribution of responsibilities supporting the joint programme is working well enough and will meet with industry again in six months to review the progress of the whole programme. All the initial action is to be taken within six months and further assignments then agreed at a further joint meeting with industry leaders.

Sport England

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport where Sport England receives its revenue from. [13016]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England receives annual grant in aid from my Department which amounted to £37.4 million in 2000–01. It also received income in that year of £9.2 million from other sources including operating receipts from the National Sports Centres and from the sale of publications.

Commonwealth Stadium

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost is of the compensation for the proposed use of the Commonwealth stadium in Manchester for the world athletics championships. [13015]

Mr. Caborn: There are no plans to use the city of Manchester stadium for the world athletics championships. Compensation to Manchester city football club, were the stadium to have been used for the 2005 world athletics championships, would have been a matter for commercial discussion between Manchester city council and the club.

BBC Knowledge

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will introduce legislative proposals to apply the provisions of section 186 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 to BBC Knowledge. [12422]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* BBC Knowledge will move to the BBC's own multiplex on 8 November 2001, when it will automatically come under the provisions of section 186.

Treasure Act

Paul Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will announce the outcome of the review of the Treasure Act 1996. [13592]

Dr. Howells: The report on the Operation of the Treasure Act 1996: Review and Recommendations is being published today and I am arranging for copies to be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Security Situation

4. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland. [10851]

25. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland. [10873]

Jane Kennedy: This year has seen, among others, the murders of Ciaran Cummings, the schoolboy Gavin Brett, the journalist Martin O'Hagan and 19-year-old Peter McNally. Up to 28 October, there have been 291 shooting incidents and 298 bombing incidents relating to the security situation.

Following advice from the Chief Constable about the involvement of the UDA, UFF and LVF, the Secretary of State specified these organisations on 12 October. The ceasefires of the other paramilitary groups are believed to be holding, although there is still a very real threat from dissident groups who want to destroy the peace process.

23. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress the Government have made towards normalising the security environment in Northern Ireland. [10871]

Jane Kennedy: Along with other measures, the Government have closed, vacated or demolished 43 Army installations since the ceasefires. On the basis of the Chief Constable's judgment that the IRA's decision to put a quantity of its arms completely beyond use represented a real improvement in the security situation, the Secretary of State announced that the following installations would also be demolished:

the observation tower on Sturgan mountain and one of the observation towers on Camlough mountain in South Armagh;

the supersangar adjacent to the helicopter landing site at Newtownhamilton Police Station; and

the Magherafelt Army base.

Work to demolish all four installations has already commenced.

Decommissioning

6. **Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the impact of General de Chastelain's recent report on decommissioning on the implementation of the Good Friday agreement. [10853]

11. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact of General de Chastelain's recent report on decommissioning on the stability of democratic institutions in Northern Ireland. [10858]

27. **Mr. McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the impact of decommissioning on the permanence of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. [10875]

Dr. John Reid: The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning's confirmation of the IRA's unprecedented act of decommissioning has facilitated the return of the UUP Ministers to the Northern Ireland Executive Committee and the re-election of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) as First Minister. As a result of these very positive developments, all of the political institutions should now be allowed to operate without impediment. The Government will in turn move ahead to implement the Weston Park package of proposals and its remaining commitments under the Belfast agreement.

7. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements he will put in place to deal with decommissioning of illegally held arms after the expiry of the de Chastelain Commission. [10854]

Dr. John Reid: Only the period during which an amnesty may be provided expires in February next year, not the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning.

The political mandate for the IICD is in the Good Friday agreement—the total decommissioning of all paramilitary arms. We shall obviously consider the commission's statutory remit in the light of that and its advice on how best to achieve that key objective.

9. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards decommissioning. [10856]

Dr. John Reid: I welcome the recent report from the IICD verifying that the IRA has put a quantity of weaponry, including arms, ammunition and explosives completely beyond use. This is a significant development not only in terms of moving forward the decommissioning process but also in the context of the Good Friday agreement.

The commission also stated it would continue contact with the IRA representative in the pursuit of its mandate, the total decommissioning of arms.

All paramilitary groups should now build upon the progress that has been made on decommissioning and all should begin decommissioning too.

15. **Margaret Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent measures have been taken to encourage paramilitary decommissioning in Northern Ireland. [10863]

Dr. John Reid: Following the recent discussion at Weston Park, the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach presented to all the constitutional parties a comprehensive package of measures, which they considered fair and balanced, and invited all parties to accept that as a way of moving the process forward. Decommissioning was one part of that package.

Since then, the Prime Minister and I have been working with all the parties to bring about the right climate for change.

17. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the prospects for further decommissioning of illegally held weapons. [10865]

Dr. John Reid: The total decommissioning of paramilitary arms is the remit of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning.

The Government and all of the pro-agreement parties have said throughout the process that the details of the actual process should be left to the decommissioning commission.

In its recent report, the commission stated it would continue contact with the IRA in pursuit of that mandate.

It is hoped that further decommissioning events will take place in the future from both the IRA and also loyalist paramilitary groups.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the impact of de Chastelain's recent report on decommissioning has been on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. [10819]

Jane Kennedy: I refer my hon Friend to the statement I made to the House on Wednesday 24 October in which I stated my belief that following the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning's confirmation of the IRA's unprecedented act of decommissioning, the Belfast agreement should now be implemented in its entirety and all the political institutions allowed to operate without impediment.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to extend the remit of the decommissioning body. [11991]

Jane Kennedy: The remit of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning remains as set out in the international agreement between this Government and the Government of the Republic of Ireland, dated 26 August 1997; and there are no plans to extend it.

The period during which an amnesty may be provided expires in February next year. However, the political mandate for the IICD as set out in the Good Friday agreement—the total decommissioning of all paramilitary arms—remains. We shall obviously consider the statutory position in light of that and the Commission's own advice on how best to fulfil that mandate.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what specific reduced security measures have been enacted in Northern Ireland in response to the IRA's decision on 23 October to decommission. [11400]

Jane Kennedy: On the basis of the Chief Constable's judgment that the IRA's decision to put a quantity of its arms completely beyond use represented a real improvement in the security situation, the Secretary of State announced that the following installations would be demolished:

the observation tower on Sturgan mountain and one of the observation towers on Camlough mountain in South Armagh;

the supersangar adjacent to the helicopter landing site at Newtownhamilton RUC Station; and

the Magherafelt Army base.

Work to demolish all four installations has already commenced and significant progress has been made.

RUC Reserve

8. **Mr. Donaldson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with the Chief Constable about the future of the full-time RUC Reserve. [10855]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State and I have regular discussions with the Chief Constable on all manner of policing and security-related matters.

Peace Process

10. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for moving the peace process forward; and if he will make a statement. [10857]

20. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process. [10868]

Dr. John Reid: In the light of the considerable progress that has been made in recent weeks on decommissioning and in the operation of the devolved institutions, the Government will now work with the parties and with the Irish Government to move quickly ahead with the full implementation of the Good Friday agreement and also to pursue the measures set out in the Weston Park package of proposals.

22. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet representatives of republican groups to discuss the peace process. [10870]

Dr. John Reid: I talk to and meet with representatives of all the democratically elected parties in Northern Ireland on a regular basis to discuss and make progress on the peace process.

Policing

12. **Mr. Tony Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the policing of groups and individuals who are not part of a ceasefire. [10859]

Jane Kennedy: The police continue to monitor the activities of such groups and individuals and, where warranted, make them amenable to the law.

Violent Crime

13. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of violent crime in Northern Ireland. [10860]

Jane Kennedy: The term "violent crime" covers offences against the person, sexual offences and robbery. During the year 2000–01 a total of 24,323 violent crimes were recorded in Northern Ireland, an increase of 0.7 per cent. on 1999–2000. Overall, violent crime accounted for 20.3 per cent. of all recorded offences during 2000–01, an increase of 7.9 per cent. on the previous year. A rise in the number of robberies was the main reason for this increase, although on a positive front, there was an 11.8 per cent. decrease in recorded sexual offences. Actual figures for the current year are not yet available.

The Northern Ireland policing plan 2001–02 contains nine objectives for policing. In particular, the specific target relating to the detection rate for violent crime has been increased to 65 per cent. from the 50 per cent. target set for 2000–01. The Government are confident that the Chief Constable is doing everything possible within the resources available to him to reduce and deal with incidents of violent crime in Northern Ireland.

Parades Commission

14. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress with the review of the Parades Commission. [10861]

Jane Kennedy: As part of the package following the Weston Park talks and the IRA's recent decommissioning of weapons, the Government have confirmed the time is right to proceed with a review of the way in which the Parades Commission operates. We plan to announce the details shortly.

Terrorist and Criminal Violence

16. **David Burnside:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the level of terrorist and criminal violence in Northern Ireland over the last three months. [10864]

Jane Kennedy: Terrorist violence over the last three months has remained at a significant level. The table gives a breakdown of that violence from 1 July 2001 to 26 October 2001. Statistics for criminal violence over the last three months are not readily available.

	2001				
	July	*August*	*September*	*October*[1]	*Total*
Number of deaths	2	0	1	0	3
Number of shooting incidents	39	24	42	21	126
Number of bombing incidents	56	40	54	29	179

	2001				
	July	*August*	*September*	*October*[1]	*Total*
Paramilitary style attacks					
Casualties as a result of shootings	13	21	19	9	62
Casualties as a result of assaults	14	4	8	7	33

[1] To 26 October

Note:

Statistics relating to 2001–02 financial year are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment.

Paramilitaries

18. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he has made on the disarming of paramilitaries. [10866]

Jane Kennedy: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland gave the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), at column 273W.

21. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents of violence attributed to *(a)* republican paramilitaries and *(b)* loyalist paramilitaries there have been since 1 January. [10869]

Jane Kennedy: The following table provides a breakdown of security situation statistics from 1 January 2001 to 26 October 2001.

	Attribution			
	Loyalist	*Republican*	*N/K*	*Total*
Number of deaths	10	1	0	—
Number of shooting incidents	190	82	18	290
Number of bombing incidents	246	34	15	195
Paramilitary style attacks:				
Casualties as a result of shootings	99	60	0	159
Casualties as a result of assaults	75	46	0	121

Note:

Statistics relating to the 2001–02 financial year are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment.

29. **Ann Keen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the position of paramilitary organisations who are not committed to a ceasefire. [10877]

Dr. John Reid: The initial list of specified organisations was made on 30 July 1998. The current list comprises of the Real IRA, the Continuity IRA, the Red Hand Defenders and the Orange Volunteers. On 12 October, it was also necessary for the Secretary of State to add the UDA, UFF and the LVF.

This means that, among other restrictions, early released prisoners associated with those organisations can have their licences suspended and be returned to jail if they continue to engage in paramilitary activity in support of their organisations. Also, under the Terrorism Act 2000, provision relating to charges of membership will also apply.

Electoral Fraud

19. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he anticipates the new measures to combat electoral fraud will come into force. [10867]

Mr. Browne: It is our intention that all the measures proposed by the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, which will provide the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland with additional functions to address the problem of electoral fraud there, will be in force by May 2003.

Northern Ireland Executive

24. **Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer with regard to the funding of the Northern Ireland Executive. [10872]

Jane Kennedy: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has had no recent discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on overall funding for the Northern Ireland Executive. He is, however, in regular contact with Treasury and Executive Ministers on a range of financial issues relating to Northern Ireland.

IRA Weapons

26. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the number of weapons remaining in the hands of the IRA. [10874]

Jane Kennedy: For obvious reasons, it is not our practice to disclose such intelligence matters. I can, however, say that substantial amounts of illegal firearms, munitions and explosives are held by various paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. That is why we continue to press all groups to decommission their arms.

Organised Crime Taskforce

28. **Mr. Mahmood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the organised crime taskforce in Northern Ireland. [10876]

Jane Kennedy: The Government remain committed to tackling the organised crime problem in Northern Ireland. The organised crime taskforce and the agencies in NI are achieving good results.

This week has seen a number of successes against the organised crime gangs who operate in Northern Ireland. In the past two weeks, in two separate raids, £700,00 of drugs were seized and £80,000 of counterfeit goods were confiscated. Last week, a Customs and police operation seized 600,000 duty-free cigarettes, 150 kilos of tobacco, 6,000 litres of alcohol and a huge quantity of illegal fireworks, CDs, videos and counterfeit clothing.

International Terrorism

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much he forecasts will be spent in the current

financial year by his Department as a direct result of measures associated with action against international terrorism after 11 September. [11073]

Jane Kennedy: At this point in time the Northern Ireland Office has had no notable expenditure in relation to international terrorism as a direct result of 11 September, and there is no planned expenditure for the remainder of this financial year.

Remembrance Day

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Chief Constable of the RUC issued a directive to his officers with regard to the wearing of poppies during the annual period of remembrance centred on 11 November; and if he will make a statement. [11943]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has not issued specific instructions in relation to the coming period of remembrance. Current instructions whereby officers may, on a voluntary basis, wear poppies on their uniform caps, still apply.

Departmental Buildings

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the total running costs for buildings used, owned or rented by his Department for each nation and region of the UK, and estimate the average cost per square metre for properties used by his Department as a whole, and by region and nation of the UK. [6789]

Dr. John Reid: The information requested is as follows:

	£
Total running costs	2,300,000
Northern Ireland	1,430,000
London	870,000
Total running costs per m^2	110
Northern Ireland costs per m^2	82
London costs per m^2	235

HEALTH

Departmental Properties

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number, value and location of properties newly leased in each of the last five years by his Department, broken down by leases by the Department itself, its next step, agencies and its non-departmental public bodies, differentiating between purchases made as a result of the creation of new bodies and those purchases made by established bodies. [7815]

Ms Blears: The table lists the number, value and location of properties newly leased in each of the last five years (1996–97 through to 2000–01) by the Department. They include and distinguish between the Department, its next step agencies and its non-departmental public bodies, differentiating between acquisitions made as a result of the creation of new bodies and those acquisitions made by established bodies.

Department of Health

Acquired by	*Year*	*Number*	*Value (£ million)*	*Location*
New bodies	1998–99	1	0.328	Bristol
Established bodies	1998–99	1	0.492	Cambridge
	2000–01	1	0.092	Manchester
Agencies				
Established bodies	1996–97	1	0.086	Reading
	1998–99	1	2.277	Reading
	1999–2000	2	0.009	Kingswinford, Cambridge
	2000–01	1	0.039	Harrogate
Non-departmental public bodies				
New bodies	1999–2000	1	0.029	London
	2000–01	12	1.785	London, Bristol Aylesbury, Shrewsbury, Bedford, Gloucester, Ashford, Northampton, Oxford, Wolverhampton, Easing, Welwyn Garden City
Established bodies	1996–97	2	0.035	Nottingham, Redhill
	1997–98	2	0.029	Bristol, Wigan
	1998–99	2	0.999	Bristol, London
	1999–2000	4	0.035	Newcastle, Bristol, Harrogate, Plymouth
	2000–01	8	2.669	London (3), Newcastle, Bristol, Chester, Birmingham, Jesmond

Note:
Value for leased accommodation is taken as the annual rent and service charge (based on the current annual cost) and for private finance initiative/public private partnership arrangements as the annual unitary charge (based on the current annual cost) and includes the cost of the provision of facilities management services.

Dental Treatment (Asylum Seekers)

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent guidance has been issued to regional and local health authorities and trusts regarding dental treatment for asylum seekers; [10948]

(2) what recent guidance has been given to *(a)* regional dental boards and *(b)* dentists regarding dental treatment for asylum seekers. [10949]

Ms Blears: The Department issued letters, in February 2000, to all local authorities and health authorities

detailing the current position on prescription charges and national health service dental treatment for asylum seekers in February 2000. This explained that any asylum seeker who did not fall into one of the groups entitled to free dental treatment, for example those who are pregnant or aged under 18 (under 19 years if in full time education) would need to complete an HC1 claim form in order to receive a NHS charges certificate (HC2), but that arrangements were under review. From 1 April 2001 the national asylum support service would issue HC2 certificates on behalf of the Department to all the asylum seekers it supports. These arrangements are now in place, and HC2 certificates are issued where appropriate, along with the first support voucher. This has removed the need for separate HC1 claims.

Under current arrangements, health authorities are responsible for the dissemination of this information to dental practitioners.

Essentially, dentists can treat asylum seekers in exactly the same way as all other patients, judging their need to pay charges using the usual criteria.

Norwich Union

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts have contracts with Norwich Union to provide healthcare premises; and what advice his Department has given to trusts on the marketing of private healthcare and health insurance products within such premises. [10018]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 October 2001]*: The Department does not hold information on the number of national health service trusts with contracts with Norwich Union to provide healthcare premises.

The overwhelming majority of elective operations carried out in NHS trusts are performed on NHS patients. Although NHS trusts are permitted to generate income from providing facilities and staff to operate on private health policy-holders and self-pay patients, trusts must ensure that this private activity is not at the expense of their NHS work.

World Health Organisation Targets

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government are committed to achieving the targets set out in the World Health Organisation Charter on Transport, Environment and Health. [11080]

Jacqui Smith: Yes. In adopting in 1999 the World Health Organisation charter on transport, environment and health the Government confirmed their commitment to making transport sustainable to health and the environment, and to striving to implement the measures in the charter's plan of action, especially those aimed at attaining its health targets.

Our White Paper on transport defined the national framework for creating a better, more integrated transport system and tackling the problems of pollution and congestion. The subsequent 10-year plan set out the long-term spending plans for delivering the policies described there.

The United Kingdom is an active participant in the steering group set up to push forward implementation of the WHO transport charter, and is the lead actor for the charter's action point on public participation, public awareness and information.

Brain Injury

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent guidance he has issued in relation to *(a)* the recognition of acquired brain injury and *(b)* the planning of rehabilitation services for those with acquired brain injury; [11670]

(2) what plans he has to implement a national education and training programme for NHS staff on the rehabilitation and treatment of individuals with acquired brain injury; [11668]

(3) what plans he has to undertake a review of the provision of brain injury rehabilitation services within the United Kingdom. [11669]

Jacqui Smith: We have issued no recent guidance on either the recognition of acquired brain injury or the planning of rehabilitation services for those with acquired brain injury.

However, the national service framework (NSF) for long term conditions was announced in February 2001 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and will have a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological disease and brain and spinal injury. In addition, it is also likely to set general standards of care for people with other long-term conditions or chronic illness that are not already covered by other NSFs. The Health Committee report on head injury rehabilitation will be brought to the attention of the group developing the NSF.

We have also asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to produce a clinical guideline for the initial assessment, management and first referral of patients with head injury. NICE will start work on the guidelines in November 2001.

Provision of brain injury services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Assemblies.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a national funding mechanism for the provision of brain injury vocational rehabilitation services. [11671]

Jacqui Smith: We allocate funding to health authorities on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each health authority's fair share target of available resources, to enable them to commission similar levels of health services for populations in similar need. There are no plans to change this system.

It is for health authorities, in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders, to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Getting people back to functional independence following illness or injury is a high priority for the national health service. This year, with the Department for Work and Pensions, we are planning job retention and

rehabilitation pilots to test the best ways of helping people with prolonged illness or disability to remain in their jobs. £12 million has been allocated to fund the pilots.

Mental Health Services

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what alternatives are being considered to HSG(94)27 for providing auspices for inquiries into deaths in the mental health services; and when they will be introduced; [11912]

(2) what assessment has been made of the adequacy of HSG(94)27 in providing the auspices for inquiries into deaths in the mental health services. [11911]

Jacqui Smith: Circular health service guidance (94)27 has been an effective mechanism since 1994 for ensuring that thorough investigations are conducted into serious adverse incidents occurring in specialist mental health services. However, in the light of the Chief Medical Officer's report 'An Organisation with a Memory' and the implementation document 'Building a Safer NHS for Patients' published in April 2001, we are establishing a system for reporting, analysing and learning lessons from adverse incidents throughout the national health service. It is important that mental health services should be included in these arrangements.

The new system is currently being piloted and will be rolled out across the NHS from January 2002.

Guidance on the introduction of new arrangements will be issued early next year. In future, all serious service failures or dysfunction will be subject to a full local review to establish what went wrong, to learn lessons and to take appropriate action. In addition, the Department's investigations and inquiries unit will be informed and, in conjunction with the Commission for Health Improvement, will decide whether any further investigation is warranted.

Bed Blocking

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria were used in determining which local authorities would receive additional social services funding to tackle the problem of bed blocking; and how the criteria differ between the councils targeted for extra help and the others. [12230]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 November 2001]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 654–56W.

Overseas Treatment

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has put in place to ensure adequate after care for patients treated abroad; and what measures will be taken to ensure that a patient's GP can discuss a patient's case with a foreign hospital team where there is a language barrier. [12773]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Local commissioners will need to ensure that any contracts with foreign providers clearly specify the roles and responsibilities of each party, including pre-operative and post-operative care. It will be essential that there are clear and agreed protocols for transferring information between clinicians abroad and the United Kingdom, including general practitioners, and opportunities for UK clinicians to raise any concerns. All relevant medical records will need to be translated into English.

These and other points will be covered in guidance for the national health service on purchasing treatment for NHS patients overseas, which the Department will publish by the end of the year.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis were *(a)* Portsmouth, *(b)* East Kent and *(c)* West Kent and East Surrey Health Authorities selected to test the treatment of NHS patients overseas. [12710]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The three test-bed sites were selected on the basis that all three have significant waiting time problems and are also located close to airports, ferry ports and train stations with connections to the continent.

Logos

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of creating the new logo for the *(a)* Social Care Institute for Excellence, *(b)* General Social Care Council and *(c)* National Care Standards Commission. [12777]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]*: The cost of creating the logo for the General Social Care Council was £16,000 and for the National Care Standards Commission £12,290. Both bodies followed procurement rules and tendered for the work. The Social Care Institute for Excellence is currently using an interim design produced in-house at a cost of £376.

Overseas Doctors

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training overseas doctor applicants to the NHS will undergo before working on the wards. [12707]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Overseas doctors will be registered to practise medicine in the United Kingdom only if they have satisfied the General Medical Council that their language and clinical skills are of a sufficiently high standard to deal with patients safely.

All doctors have to compete for national health service posts at a level appropriate to their qualifications. There is an obligation for NHS employers to ensure that each doctor they take on (whether from Europe or from overseas) has the professional and communication skills necessary to carry out the duties of their specific post.

All non-UK doctors newly recruited to the NHS are entitled to attend an overseas doctors' induction course either before or shortly after starting in post. Courses are run by postgraduate deaneries at a variety of locations and are available throughout the year. During the course, doctors are familiarised with UK and NHS cultural and ethical issues, and taken through some of the more common NHS procedures. Individual trusts routinely run local induction courses covering issues specific to their area.

Germedic

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contact his Department has had with Germedic Gmbh. [12712]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Officials met the chief executive of Germedic on 15 October and have spoken to him several times subsequently by telephone.

Care Homes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* care homes and *(b)* care home places have been lost in each health authority in each financial year since 1997. [12730]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]*: The available information is in tables that have been placed in the Library. Table 1 shows year on year changes in the number of residential care homes and places in these homes, by local authority area. Table 2 shows year on year changes in the number of nursing homes and private hospitals and clinics and registered beds in these homes, by health authority area.

Allied Health Professions

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether uni-professionals curriculum development and course approval for regulation purposes for allied health professions will continue to involve the professional and regulatory bodies. [13057]

Mr. Hutton: The Health Professions Council as the regulatory body for allied health professions has responsibility to set standards for education and training and to approve courses in accordance with those standards. In doing so it will be expected to work with professional bodies who provide the registrant members of the council. It will also be expected to safeguard essential uni-professional curriculum requirements but also to enhance professional training by exploiting the benefits of multi professional and shared learning where the subject matter is common across professions.

Chiropodists

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to enable the NHS to utilise the services of non-state registered chiropodists. [12439]

Mr. Hutton: Non-state registered chiropodists, also known as unregulated practitioners, are not allowed to practise in the national health service. However, we recognise that non-state registered chiropodists do have important skills to offer.

This is one of the reasons we are proposing to modernise the regulation of professional healthcare staff. From April 2002 a new Health Professions Council will be established and all those wishing to be able to practise in the NHS will be able to seek registration. The Council will require all practitioners to meet accepted standards of safe practice, and apply consistent, fair and appropriate measures to deal with practitioners whose practice falls short of those standards.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

House of Lords

Mrs. Lait: To ask the President of the Council what plans he has for MSPs to sit in a reformed House of Lords; and when he expects to announce them. [9461]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Government are today publishing a White Paper expressing their views on the composition of a reformed House of Lords and are seeking comments on these proposals.

PRIME MINISTER

Tuition Fees

13. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the future of tuition fees. [10891]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has announced a review of student finance, which will cover higher education tuition fees.

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Prime Minister what action his Department took in recognition of Energy Efficiency Week. [11514]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 6 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 203W.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by his office; if he will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans he has to sell further such assets over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review; and if he will make a statement. [10836]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 204W.

European Delegations

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Prime Minister if he will announce the composition of the United Kingdom Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of Western European Union. [13537]

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Western European Union is as follows:

Terry Davis Esq. MP (Leader)

Full Representatives

David Atkinson Esq. MP
Malcolm Bruce Esq. MP
Sir Sydney Chapman MP
Tom Cox Esq. MP
James Cran Esq. MP
Bill Etherington Esq. MP
Paul Flynn Esq. MP
Lord Judd
Baroness Knight of Collingtree DBE
Tony Lloyd Esq. MP
Jim Marshall Esq. MP
Chris McCafferty MP
Kevin McNamara Esq. MP
Eddie O'Hara Esq. MP
Lord Russell-Johnston
John Wilkinson Esq. MP
Jimmy Wray Esq. MP

Substitute Members

Janet Anderson MP
Tony Banks Esq. MP
Baroness Billingham
Lord Burlison
Ann Cryer MP
Michael Hancock Esq. CBE MP
Baroness Hooper
Rt. Hon. Lord Kilclooney
Khalid Mahmood Esq. MP
David Marshall Esq. MP
Alan Meale Esq. MP
Gordon Prentice Esq. MP
Geraldine Smith MP
Lord Tomlinson
Dr. Rudi Vis MP
Robert Walter Esq. MP.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Working Time Directive (Road Transport Sector)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the impact of the working time directive proposals on the pay levels of haulage workers. [9660]

Mr. Jamieson: The draft directive for mobile workers in the road transport sector is still subject to negotiation, so it would be very difficult to assess the likely impact of these proposals on levels of pay until the directive has been agreed. In any event, levels of pay for haulage drivers will remain a matter for negotiation between the employer and the employee.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made of the impact of the Working Time Directive on the haulage industry; and if he will make a statement. [9658]

Mr. Jamieson: In March 1998, the Department of Trade and Industry published a regulatory assessment covering the costs and benefits of working time legislation. The assessment covered all sectors of employment in the UK, including excluded sectors such as the road haulage industry. A copy of the assessment was deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Since then, the Government have held regular meetings with both sides of industry to discuss the impact of the latest proposals on the haulage industry.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect of the working time directive proposals to increase night-time working restrictions on day time traffic congestion. [9661]

Mr. Jamieson: From our regular meetings with industry, we are fully aware of the problem that an eight-hour limit for night workers is likely to have on daytime congestion. That is one of the reasons why the Government support the 10-hour figure included in the council's common position.

Vehicle Excise Duty Evasion (Stingray System)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Stingray system for combating vehicle excise duty evasion will be introduced in Scotland. [11182]

Mr. Jamieson: The mobile number plate reader camera system was launched in Scotland on 23 October. I wrote to Scottish MPs, MEPs and MSPs on 18 October, to inform them about this.

Air Traffic Control Centre, Prestwick

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what changes have been made to the proposed plans for the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick, following the delay in construction; [11245]

(2) when the building of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick will recommence. [11246]

Mr. Jamieson: National Air Traffic Services (NATS) remains committed to investing in the New Scottish Centre (NSC) at Prestwick as part of its two-centre strategy. Following the downturn in demand for air travel arising from the events of 11 September, the Government have agreed to a proposal to delay construction of the NSC, though preparatory work on the building and system design will continue. It is not possible to be precise about the revised timing.

London Underground

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the terms of reference for evaluation of the PPP bids for the London Underground. [11612]

Mr. Jamieson: London Transport is carrying out a thorough evaluation of the value for money of the bids for the London Underground PPPs, in line with the relevant guidance produced by HM Treasury and Treasury Taskforce, copies of which are already in the House Library. London Transport is also working to ensure that when it evaluates final PPP bids it addresses the issues raised by the National Audit Office in its report "The financial analysis for the London Underground Public Private Partnerships".

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has asked external *(a)* consultants and *(b)* organisations to evaluate the PPP bids for the London Underground once the final bids have been prepared; and if he will make a statement. [11613]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's plans for a publicly run, privately built tube will deliver around £13 billion of investment to improve the underground's infrastructure over the next 15 years. The Secretary of State has made it clear that he will only be prepared for these plans to go ahead if he is content that they represent value for money.

London Underground is carrying out a thorough evaluation of all bids, assisted by its financial advisers PricewaterhouseCoopers and its engineering advisers Ove Arup. I understand that London Underground is also asking KPMG, its external auditor, to review the public sector comparators that London Underground has developed to guide its value for money evaluation.

In addition, Ernst & Young will be providing the Secretary of State with an independent opinion on London Underground's evaluation of the final PPP bids, focusing on the overall robustness of the value for money conclusions reached by London Underground and its advisers.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place copies of the letters of comfort issued in relation to *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* the London Underground PPP in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [11606]

Mr. Jamieson: No such letters have been issued.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what analyses of the impact of the discount rate on the value for money calculations on the London Underground PPP have been undertaken; and if he will place summaries in the Library. [11605]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 9W. The value for money evaluation of the London Underground PPPs will be placed in the House Library, but not until London Transport has concluded its negotiations with bidders. To publish the value for money evaluation any earlier would reveal London Transport's negotiating position and so undermine its ability to achieve best value.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on London Underground fares of financing the tube improvements planned for the next 15 years by *(a)* PPP and *(b)* direct Government borrowing. [12219]

Mr. Jamieson: Fares for the London Underground are a matter for the Mayor. The value for money evaluation that London Underground is carrying out on PPP bids assumes that fares will do no more than keep pace with inflation whether tube improvements are financed under the PPPs or by direct Government borrowing.

Fire Deaths (Cigarettes)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people died in the United Kingdom in 2000 in fires caused by cigarettes. [11863]

Dr. Whitehead: The total number of people estimated to have died in fires caused by smokers' materials (ie cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco etc.) in the United Kingdom in 2000 was 140. Of these, 135 occurred in accidental fires in dwellings.

It is not possible separately to identify those fires that were caused by cigarettes.

Flood Defences (Yorkshire)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will increase the provision for flood defences in future SSA calculations for the East Riding of Yorkshire. [11962]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government will increase SSA provision for authorities collectively up to the aggregate 4.2 per cent. increase for 2002–03 provided for in spending review 2000. To do more would mean unfairly limiting the increase in other parts of the environment, cultural and protective services SSA block. Of course, a local authority is able to increase spending on flood defence by more than this if it judges flood defence a high priority within its budget.

The Government are just completing a review of the funding arrangements for flood and coastal defence and a report will be published later this year.

Railway Assets

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in compiling a register of the assets of the railway system infrastructure. [12048]

Mr. Jamieson: The compilation of a robust asset register is a complicated task and Railtrack has agreed a two-year rolling plan with the rail regulator for the continued development of asset management and decision support systems. The new licence condition requiring Railtrack to establish and maintain a register of the condition, capacity and capability of its assets came into force on 18 April, and the first two reporting dates have been met:

On 10 June Railtrack produced its initial guidelines to the asset register, to document the current state of asset data held and used, and identify gaps in service-critical data with plans to remedy these; and its committed development plans (eg the roll-out of its computerised maintenance information management system database).

On 1 October Railtrack produced the first two-year rolling plan for further development of the asset register up to April 2004.

Railtrack will continue to produce six-monthly progress reports, which will be used to monitor and review implementation of the asset register.

Railway Safety

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many instances there have been of trains falling between rails that have spread apart in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [12047]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures provided by the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate show that during the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 there were 29 derailments due to gauge spread. Figures for this type of incident were not collected prior to 1 April 2000. Figures for the current financial year, from 1 April 2001, will not be collated until next year.

Private Leisure Craft (Accidents)

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many accidents involving private leisure craft were caused by the consumption of alcohol in the last five years. [12262]

Mr. Spellar: No specific records are currently kept of accidents involving private leisure craft caused by the consumption of alcohol, but it is estimated that some 47 such incidents occurred in the last five years.

Council Houses

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council houses for rent were held on 21 April 1991 in *(a)* Cannock Chase, *(b)* East Staffordshire, *(c)* Lichfield, *(d)* Newcastle Under Lyme, *(e)* South Staffordshire, *(f)* Stafford, *(g)* Staffordshire Moorlands, *(h)* Stoke on Trent and *(i)* Tamworth; and what the current equivalent figures are. [12567]

Ms Keeble: Council houses for rent held on 21 April 1991 and the current equivalent figures.

	Council houses for rent	
	1 April 1991	*1 April 2001*
(a) Cannock Chase	7,743	6,675
(b) East Staffordshire	6,226	0
(c) Lichfield	5,686	0
(d) Newcastle under Lyme	10,621	0
(e) South Staffordshire	5,732	0
(f) Stafford	7,441	6,361
(g) Staffordshire Moorlands	3,674	0
(h) Stoke on Trent	25,412	22,329
(i) Tamworth	6,399	5,522

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council houses for rent for each of *(a)* Cannock Chase, *(b)* East Staffordshire, *(c)* Lichfield, *(d)* Newcastle under Lyme, *(e)* South Staffordshire, *(f)* Stafford, *(g)* Staffordshire Moorlands, *(h)* Stoke on Trent and *(i)* Tamworth local authorities were transferred by a large scale voluntary transfer in each authority between 1 May 1997 and 31 August 2001. [12443]

Ms Keeble: Council houses for rent transferred by a large scale voluntary transfer in each of the following authorities between 1 May 1997 and 31 August 2001:

	Transferred
(a) Cannock Chase	0
(b) East Staffordshire	5,637
(c) Lichfield	0
(d) Newcastle under Lyme	9,887
(e) South Staffordshire	0
(f) Stafford	0
(g) Staffordshire Moorlands	3,132
(h) Stoke on Trent	[1]917

[1] Partial transfer only

Building Inspectors

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many recent complaints he has received about the work of approved building inspectors. [12646]

Dr. Whitehead: I receive a small number of complaints about the work of approved inspectors. If my hon. Friend has concerns about any particular aspects of their work, I hope he will write to me.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the quality of work carried out by the National House Building Council as approved building inspectors. [12643]

Dr. Whitehead: NHBC Building Control Services Ltd. carries out building control on about half the new homes built for sale in England and Wales and on a substantial number of new homes built by registered social landlords. Local authorities carry out building control on the other new homes. I have no evidence that the quality of building control service provided by NHBC Building Control Services Ltd. is in general different from that provided in the new homes sector by local authorities.

Building Act

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to bring into force section 38 of the Building Act 1984; and if he will make a statement. [12644]

Dr. Whitehead: I have no immediate plans to bring into force section 38 of the Building Act 1984. I keep all parts of the Building Act 1984 under review, and should a clear need to implement this section arise, I will do so.

Rail Services (London—North Kent)

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on how capacity on rail services between London and north Kent can be increased; how the electricity supply for rail lines between London and north Kent can be improved; and how the length of trains can be increased to 12 carriages on rail services between London and north Kent. [12551]

Mr. Jamieson: Twelve car operation from London to Dartford possibly through to Gillingham could be achieved by a combination of the implementation of Thameslink 2000, and as part of possible negotiations to

extend the current Connex South Eastern franchise. This would increase capacity between London and north Kent. The parties concerned are aware of the need to improve the electricity supply on these rail lines and will work together in devising a suitable solution.

Private Rail Tracks

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to ensure that private rail tracks are marked by signs placed at the border between the public rail network and private lines. [12325]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand from Railtrack that the public rail network is separated from private lines by fencing and barrier systems as appropriate. Where private lines cross over the public network, notification is provided of the type of barrier and signal process in place.

Local Government (Minority Party Representation)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives to local authorities on the proportionality of minority party representation on committees; and what information he collates on the action taken by local authorities to observe his guidance. [12324]

Dr. Whitehead: Section 21(11) of the Local Government Act 2000 requires that where party groups have been declared, overview and scrutiny committees, and their sub-committees, must reflect the political balance of the local authority. My Department has issued local authorities with guidance on these requirements.

The only exception to this is where the local authority approves a different arrangement for the allocation of committee seats without any member present voting against, under section 17(1)(B) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

All local authorities have been required to submit their constitutional proposals, including the rules for membership of overview and scrutiny committees, to the Secretary of State for consideration.

Planning Permission

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce a third party right of appeal against the granting of planning permission. [12531]

Ms Keeble: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 222W.

Rail Rolling Stock

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the availability of new rail rolling stock; and if he will make a statement. [12534]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers receive monthly progress reports from the Strategic Rail Authority regarding the delivery of the new rolling stock currently on order.

European Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 682W, on European railways, which TSIs are now being drafted; what work his Department has done to contribute to the scoping of the TSI drafting; if the directive will require the upgrading of main line routes in the UK to meet continental gauges; and what representations his Department has received from the rail industry about this directive. [12972]

Mr. Jamieson: Preparatory work has started on the first priority group of TSIs specified in article 23(1)(a) of the directive. This work is being led by the AEIF (the European Association for Railway Interoperability), which comprises representatives from the railway operating and manufacturing industries. The UK railway industry is well represented at all levels within AEIF. Member states' involvement in the TSIs at government level is through participation in the "Article 21 Committee" set up under the directive. This committee is responsible for approving the TSIs before they are adopted and can influence the contents of the TSIs throughout the drafting process.

We do not expect the TSIs to require the upgrading of UK main line routes to continental gauges. The directive provides for "specific cases" to be included in the TSIs to allow some existing national parameters, such as the loading gauge, to be retained in certain circumstances. We expect to seek appropriate specific cases in these respects. More generally, the directive provides for derogations from application of the TSIs in certain circumstances, including where their application would compromise the economic viability of the project and/or its compatibility with the existing rail system.

The rail industry has been consulted on the directive from its inception and has made wide-ranging representations on its scope and potential impact.

Jet-skis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to bring forward proposals to improve the safety of jet-skis in coastal waters. [12593]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Although Government policy is generally that recreation should be self-regulating, recreational sailing or motor boats are subject to the international regulations for the prevention of collisions (COLREGS). To comply with the COLREGS vessels must be navigated in a safe and responsible manner.

In the UK, personal watercraft such as jet-skis are not covered by merchant shipping regulations because the UK's powers to make safety regulations apply to ships.

However the Government intend to amend the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 when parliamentary time allows in order that specified legislation, such as the COLREGS, can be applied to jet-skis. Contravention of the COLREGS is a criminal offence.

Building (Flood Plains)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many

houses were built on flood plains in the last year; and what percentage this is of the total number of houses built. [12888]

Ms Keeble: The latest information on new house construction and its relationship to flood-risk areas was published in "Land use Change in England: No. 16", in July 2001. This showed that in 1998 about 135,000 new dwellings were constructed, of which about 14,500 (11 per cent. of the total) were within the indicative flood plain as shown on maps published by the Environment Agency in December 2000. Many of the new houses in flood-risk areas were constructed behind adequate flood defences. For example 37 per cent. of new houses in London were in flood-risk areas that are largely defended to a very high standard as a result of the Thames Barrier.

For the 10 years from 1989–98, 9 per cent. of the land changing to residential use and 10 per cent. of the almost 1.4 million new dwellings built were within the indicative flood plains. This compares to the 12 per cent. of all land in England that is within the indicative flood plains.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of how many houses will be built on flood plains in the next *(a)* two, *(b)* five and *(c)* 10 years. [12890]

Ms Keeble: No such estimate can be made because of the wide range of factors affecting the future volume and location of house-building. However, we are continuing to monitor land-use change in relation to areas of flood-risk. Through the high-level targets published by the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1999, we are also monitoring the responses of the Environment Agency to consultations on planning applications and whether decisions were in line with or contrary to their views. My Department is currently examining with the Environment Agency how the implementation and effectiveness of the flood-risk related policies in the new planning policy guidance note 25 issued in July 2001 on "Development and flood risk" can best be secured.

Railway Stations (Disabled Access)

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is taking to ensure that adequate disabled access is being provided at railway stations in order to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [12912]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Access to railway stations for disabled people is covered by part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Since October 1999, service providers have been required to take reasonable steps to change practices, policies or procedures which make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service. From 2004, service providers will have to take reasonable steps to remove, alter or provide reasonable means of avoiding physical features that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service.

My Department, with the Institution of Highways and Transportation and a number of other bodies, has commissioned guidance, which should be available early next year, on best practice in the design of public transport infrastructure and the pedestrian environment. This will help transport service providers to meet the duties imposed by the DDA.

In addition, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), which took over responsibility for protecting the interests of disabled passengers from the rail regulator earlier this year, requires that all licensed train operating companies publish a disabled people's protection policy describing their facilities and policies for passengers with disabilities. These policies are subject to approval by the SRA and must take account of the SRA's code of practice, "Train and Station Services for Disabled Passengers", a revised version of which was recently circulated for consultation.

Port Policing

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has completed his review of the policing of ports; and if he will make a statement. [13107]

Mr. Jamieson: Work on this review is continuing and I hope that it will be completed early in 2002.

Commercial Floor Space

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of UK commercial floor space is provided by buildings which are *(a)* larger than 1,000 square metres, *(b)* larger than 500 square metres and *(c)* larger than 100 square metres. [12100]

Ms Keeble: We do not currently have UK floorspace broken down as requested. In England and Wales in 2000, there were 1,340,780 commercial and industrial hereditaments with a total floorspace of 568,909 sq m. (A hereditament is a rateable unit of property and corresponds mainly to groups of buildings, individual buildings or parts of buildings.)

More information is available in 'Floorspace and Rateable Value for Commercial and Industrial Properties 2000', a copy of which has been placed in the House Library. The data in the publication come from the administrative databases of the VOA.

Container Ports

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on demand for container port capacity in the United Kingdom. [13518]

Mr. Jamieson: Our ports policy paper, "Modern Ports: A UK Policy", published last November, recognised a need to be better informed about developments in the UK port industry. The Department recently issued a discussion paper, "Recent developments and prospects at UK container ports", which notes that most industry forecasts point to an overall shortage of container movement capacity in the UK over the next 10 years. Market pressures are driving up the size and draught of container ships, which means that container facilities need to offer deep water with good tidal windows and ample manoeuvring room; there is only a limited number of sites capable of meeting these criteria. Market considerations, such as proximity to principal shipping lanes and markets,

and other criteria such as transport access, including the availability of deep water concentrate demand in the south-east and east of England.

As indicated in "Modern Ports", the Government believe there are important national economic benefits in meeting the growth in demand. We recognise that this would require significant container port capacity increases in the south-east and east of England over the next few years. There are relatively few specific sites where such capacity can realistically be provided which meet the criteria previously noted. At the same time, we are well aware that some expansion proposals may have significant local environmental impacts and that these represent a challenge to which those proposing port development need to rise. Planning decisions will have to take due account of these considerations.

The discussion paper discusses recent trends and prospects for demand at container ports and how it might be met. Its purpose is not to discuss in detail all the issues which planning procedures have to address, but to promote a better understanding of the ports and shipping business, and of the demands which are now causing pressure on capacity. Copies of the paper are in the Library, and it is also available from my Department (EAMI Division, Zone 1/34, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London SWIP 4DR) and on the Department's website. A further consultation paper is planned discussing project appraisal criteria to be applied to port developments.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Fly Tipping

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the level of fly tipping in the countryside; and if she will make a statement. [6613]

Mr. Meacher: The fly tipping forum, under the chairmanship of the Environment Agency, has commissioned research to assess the problem of fly tipping on farmland. However, the survey, which is an essential part of the project, was suspended on the outbreak of the foot and mouth epidemic. The project will be carried out as soon as practicable.

The action being taken by the Government on fly tipping and other forms of unlawful waste disposal was set out most recently in the Government's response to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's report on the Environment Agency (Cm 4832—paragraphs 55–60).

Live Bovine (Ear Tag)

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evidence she has received of a slaughter team in Yorkshire cutting off the ear of a live bovine in order to get an ear tag. [2799]

Mr. Morley: I replied to the right hon. Member by letter on 6 August 2001 and placed a copy of my letter in the Library.

Foot and Mouth

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will use the veterinary laboratories at Stormont for foot and mouth blood testing as a supplement to Pirbright; [2739]

(2) what confidentiality or secrecy agreements temporary veterinary inspectors have to sign on joining her Department. [2759]

Mr. Morley: I replied to the right hon. Member by letter on 6 August 2001 and placed copies of my letters in the Library.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to assist small farms following the foot and mouth outbreak. [2555]

Mr. Morley: I replied to the right hon. Member by letter on 13 August 2001 and placed a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her most recent assessment is of the impact of foot and mouth disease on the economy of rural Northumberland and its market towns. [4683]

Alun Michael: Foot and mouth disease restrictions have had a massive impact on rural economies. We have commissioned a study to help quantify the impact on a selection of areas typical of those affected, and Newcastle university is currently undertaking research specific to Northumberland.

Twelve market towns in the north-east, including Berwick-on-Tweed and six others in Northumberland, have been selected for inclusion in the market towns regeneration programme announced in the rural White Paper. This will help counter the effects of foot and mouth by providing a boost to the economies and communities of the towns and their rural hinterlands.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has received in favour of treating the north of Northumberland as a foot and mouth disease free area; and if she will make a statement. [11085]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The Department has received a number of representations on this subject. When the autumn movements arrangements were announced, Ministers said that foot and mouth free status would normally be gained on a county or unitary authority basis. However, it was also made clear that we would consider splitting counties between different foot and mouth disease status if circumstances warranted this. So far, this has been done only in Powys and north Yorkshire, but we are keeping other candidates, including Northumberland, under constant review.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many of the cases of FMD in sheep in Wales were diagnosed on the basis of clinical symptoms alone; and how many were confirmed positive by laboratory tests. [9852]

Mr. Morley: Since the start of the foot and mouth disease outbreak, the number of infected premises in Wales which had sheep present totals 107. Of these 107 premises, 94 had laboratory tests conducted of with 54 returned positive results.

Notes:

1. The 107 premises noted above may have contained other animals as well as sheep.

2. A negative lab result does not mean that infection was absent. Each case is confirmed on the basis of a clinical diagnosis of foot and mouth disease by the vet on the farm, supported by convincing clinical evidence.

Source:

DEFRA Disease Control System database as at 1 November 2001. The figures may be subject to revision as quality assurance of data is carried out.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations the Government have received about a public inquiry into the handling of the foot and mouth disease outbreak. [9850]

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many representations she has received in favour of a public inquiry into the foot and mouth crisis. [9263]

Mr. Morley: The Government have received a number of representations from a variety of sources on this subject. These have mainly been from parish, district and borough councils.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of recent research into the relationship between the number of animals slaughtered during the foot and mouth outbreak and the promptness of the implementation of a 24 hour slaughter policy. [7723]

Mr. Morley: The foot and mouth disease control policy is to slaughter all susceptible animals on infected premises within 24 hours of the infection being reported and, with allowance for limited local veterinary discretion, all susceptible livestock on contiguous premises within 48 hours.

The Department's implementation of the policy is likely to be one of the issues that will be examined by Dr. Iain Anderson's lessons learned inquiry.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many individual payments have been made to farmers following foot and mouth disease of *(a)* £1,000,000 to £1,999,999, *(b)* £2,000,000 to £2,999,999, *(c)* £3,000,000 to £3,999,999 and *(d)* in excess of £4,000,000. [11799]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The information on individual payments to farmers that you requested is as follows:

	Number of payments
£1,000,000 to £1,999,999	56
£2,000,000 to £2,999,999	8
£3,000,000 to £3,999,999	3
In excess of £4,000,000	1

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many infected premises were identified in Powys in the foot and mouth outbreak. [R] [12834]

Mr. Morley: The number of infected premises cases in Powys is available on the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk. The website is updated daily.

As at 5 November 2001, there had been 69 infected premises in Powys.

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many contiguous culls were started more than 48 hours after samples had been collected from infected animals on the contiguous infected premise in Powys in the foot and mouth outbreak. [R] [12835]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what powers the three inquiries into foot and mouth have to compel *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials to give evidence. [12612]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Given their non-statutory nature, Ministers and officials may not be compelled by the two Government inquiries or the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food to give evidence. However, Ministers and officials are expected to co-operate fully with the two inquiries and the policy commission and compulsion is not an issue.

Light Lambs

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many lighter lambs the Government plan to buy in 2001. [6661]

Mr. Morley: Under the light lamb scheme introduced from September 2001, the Government are prepared to pay £10 for the buying up of light lambs for which there is currently no export market because of the foot and mouth export ban. This could cost up to £25 million in purchase costs but estimates of uptake are uncertain. The scheme will not operate in 2002 and we expect farmers to look into selling lambs into the food chain as their first priority.

Waste Disposal

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to ensure that incineration is only used to burn sorted, post-recycled waste and not mixed household waste; and if she will make a statement. [4149]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 July 2001]:* The Government have now set each local authority statutory targets for recycling and composting. In future, therefore, material burnt in municipal waste incinerator residues cannot be counted towards meeting the statutory recycling targets.

Sugar Beet Industry

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support is to be given by her Department to the sugar beet industry over the next five years. [4494]

Mr. Morley: Support for the sugar beet industry is governed by the European Union's common agricultural policy (CAP) regime for sugar. A new regime was agreed at the May Agriculture Council and runs for five years from 1 July 2001. This maintains support prices for sugar and sugar beet at previous levels, but ends support for the storage of sugar. The regime will be subject to review at the beginning of 2003 on the basis of a Commission report and any necessary proposals. The Government's view is that the EU support for sugar needs to be put on a more sustainable basis.

Carcase Burial Site, Petrockstowe

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will state, in relation to the carcase burial site at Ash Moor, Petrockstowe, *(a)* what the level of the water table is below the surface of the land and *(b)* whether a microbiological study has been conducted into the use of the land for the burial of animal carcases; if she will publish the environmental impact and risk assessments for the site and list the recommendations they made; which legal requirements were complied with before construction of the site started; what has been (i) the cost of work to date and (ii) the continuing cost of upkeep; what additional cost will be incurred if the site is brought into use for the burial of animal carcases; and if she will make a statement. [R] [10735]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* In relation to the burial site at Ash Moor, Petrockstowe:

(a) The level of the water table is 1.3, to 3.5 m below ground level.

(b) No. A microbiological study is not necessary as the only vectors for micro-organisms to travel from burial into the environment are in the leachate or gas. The environmental assessment describes how these vectors will be controlled.

The environmental statement will be published after local consultation. The document is currently in draft format and is being finalised prior to local consultation.

Prior to construction an Environment Agency risk assessment (available from the Public register at Exminster House, Miller Way, Exminster, EX6 8AS) was completed on 11 April 2001. EA authorisation under regulation 18(3)(a) of the Groundwater Regulations 1998 was granted on 12 April 2001. (Construction at Ash Moor started on 20 April 2001).

(i) £5.6 million is the cost of the work to date but this figure is subject to confirmation as negotiations are on-going with one of the contractors.

(ii) £20,000 per week is the continuing cost of upkeep.

If the site is brought into use for the burial of animal carcases the one off cost for one cell would be approximately £350,000. If three cells were used the cost rises to approximately £670,000 and if all cells were used the cost would be approximately £1,550,000. On top of this, there would be costs for odour controls, long-term maintenance and monitoring and testing. These are expected to be approximately £350,000-£400,000 per annum irrespective of the number of cells used. Such costs would fall after four or five years.

Compensation (Tuna Fishermen)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on compensation to UK tuna drift net fishermen for the withdrawal of their licences. [11591]

Mr. Morley: Funding available under Cornwall's objective 1 fisheries programme includes grants for the conversion of fishing vessels to more environmentally friendly fishing methods. Depending on the new fishing method chosen, conversion from drift netting could be treated as a priority under this scheme.

Those affected by the ban may also apply under the decommissioning scheme which I recently announced.

Livestock Markets

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to support livestock markets in England and Wales to ensure that they have a viable future; and if she will provide financial aid and support for livestock markets to assist with the financial costs they are incurring due to additional cleaning and disinfecting measures that are in place. [10497]

Mr. Morley: The question of whether, and if so under what conditions, livestock markets will reopen is kept under review in the light of the developing disease situation.

Livestock markets are commercial operations, and there are no plans to offer them subsidies from the public purse.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what long-term plans her Department has for local collection points at livestock markets; what plans she has *(a)* to help livestock farmers to off-set the costs of having their livestock collected at markets and *(b)* for assisting markets with the costs they incur in acting as collection points. [10499]

Mr. Morley: The question of whether, and if so under what conditions, livestock markets will reopen is kept under review in the light of the developing disease situation.

There are no plans to offer subsidies *(a)* to farmers to offset the cost of having livestock collected at markets or *(b)* to markets to offset costs incurred in acting as collecting points.

Devolved Administrations

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is with regard to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in her Department giving evidence to (i) Scottish Parliament, (ii) Welsh Assembly and (iii) Northern Ireland Assembly Committees; and to what categories of document she gives (A) full access, (B) restricted access and (C) no access to (w) Scottish parliament, (x) Welsh Assembly, (y) Northern Ireland Assembly and (z) House of Commons select committees. [7045]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1003–05W.

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies Research Programme

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will provide the information on her Department's TSE research programme promised in her statement of 22 October. [13487]

Margaret Beckett: I have today placed a paper describing the programme in full in the Library of the House.

Live Animal Exports

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many exporters of live animals have been found to have breached the live transport regulations; and how many have had their licence revoked since July 1997. [10389]

Mr. Morley: Since July 1997, anyone transporting farm livestock for journeys exceeding eight hours by road or any animals on commercial journeys by rail, sea or air must hold a specific authorisation. The TRADE database, maintained by DEFRA, records enforcement action under the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 but does not separately identify transporters who are exporters of live animals. No specific authorisations have been revoked. One case is pending.

Correspondence

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to letters from the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire of 3 April concerning Mr. Gale, 4 April concerning Chaddesley Corbett, 18 April concerning Mr. and Mrs. Morris, 20 April concerning Mr. Boaz, 25 April concerning Mr. Chadwick, 30 April concerning the Wyre Piddle By-Pass, 30 April concerning Ann Ward and 2 May concerning landfill sites. [2705]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* Replies have been sent to all the hon. Member's letters to MAFF Ministers with the exception of his letter of 30 April, of which I am afraid we have no record.

Fishing Industry

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what short-term provision she will make to North sea trawlermen; and if she will make a statement. [11996]

Mr. Morley: The priority for action to help the fishing industry is to reduce the current excess of fishing capacity. I have therefore announced a grant scheme for the decommissioning of fishing vessels. Grants are also available for the conversion of vessels to introduce more environmentally sensitive fishing methods and to improve the handling of fish.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what estimate she has made of *(a)* current and *(b)* projected cod stocks for the next three years in the North sea; [11964]

(2) what the Government's policy is in relation to the future of the British trawling industry in the North sea; and if she will make a statement. [11997]

Mr. Morley: The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) estimates that the spawning stock biomass of cod in the North sea will stand at 55,400 tonnes at the beginning of 2002, which ICES considers to be outside safe biological limits. The biomass in future years will depend on the level of exploitation as regulated by management measures and on natural developments. The Government's policy is to work with EU partners, through recovery plans and other measures, to ensure a sustainable future for trawling and for other sectors of the British fishing industry, exploiting opportunities in the North sea and elsewhere.

French Beef Imports

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much French beef was imported in the last 12 months. [12077]

Mr. Morley: The volume of beef imported into the UK from France in the 12-month period from September 2000 to August 2001, as recorded by the overseas trade statistics, was approximately 5,700 tonnes. The country from which these imports originated is not recorded in the overseas trade statistics; therefore, not necessarily all beef shown as being imported from France will be of French origin. Similarly, this figure will exclude any beef of French origin imported from other member states.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's relationship to the Food Standards Agency. [11791]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* DEFRA is responsible for the promotion of sustainable development across government and society at large, both in the UK and internationally, leading the renewal of rural areas and promoting an efficient, competitive and sustainable food chain. The main objective of the Food Standards Agency is to protect public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food, including risks caused by the way in which it is produced or supplied, and otherwise to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food. The two Departments have a close working relationship.

Horticulture

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she has collated on *(a)* variations in the prices of horticultural plants in the EU and *(b)* the impact of localised funding support on such prices. [12167]

Mr. Morley: No such information is collated by the Department, though we do compile data on UK horticultural production, including the price of selected flowering pot plants in certain wholesale markets in England.

Apples

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how much

subsidy from the *(a)* UK and *(b)* EU Bramley apple growers have received in (i) Northern Ireland, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) England each year since 1981; [11976]

(2) how many apple processing plants have been given grant in aid in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* England since 1981; [11978]

(3) how many apple processing plants have closed in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* England since 1991. [11979]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The information is not available in the form requested. Apple growers may have received payments under a variety of schemes and from a number of Departments but are not generally identifiable as such from the records held.

The Department does not hold information on the number or location of apple processing plants.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many representations she has received for arable compensation from British farmers in the year prior to the 31 October deadline; and from whom they came. [12301]

Mr. Morley: I have received numerous representations about arable agrimonetary compensation directly from farmers, from their unions and other organisations, and through hon. Members' correspondence.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps she has taken to secure agrimonetary compensation from the European Union. [12300]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 738W.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with EU Ministers about a replacement to the agrimonetary compensation scheme; and if she will make a statement. [12357]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* There have been no discussions with EU representatives concerning a replacement to the agrimonetary compensation arrangements.

Correspondence/Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when will she reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute, dated 27 July, regarding *(a)* import of German beef, *(b)* prawn quotas and *(c)* sheep farming in Kintyre; [8638]

(2) when she will reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute on 16 October, ref. 8638. [12657]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* My noble Friend, Lord Whitty, replied to the letter from the hon. Member on 6 November.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects testing for TB to resume in Gloucestershire; and if she will make a statement. [12354]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Veterinary resources in Gloucestershire are still subject to pressures of work in support of foot and mouth disease control. TB testing will resume as and when resources become available. It will be prioritised in accordance with veterinary risk assessment.

Livestock Movements

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make provision to compensate for the cleansing and disinfecting costs involved in animal movement; and if she will make a statement. [12348]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* There is currently no provision to compensate farmers for the cost of cleansing and disinfecting involved in the movement of animals and there are no plans to do so.

Imported Foods

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further measures are being implemented to check against possible contamination of imported foods. [13018]

Mr. Morley: Adequate measures are in place to control legally presented imports of products of animal origin. All products of animal origin imported from third countries into the UK must enter at designated UK border inspection posts (BIP) where they are subject to veterinary inspections. All consignments are subject to documentary and identity checks and a percentage of consignments undergo physical checks. These checks are designed to establish that the products meet EU import conditions. Contaminated consignments would be rejected.

In respect of food not of animal origin, the Food Standards Agency monitors general food enforcement activity by all local authorities, including port health authorities, and has recently begun a programme of audits to provide more detailed information on enforcement standards.

Farm Woodland Schemes

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers participate in farm woodland schemes. [12806]

Mr. Morley: Between 1988 and the end of June 2001, there were 8,572 approved applications in England under the farm woodland premium scheme and/or its predecessor the farm woodland scheme. Individuals may make more than one application.

Supermarkets

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure that the code of practice on the

relationship between suppliers and supermarkets is made available to farmers and growers in Worcestershire; and if she will make a statement. [12676]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry published the code of practice on 31 October 2001 and asked the Director General of Fair Trading to seek to obtain undertakings from four leading supermarket chains within four weeks.

The code can be found as an attachment to the relevant press release on the Department of Trade and Industry's website: http://www.dti.gov.uk

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Private Finance Initiative (Employees' Rights)

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on protection of employees' rights and conditions of service where PFI projects are introduced to the public sector. [10717]

Mr. Leslie: The Government are committed to protecting the rights and existing terms and conditions of staff in transfers from the public sector to the private sector under public private partnership arrangements. To this end the Cabinet Office has published a statement of practice on staff transfers in the public sector. This is accessible on the Cabinet Office website: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/civilservice/2000/tupe/

Departmental Spending

Pete Wishart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total spending by his Department was in each nation and region of the UK in the last year for which figures are available; what proportion of his Department's total spending this constitutes; and if he will make a statement. [6785]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 854–56W.

Council of the Isles

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the future programme of meetings of the Council of the Isles. [10862]

Mr. Prescott: The British-Irish Council, brings together the British and Irish Governments, the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the authorities in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

The British-Irish Council meets in different formats. Since the first summit meeting held in London in December 1999, a number of meetings have taken place in different sectoral areas at ministerial and official level.

The most recent meeting of the Council took place in Dublin on 13 September 2001. Officials discussed the issue of misuse of drugs, the area of work for which Ireland is the lead administration within the Council.

The Irish Government will host the next British-Irish Council summit. The drugs issue will be the main item for discussion at the summit. Progress in the other areas of work of the Council will also be reviewed.

The Government look forward to further meetings taking place in the agreed areas of work.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside his Department. [13130]

Mr. Leslie: Within my Department and its agencies over the last two years there have been no cases of computer hacking from (A) within or (B) outside and no instances of fraudulent use of computers although there have been 16 cases of theft in 1999–2000 and nine in 2000–01.

Consultation Documents

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many consultation documents were issued by his Department from *(a)* 15 October to 14 January, *(b)* 15 January to 14 April, *(c)* 15 April to 14 July and *(d)* 15 July to 14 October in each year from 1996. [12895]

Mr. Leslie: The number of consultation documents issued by the Cabinet Office was as follows:

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
(a) 15 October to 14 January	2	1	1	3	—
(b) 15 January to 14 April	—	1	—	2	2
(c) 15 April to 14 July	—	—	1	—	2
(d) 15 July to 14 October	—	1	—	—	9

No formal consultation documents were issued in the other periods given in the question. The figures do not include nine technical documents published between 1999 and 2001. These documents went out for consultation but the Cabinet Office does not hold records of the precise dates of issue.

Since the beginning of 2001, formal Cabinet Office consultation documents (and those of other central Government Departments) have been available from the online central register of consultations at http// www.ukonline.gov.uk.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were prosecuted for committing benefit fraud in financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [7579]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the tables:

Benefits Agency fraud investigations

Year	Prosecutions	Cautions and administrative penalties as an alternative to prosecution[1]	Total
1997–98	12,009	—	12,009
1998–99	11,185	2,835	14,020
1999–2000	9,977	12,332	22,309
2000–01	9,030	15,092	24,122

Local authority investigations[2]

Year	Number of successful prosecutions[3]	Number of administrative penalties[1] administered as an alternative to prosecution[3]	Total[3]
1997–98	700	—	700
1998–99	800	—	800
1999–2000	860	390	1,250
2000–01	1,100	550	1,650

[1] Administrative Penalties, as an alternative to prosecution, were introduced by the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act (1997) with effect from December 1998.

[2] Figures are taken from local authority management information returns. It is possible that there could be some double counting with Benefits Agency data if there were cases which involved a joint prosecution.

[3] Data are not available for all 409 local authorities. The total for Great Britain includes estimates for local authorities that have not responded. These estimates are based on historical and regional data. This type of estimate is standard practice in reporting totals where there have been non-respondents. The figures have been rounded to two significant figures.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many national insurance numbers have been issued; and what plans he has to review the procedures for issuing, cancelling and verifying NI numbers. [8341]

Malcolm Wicks: We regularly review data cleansing activities on the departmental central index (DCI) and are currently looking at issues relating to NINO security as a whole. This includes reviewing procedures and building on work already done to identify and further safeguard vulnerable accounts.

There are approximately 83 million national insurance numbers (NINOs) currently held on the DCI. Other than the 47 million NINOs used by UK residents over 16, this figure includes approximately 12.5 million child reference numbers for all children included on claims to child benefit, 13.5 million for people who are dead and whose numbers remain in order to allow surviving spouses to claim contributory benefit entitlement and 2 million for those in receipt of benefit abroad. The remaining estimated 8 million will include UK citizens who have migrated to other countries, short-term immigrants/holiday workers and deceased persons where notification of death has not been received.

Duplicate NINOs are 'cancelled' or removed from the DCI as and when they are identified. The cancellation of NINOs, other than those discovered to be duplicates or unused, is not carried out as it is considered that the removal of 'inactive' records opens a gateway to identity fraud. The retention of a deceased person's NINO is necessary to protect the inheritable rights of a surviving spouse to ensure they are awarded the correct rate of retirement pension.

The procedure for issuing NINOs has been tightened through the enhanced NINO allocation process which was introduced nationally from April 2001. This aligns the process for the allocation of both benefit inspired and employment inspired NINOs and ensures consistency of approach is maintained throughout the country, thereby securing the adult registration gateway. All adult applicants for a NINO are interviewed by dedicated staff who have received specific specialist training. Information given by the applicant in support of their application is corroborated by expert staff who also scrutinise documentation provided using specialist equipment. A more stringent internal checking regime ensures that a NINO application is valid and that the applicant does not already have a NINO.

We are currently examining new initiatives that address the issues around NINO security and propose to do more in the future to improve the procedures for managing NINOs.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what considerations and costs are taken into account when determining the level of jobseeker's allowance. [10575]

Malcolm Wicks: Jobseeker's allowance consists of both a contribution-based and an income-based element. The rates of jobseeker's allowance are intended to cover normal day-to-day living expenses and are reviewed annually using the Rossi index.

Entitlement to contribution-based jobseeker's allowance is not affected by the amount of capital a person has although part-time earnings and occupational or personal pensions are taken into account. When determining income-based jobseeker's allowance most forms of income a person or their partner have are taken into account. The amount of capital held can also affect the amount of benefit.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase the staff of the Child Support Agency while the new assessment procedures are implemented. [10417]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Doug Smith to Mr. David Willetts, dated 6 November 2001:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the Child Support Agency.

You asked what plans the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has to increase the staff of the Child Support Agency whilst the new assessment procedures are implemented.

The amount of staff in the Child Support Agency will grow by around 1,000 during the period in which the new procedures will be implemented.

I hope this is helpful.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time was between receipt of requests to re-examine claims for attendance allowance and their examination, in each of the last four years. [11386]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated November 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what the average time was between receipt of requests to re-examine claims for Attendance Allowance and their examination in each of the last four years.

The actual average clearance times for Attendance Allowance (AA) reviews between April 1997 and September 2001 are shown in the attached table. Please note that under the Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) procedures introduced in October 99, the review process changed in some respects and was henceforth termed reconsiderations. Reconsiderations occur when a claimant asks for a claim to be looked at again within one month of the previous decision.

The DMA procedures introduced in 1999 led to temporary backlogs of work, and taken with a growing caseload for disability benefits, the average time taken to reconsider claims increased very significantly. These backlogs were tackled as a priority and the average clearance time for reconsiderations is now significantly lower.

I hope this is helpful.

Date	*Average days taken*
Reviews (AA) April 1997-March 1998	
April 1997	43.20
May 1997	44.72
June 1997	53.69
July 1997	53.17
August 1997	52.57
September 1997	52.17
October 1997	50.40
November 1997	47.99
December 1997	45.34
January 1998	48.41
February 1998	42.30
March 1998	38.48
Reviews (AA) April 1998-March 1999	
April 1998	39.10
May 1998	38.04
June 1998	38.90
July 1998	40.58
August 1998	42.06
September 1998	43.54
October 1998	43.54
November 1998	43.24
December 1998	44.38
January 1999	46.05
February 1999	54.39
March 1999	44.13
Reviews (AA) April 1999-March 2000	
April 1999	44.34
May 1999	46.[illegible]
June 1999	51.14
July 1999	54.73
August 1999	54.61
September 1999	52.57
October 1999	53.98
November 1999	67.75
December 1999	75.17
January 2000	90.78
February 2000	105.59
March 2000	129.80
Reconsiderations (AA) October 1999-March 2000	
April 1999	—
May 1999	—
June 1999	—
July 1999	—
August 1999	—
September 1999	—
October 1999	24
November 1999	28
December 1999	36
January 2000	52
February 2000	62
March 2000	65
Reconsiderations (AA) April 2000-March 2001	
April 2000	63
May 2000	60.2
June 2000	54.4
July 2000	50.9
August 2000	47.5
September 2000	51.8
October 2000	46.1
November 2000	44.9
December 2000	42.2
January 2001	44.4
February 2001	40.5
March 2001	35.6
Reconsiderations (AA) April 2001-September 2001	
April 2001	36
May 2001	33.9
June 2001	35.3
July 2001	36.1
August 2001	36.1
September 2001	38.5

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what factors determine the length of time for a decision to be given in response to those who request that their claims for attendance allowance are re-examined; and if he will make a statement. [11388]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 6 November 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what factors determine the length of time for a decision to be given in response to those who request that their claims for Attendance Allowance are re-examined; and if he will make a statement.

A number of factors can affect the length of time it takes to re-examine claims for Attendance Allowance. In particular, before a final decision can be taken on their case, a decision maker (DM) may need additional evidence from claimants or further medical evidence or reports about the effects of their disabilities on their care needs.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many appeals against decisions on attendance allowance have been made in each of the last 12 months for which figures are available; and how many *(a)* have been allowed, *(b)* have been dismissed and *(c)* are awaiting a decision in each of the last four years. [11385]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 6 November 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many appeals against decisions on attendance allowance have been made in each of the last 12 months for which figures are available; and how many have been (a) allowed (b) dismissed and (c) are awaiting a decision.

The information is in the attached table.

I hope this is helpful.

Month	*AA appeals registered*	*Allowed appeals (a)*	*Dismissed appeals (b)*	*Outstanding appeals (c)*	*Total number of cleared cases (d)*
October 2000	1,434	386	3	3,116	1,271
November 2000	1,545	502	6	2,284	1,539
December 2000	1,023	425	6	1,958	1,246
January 2001	1,311	613	8	1,698	2,008
February 2001	1,330	636	4	1,672	1,770
March 2001	1,442	642	5	1,649	1,688
April 2001	1,317	431	1	1,799	1,227
May 2001	1,212	448	3	1,646	1,237
June 2001	1,263	430	3	1,475	1,210
July 2001	1,331	431	3	1,447	1,266
August 2001	1,261	397	3	1,516	1,142
September 2001	1,129	338	5	1,676	1,078

(a) Allowed appeals include allowed or increased appeals.
(d) Dismissed appeals include cases where entitlement is reduced or disallowed on appeal.
(c) Outstanding appeals include all cases sent to the Tribunal awaiting a decision.
(d) The total number of cleared cases column includes allowed, dismissed, maintained and various other outcomes that are not appropriate to the stated categories.
It is not possible, from overall statistics to track individual claims through the subsequent stages.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time is for dealing with requests by those seeking an explanation for decisions relating to claims for attendance allowance. [11384]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated November 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what the average time is for dealing with requests by those seeking an explanation for decisions relating to claims for attendance allowance.

There are two types of explanation available to claimants, a verbal explanation and a written explanation. A customer is entitled to ask for an explanation in one or both forms to help them understand the reasons for the decision on their entitlement to Attendance Allowance. The actual average clearance times for requests for explanations of decisions relating to Attendance Allowance is three days.

I hope this is helpful.

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action his Department took in recognition of energy efficiency week. [11519]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 592W.

The Department for Work and Pensions is actively involved in an overall cross-government programme designed to lessen the impact of our operations on the environment. We are currently working with our estates and service partners, Land Securities Trillium, to implement a number of capital investment projects designed to improve energy efficiency throughout the estate. Further to this, the Department is in the process of developing an overarching environmental awareness campaign for staff, that will include energy efficiency good practice while at work and links will be promoted with the work of the Energy Savings Trust.

Medical Assessments

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of C grade medical reports fail to meet his Department's standards by *(a)* 10 per cent. and *(b)* five per cent. broken down by disability benefit centre in each of the last three years. [11903]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested.

Medical quality targets were set in June 2000, in the Government's response to the Social Security Committee report on medical services. The target in relation to C grade medical reports was: within six months to reduce the proportion of C grade reports by 10 per cent.; and within one year to reduce the proportion of C grade reports across all benefits to less than 5 per cent.

Performance against the target is monitored at national and at contract package level. All contract package areas (north, south-east, and south-west) have met both the six month and the one year target.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the rate of medical examinations by SEMA is in respect of *(a)* incapacity and *(b)* disability benefits. [11901]

Malcolm Wicks: In the 12 months ending 31 September 2001, there were 428,232 IB examinations and 235,549 DLA/AA examinations carried out.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Passports (Confiscation)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will remove the passports of individuals who have expressed an intention to go to *(a)* Afghanistan and *(b)* Pakistan to fight against British or US armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [8655]

Angela Eagle: The courts have distinct statutory powers to order the surrender of passports belonging to football hooligans and drug offenders but, in general, the power of the Secretary of State to refuse or withdraw passport facilities is limited to certain categories which have previously been announced in Parliament. These include:

> "in very rare cases a person whose past or proposed activities are so demonstrably undesirable that the grant or continued enjoyment of passport facilities would be contrary to the public interest".

I will carefully consider the individual circumstances of any cases which appear to fall into this category.

Police Pensions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to fund police pensions over the next 10 years. [9974]

Mr. Denham: We have no plans to change the manner of funding of police pensions at present. However, we are aware of police authorities' concern over the increasing burden of the funding of pensions. The Home Office and Treasury will be keeping the situation under review.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome was of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held in Brussels on 16 October; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [10368]

Mr. Denham: I represented the United Kingdom at the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council in Luxembourg on 16 October. The purpose of the Council was to consider key issues on the two main anti-terrorism instruments presented by the Commission at the special JHA Council on 20 September, both of which are scheduled for adoption at the JHA Council on 6–7 December.

Framework Decision on European Arrest Warrant

The principal issue considered was the intended scope of the warrant, in particular the abolition of dual criminality for offences covered by the framework decision.

Member states expressed a range of views on dual criminality and on the way in which offences should be defined for the purpose of operating the warrant.

The Council also noted the work in hand to identify the appropriate procedures for serving and enforcing the European arrest warrant.

Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism

The Council examined two aspects of the draft framework decision on combating terrorism: penalties and jurisdiction.

A number of member states expressed difficulty over the Commission's proposal for common minimum/maximum penalties for those terrorist offences defined in the framework decision.

On jurisdiction, member states expressed concern about possible conflicts of jurisdiction if extra-territorial jurisdiction within the European Union were provided for.

The Presidency concluded that further work should be undertaken and that these issues should be discussed again at the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 16 November, in order to meet the commitment to adoption in December.

Police Numbers (Staffordshire)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the chief constable on police numbers in Staffordshire. [10289]

Mr. Denham: I have not had any discussions with the chief constable about police numbers in Staffordshire.

On 31 August, Staffordshire police had 2,212 officers, 83 more than in March 2001. The force had 935 civilian support staff at March 2001; this is an increase of 173 since March 1997 and 77 since March 2000.

Under the crime fighting fund (CFF) recruitment initiative, Staffordshire police have been allocated a total of 146 additional recruits, over and above their existing recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003.

In 2000–01, Staffordshire police recruited all 49 of their CFF allocation. The force expects to recruit all its second year CFF allocation of 51 in 2001–02. Staffordshire has been allocated a further 46 CFF recruits in 2002–03.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to collect data on the number of asylum seekers who have their asylum applications rejected on the grounds of non-compliance, broken down by the reason for non-compliance. [10722]

Angela Eagle: Data are collected centrally and published showing the number of applications refused on non-compliance grounds as a whole. This is not broken down into specific reasons for non-compliance. This information could be obtained only at a disproportionate

cost. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the main reasons for refusing an asylum claim on non-compliance grounds are:

1. Failure to attain the screening interview;
2. Failure to return or late return of the statement of evidence form (SEF);
3. Failure to attend or late attendance at an asylum interview.

Police Numbers (Cheshire)

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* police constables there were in the Cheshire constabulary in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001. [11074]

Mr. Denham: The information requested has been provided by the chief constable of Cheshire constabulary and is set out in the table.

Year	*Police Officers*	*Constables*
31 March 1997	2,046	1,590
31 March 2001	2,002	1,533
30 September 2001	2,058	1,575

Under the crime fighting fund (CFF) recruitment initiative, Cheshire police have been allocated a total of 147 additional recruits, over and above their existing recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003. Cheshire police recruited 21 of its CFF allocation in 2000–01.

Cheshire constabulary employed 735 civilian staff in March 1997 and 833 in March 2001.

Motorcycle Theft

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to target motorcycle theft. [11659]

Mr. Denham: Motorcycle theft is included within the national target to reduce vehicle crime by 30 per cent. over the five year period April 1999 to March 2004.

The National Criminal Intelligence Service has received additional Government funding to run a project aimed at tackling organised motorcycle theft. Crime prevention messages specifically aimed at motorcyclists have been included in the current phase of the national vehicle crime reduction communications campaign. Local authorities now have powers to provide secure parking for motorcycles under the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984 (as amended). The Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 provides for statutory regulation of the motor salvage industry which will help prevent vehicles, including motorcycles, from being stolen to be broken up for spare parts or "rung" (ie taking on the identities of vehicles which have been written off in accidents).

Cannabis

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the average cost of arresting and charging people for cannabis possession in the last 12 months. [11874]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: It can take on average three hours of a police officer's time to arrest and charge a person for possession of cannabis. There were 81,380 cannabis possession offences in 1999. A police constable's basic salary cost in England and Wales falls within the range of £12 to £14 per hour, therefore the annual cost is in the region of £2,929,680 to £3,417,960.

In assessing the costs, it is important to remember that arrests for cannabis possession may be incidental to other police action.

People Trafficking

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government are taking to bring to justice people who traffic in human beings; and in what such action they are participating on an EU-wide basis. [12074]

Angela Eagle: The Government are committed to ensuring that strong measures are in place to penalise people who traffic in human beings. We have signed the trafficking protocol to the United Nations convention on transnational organised crime, which requires the specific criminalisation of trafficking in human beings.

The Government are currently negotiating a framework decision, which is a binding European Union instrument and requires the criminalisation of trafficking in human beings for the purposes of exploiting their labour and services or for sexual exploitation. Under its provisions, the United Kingdom will be required to have implemented the instrument within two years of its adoption.

A decision will be made on how best to implement the UN and EU agreements after the EU framework decision has been adopted. We will also take account of the outcome of the consultation exercise on "Setting the Boundaries", the report of the sex offences review which made recommendations for a new offence of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Last year we set up Project Reflex, a multi-agency task force chaired by the National Crime Squad, to co-ordinate anti-trafficking operations and develop the intelligence and strategic planning to underpin them. It is now well established and has resulted in some major successes involving partners overseas. The most recent has been Operation Franc in early June, which led to arrests in the United Kingdom, Belgium, France and Germany.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the *(a)* local authorities which have successfully applied for antisocial behaviour orders, *(b)* local authorities which have only unsuccessfully applied for antisocial behaviour orders and *(c)* local authorities which have not applied for any antisocial behaviour orders; and if he will identify under what political control each authority operates; [12030]

(2) how many applications for antisocial behaviour orders have been made by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* the police; and how those applications were disposed of and with what outcomes. [12029]

Mr. Denham: There is known to have been some under-recording of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) in a few police force areas. With the co-operation of Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) we are

therefore undertaking a one-off reconciliation exercise to establish any differences, between the numbers of ASBOs known to the police and the data from court returns.

The data should be available in November and I will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals against antisocial behaviour orders have been made; and with what outcomes. [12028]

Mr. Denham: Information collected centrally on antisocial behaviour orders does not include details of those cases in which an appeal has been lodged.

Crimestoppers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to support voluntary organisations involved in crime prevention, with particular reference to Crimestoppers. [12015]

Mr. Denham: My Department is constantly looking at ways to support voluntary organisations involved in crime prevention. Crimestoppers has submitted a request for support which is currently being considered.

Experience Corps Initiative

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for members of the National Experience Corps to lead sport and exercise sessions for older people. [12228]

Angela Eagle: The experience corps initiative aims to encourage more people aged 50 and over to become or to remain active in their local communities. Although there are no specific plans in relation to encouraging older people to engage in sport and exercise sessions, it is hoped that those who volunteer through the experience corps will be able to participate in a wide range of volunteering opportunities.

The Government recognise the importance of sport and exercise activities for older people and that is why the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has set up a working group of officials and representatives from other key bodies to explore ways of encouraging and facilitating physical activity for older people.

Police Pay

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will revise the income supplements provided to police officers in Sussex, based on an analysis of comparative costs of living in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. [12038]

Mr. Denham: In February this year, the police negotiating board (PNB) reached agreement on a recommendation to the Secretary of State for the Home Department that officers in eight south-east police forces appointed after 1 September 1994 and not in receipt of housing allowance should receive a new allowance. The PNB recommended that qualifying officers in Kent and Surrey should receive an allowance of £2,000 a year and qualifying officers in Sussex should receive £1,000 a year. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary approved the recommendation of the PNB.

The PNB is the statutory negotiating body for police pay and conditions of service, with representatives from all the main police organisations, including the Police Federations, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities. It would be for the PNB in the first instance to consider whether the allowance awarded to qualifying officers in Sussex should be revised.

Drugs

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reassess the recommendations of the Police Foundation report on drug use. [12061]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: No. The Government published their response to the report of the independent inquiry into the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 by the Police Foundation in February 2001. We welcomed the inquiry's report and its contribution to the on-going process of assessing the effectiveness of the United Kingdom's drugs laws and policies.

The Government supported 24 of the inquiry's 81 recommendations, rejected 37 and referred the remaining 20 recommendations for further consideration by relevant Government Departments and agencies. There is no intention to undertake a further review of the inquiry's recommendations.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the effect of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 on the levels of consumption of *(a)* heroin, *(b)* cocaine and *(c)* cannabis; [12058]

(2) if his Department has recently considered the merits of *(a)* legalising and *(b)* decriminalising the use of illegal drugs. [12171]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There has been no change in Government policy on legalising or decriminalising illegal drugs. Our drugs laws deter experimentation, a point borne out by public opinion surveys. For example 30 per cent. of adults questioned by MORI for the Police Foundation inquiry cited illegality as the main reason for not taking drugs. Moreover, the findings of the 1998–99 youth lifestyle survey revealed that 64 per cent. of respondents who had never taken cannabis had not done so because it is against the law.

The Home Secretary has asked the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs to review the arguments for reclassifying cannabis from class B to class C. In giving evidence the Home Secretary said that he was not in favour of either legalisation or decriminalisation.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests were made for the *(a)* possession and *(b)* supply of (i) heroin, (ii) cocaine and (iii) cannabis in each of the past five years. [12057]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Arrest data are not collected centrally by individual offence.

Information taken from the Home Office Court proceedings database showing the number of persons proceeded against for the *(a)* possession, *(b)* supply and *(c)* possession with intent to supply (i) heroin, (ii) cocaine and (iii) cannabis in England and Wales during the period 1996 to 2000 is given in the table.

Persons proceeded against in the magistrates courts for the given offences, England and Wales, 1996–2000

Offence	*Principal statute*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Having possession of a controlled drug						
Heroin	Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 Sec. 5(2)	2,653	3,698	4,819	5,236	5,510
Cocaine	Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 Sec. 5(2)	840	1,194	1,829	2,268	2,048
Cannabis	Ibid as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 Sec. 157 Sch.8 part II	14,857	18,940	24,395	24,322	22,303
Supplying or offering (or being concerned in) to supply a controlled drug						
Heroin	Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 Sec. 4(3)	933	1,304	1,486	1,869	1,643
Cocaine	Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 Sec. 4(3)	287	342	423	487	437
Cannabis	Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 Sec. 4(3)	1,559	1,788	1,830	1,580	1,001
Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply						
Heroin	Misuse of Drugs Act Sec. 5(3)	1,040	1,265	1,411	1,483	1,488
Cocaine	Misuse of Drugs Act Sec. 5(3)	370	471	502	578	664
Cannabis	Misuse of Drugs Act Sec. 5(3)	2,765	3,275	3,223	2,917	2,194

Note:
Data are given on a principal offence basis

Centralised Custody Centres

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what efficiency savings have been achieved, broken down by police force area, through the introduction of centralised custody centres; [12035]

(2) which police forces have moved to a system of centralised custody centres; [12036]

(3) what the average waiting times at each custody centre for processing a case were for the latest month for which figures are available. [12033]

Mr. Denham: This information is not collected centrally.

Police Establishment

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers within the City of London there were *(a)* in May 1997 and *(b)* for the latest month for which figures are available. [12406]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The City of London police had 859 police officers on 31 March 1997 and 705 police officers on 2 November 2001.

The force employed 347 civilian support staff in March 1997 and 223 in March 2001.

Identity Cards

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's policy on national identity cards is; and if he will make a statement. [12873]

Angela Eagle: The Government have no plans to introduce a national identity card scheme as part of its response to the atrocities in the United States on 11 September.

However, the policy is kept under review and the Government are considering whether a universal card which allowed people to prove their identity more easily and provided a simple way to access a range of public services would be beneficial. Such an entitlement card scheme could also help to combat illegal working which disproportionately affects the poorer sections of our society by undercutting the minimum wage and encouraging unscrupulous employers. It could also reduce fraud against individuals, public services and the private sector.

The introduction of an entitlement card would be a major step and the Government would not proceed without consulting widely and considering all the views expressed very carefully.

Vandalism Costs

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he collates on the annual cost of vandalism, broken down by local authority. [13103]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* In Home Office statistics, vandalism is categorised as criminal damage. We have estimates of the economic cost of criminal damage in England and Wales. However, we do not currently estimate the annual cost of criminal damage broken down by local authority.

The most recent figure of the cost of criminal damage was published in a report in December 2000, "The economic and social cost of crime" (Home Office Research Study 217). This estimated the total cost of criminal damage in England and Wales in 1999–2000 to be £4.1 billion. This represents 7 per cent. of the total economic cost of crime.

Private Security Firms

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to local authorities on the case of private security firms; and if he will make a statement. [12910]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* We do not routinely issue guidance on this subject. There is, however, an extant piece of advice (Home Office Circular 60/1995) on the subject of local authority registration of door supervisors.

The Private Security Industry Act 2001 sets out the Government's current framework for the regulation of the private security industry in England and Wales. Consultations with local authorities will be essential with regard to those aspects of the Act relating to the licensing of door supervisors.

Special Constables (Sussex)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables there were in (i) Sussex police and (ii) nationally in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000. [11805]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The number of serving special constables in England and Wales and the number of specials serving in Sussex police from 30 September 1997 to 30 September 2000 are set out in the table:

Year	*Total strength*[1]	*Strength in Sussex*
1997	19,163	465
1998	17,296	415
1999	15,727	377
2000	13,487	317

[1] England and Wales

Note:

Figures provided by Research Statistics and Development

The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary and we are looking at radical improvements in their management, welfare and deployment as part of the police reform process.

Asylum Support

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are receiving *(a)* accommodation and subsistence support and *(b)* subsistence support only from the national asylum support service. [13053]

Angela Eagle: As at the end of July 2001, the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) supported in national asylum support service (NASS) accommodation was 28,810[1,2]. A further 18,520[1,2] asylum seekers (including dependants) were receiving voucher only support from NASS.

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Cases which have had their support ceased are excluded from these figures.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum-seekers and dependants have been dispersed to each of the NASS-designated dispersal areas since *(a)* 1 April 2001 and *(b)* 3 April 2000. [13054]

Angela Eagle: The information is not currently available in the form requested.

The available information on dispersed asylum seekers is in the table. The table shows the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) supported in the national asylum support service (NASS) accommodation in each cluster area as at the end of July 2001.

Number of asylum seekers (including dependants) supported in NASS accommodation by cluster area as at the end of July 2001[1,2]

Region/area	*Number*
East Midlands	
Derby	110
Leicester	640
Nottingham	880
Total	1,630
East of England	
Ipswich	30
Peterborough	180
Total	200
Greater London	
Disbenefited[3]	200
London	480
Total	680
North East	
Darlington	30
Gateshead	530
Hartlepool	50
Middlesbrough	370
Newcastle	1,410
North Tyneside	340
Redcar and Cleveland	300
South Tyneside	130
Stockton-on-Tees	240
Sunderland	830
Total	4,240
North West	
Blackburn	430
Bolton[4]	590
Burnley	130
Bury[4]	160
Disbenefited[3]	*
Liverpool	1,620
Manchester	1,880
Nelson	210
Oldham[4]	160
Rochdale[4]	230
Salford[4]	250
Stockport[4]	70
Tameside[4]	60
Trafford[4]	50
Wigan	360
Total	6,190
Northern Ireland	
Belfast	40
Other	10
Total	50
Scotland	
Glasgow	3,890
Total	3,890
South Central	
Bournemouth	*
Brighton and Hove	40
Disbenefited[3]	40
Hastings and St. Leonards	210
Portsmouth	100
Total	390
South West	
Bristol	130
Disbenefited[3]	10
Exeter	40
Plymouth	360
Total	540

Number of asylum seekers (including dependants) supported in NASS accommodation by cluster area as at the end of July 2001[1,2]

Region/area	*Number*
Wales	
Cardiff	330
Swansea	10
Wrexham	30
Total	370
West Midlands	
Birmingham	1,980
Coventry	840
Disbenefited[3]	10
Dudley	160
Sandwell	120
Solihull	60
Stoke-on-Trent	340
Walsall	210
Wolverhampton	690
Total	4,410
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Barnsley	160
Bradford	1,370
Disbenefited[3]	*
Doncaster	590
Grimsby	80
Halifax	220
Hull	960
Kirklees	390
Leeds	910
Rotherham	370
Sheffield	1,040
Wakefield	140
Total	6,230
Overall total	28,810

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10. * indicates a number between one and four. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
[2] Figures exclude cases where the asylum seekers support has been ceased.
[3] Disbenefited cases are cases which were previously supported by social services and after an initial decision on their asylum application have been transferred onto NASS support.
[4] Greater Manchester

Women Prisoners

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women prisoners were detained *(a)* on remand and *(b)* following sentence on the 1st of each month since May 1997. [11640]

Beverley Hughes: The number of females in prisons in England and Wales in each month since 30 April 1997 is shown in the table. Figures are available only for the last day of the month.

Number of females detained on remand and under sentence since 1 April 1997 by month[1,2]

	1997		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
	Remand	*Sentenced*	*Remand*	*Sentenced*	*Remand*	*Sentenced*	*Remand*	*Sentenced*	*Remand*	*Sentenced*
January	—	—	650	2,205	778	2,397	730	2,489	692	2,624
February	—	—	693	2,311	781	2,427	740	2,590	686	2,749
March	—	—	698	2,372	707	2,435	716	2,659	677	2,849
April	592	1,992	717	2,371	730	2,411	675	2,620	702	2,848
May	560	2,044	694	2,385	741	2,451	701	2,592	746	2,895
June	587	2,066	735	2,367	752	2,436	669	2,666	773	2,899
July	618	2,105	721	2,445	757	2,481	724	2,692	820	2,936
August	628	2,113	704	2,440	806	2,504	709	2,712	846	2,978
September	630	2,146	714	2,430	783	2,539	685	2,689	860	3,060
October	625	2,152	694	2,432	788	2,582	726	2,681	—	—
November	671	2,196	748	2,441	742	2,589	731	2,627	—	—
December	589	2,158	681	2,364	614	2,447	604	2,515	—	—

[1] All figures are as the last day of the month
[2] Figures exclude civil prisoners

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish guidance on the housing and care of ferrets and gerbils in breeding and supplying establishments designated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement. [13591]

Angela Eagle: I have today laid before Parliament a draft supplement to the code of practice for the housing and care of animals in designated breeding and supplying establishments. The draft sets standards for the housing and care of ferrets and gerbils in designated breeding and supply establishments, and is a consequence of the species concerned being added to the list in schedule 2 to the 1986 Act (animals which can only be obtained from designated sources). The draft has been produced and laid under section 21 of the Act and is subject to the negative resolution procedure. Copies have been placed in the Library.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Land Registry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what percentage of the total land area of Great Britain is not registered; and when he expects all land to be registered. [12553]

Mr. Wills: Information relating to the amount of land that is either registered or unregistered in Great Britain is not collected centrally. In England and Wales, land

registration is compulsory on sale and on most other transactions affecting unregistered land. Over 18 million titles are already registered out of an estimated 23 million. The Land Registration Bill currently before Parliament is expected to lead to a substantial increase in voluntary applications for first registration and in registration of leasehold interests. The Law Commission and HM Land Registry have recommended that ways in which all remaining land with unregistered title in England and Wales might be brought on to the register should be re-examined five years after the Bill is implemented. The Government are currently considering that recommendation.

Islamic Marriages

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will make it her policy to make Islamic marriages undertaken by UK citizens abroad registerable in the UK upon the return home of either party to the marriage. [12400]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The recognition in the UK of a marriage which has taken place overseas can be determined only by a court. I understand, however, that generally such marriages would be recognised here as valid provided that they complied with the law of the country where they took place and the couple had the legal capacity to marry each other.

There is currently no provision in law for marriages which take place outside the UK to be registered in this country. But, under the Foreign Marriage Order 1970, certificates of marriage may be lodged with the Registrar General on receipt from the local consular office of non-Commonwealth countries. However, if the couple are already validly married to each other, there would be no need for the marriage to be registered again in this country.

Census Information

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what arrangements are being made for the general public to view 1901 Census information. [12379]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The general public will be able to view the 1901 census in two ways. First, online over the internet at www.census.pro.gov.uk. This innovation will greatly increase ease of access and is expected to attract a wider range of users. Secondly, as with earlier census records, it will be available on microfiche at local record offices and libraries and a full set of fiche for England and Wales will be available at the Public Record Office at Kew.

District Judges

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many district judges (magistrates courts) sit in England and Wales, broken down by county; and what plans he has to increase this number. [12386]

Mr. Wills: The table shows where stipendiary magistrates (now district judges (magistrates courts)) are based, county by county. London includes the senior district judge and her deputy. A competition is under way to fill the following vacancies included in the figures—two in London, one in Greater Manchester, one in Middlesex, one in Nottinghamshire, one in South Yorkshire and one in West Yorkshire. The Government are considering Lord Justice Auld's recommendations which may have an impact on the number of these appointments required.

District judges (magistrates courts) district bench by county

County	*Number*
Bristol	1
Cheshire	1
Cleveland	1
Derbyshire	2
Devon	1
Dorset	1
Essex	1
Greater Manchester	5
Hampshire	3
Humberside	1
Leicestershire	2
London	48
Merseyside	5
Middlesex	3
Norfolk	1
Nottinghamshire	3
Shropshire	1
South Wales	3
South Yorkshire	5
Staffordshire	1
Sussex	2
West Midlands	10
West Yorkshire	5
Total	106

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 8 November 2001

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Refrigerators

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on small businesses of the requirement to take refrigerators to scrap yards after 1 January 2002. [12689]

Nigel Griffiths: These requirements are a policy matter for my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment. However, officials in the Department have been assisting those in DEFRA to consult small businesses about this issue, and to consider the wider implications for small businesses as the policy is developed.

DEFRA is currently assessing what financial assistance local authorities will require, in keeping with the new burdens procedure.

Conference on Nuclear Terrorism

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representatives her Department had at the International Atomic Energy Agency's conference on nuclear terrorism in Vienna; what recommendations for action by the United Kingdom Government were made at the conference; and what further discussions she intends to have with the IAEA in respect of security at civil nuclear installations. [13230]

Ms Hewitt: Officials from the Office for Civil Nuclear Security and the Export Control and Non-Proliferation Directorate within my Department participated at the International Atomic Energy Agency's symposium on nuclear safeguards, verification and security held in Vienna between 29 October and 2 November. This included a special session on 2 November focused on the issue of combating nuclear terrorism. The special session consisted of preparations on a number of issues around the response to the threat of nuclear terrorism.

The IAEA Secretariat will be presenting a preliminary report to the IAEA's Board of Governors later this month on current and planned activities relevant to protecting against acts of nuclear terrorism, and ideas for new and expanded activities for the agency to undertake. The UK is an active member of the Board of Governors, and will consider carefully the agency's proposed activities.

Departmental Reviews

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if initial findings submitted to the strategic steering group as part of the Helping the UK get to the Future First and Business Support reviews will be made available to opposition parties. [12520]

Ms Hewitt: The reviews of my Department's priorities and structure of my Department's support for business are continuing. I propose to make a public announcement about them as soon as their recommendations are ready.

EU Research Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome of the Research Council held in Brussels on 30 October was; what the Government's stance on each issue discussed, including their voting record was; and if she will make a statement. [12018]

Ms Hewitt: The Research Council which was held in Luxembourg on 30 October:

1. Held a general debate on Commission proposals for the next EU Research and Development Framework Programme 2002–06, including the proposed new funding instruments, and the next EURATOM Research and Development Framework Programme 2002–06. The Government reiterated their support for a focused programme, aimed at achieving added value through European co-operation, and for improving the efficiency of financial arrangements. The Council agreed to set up an expert working group to examine the future development of research on nuclear fusion.
2. Adopted Council conclusions on the possible application of Article 169 concerning the voluntary networking of national programmes.
3. Received a presentation from the Commission of its Communication on the regional dimension of the European Research Area.
4. Received a presentation by the Commission on a draft European Community action plan on the Global Monitoring of Environmental Security (GMES) satellite initiative. The Government welcomed the emphasis on users' needs in the proposed action plan, but underlined the risks of a potential overlap with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).
5. Received information from the Commission on the networking of member states' activities in the field of therapeutic AIDS trials.
6. Under Other Business, the Council agreed in principle a proposal by the Belgian presidency to set up an expert group of member states' representatives to examine the scope for co-operation in research aimed at countering bio-terrorism.
7. No votes were taken at the Council.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many meetings Ministers have had with the Institute of Directors in each of the last five years. [10092]

Ms Hewitt: Since 2 May 1997 DTI Ministers have had formal meetings with representatives from the Institute of Directors on the following number of occasions:

Year	*Number of occasions*
1997	5
1998	4
1999	4
2000	7
2001	3

In addition, in the normal course of Government business DTI Ministers will have had more informal contact with representatives from the Institute of Directors on other occasions.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many meetings Ministers have held with the Institute of Management in each of the last five years. [10093]

Ms Hewitt: Since 2 May 1997 DTI Ministers have had formal meetings with representatives from the Institute of Management on the following occasions.

Year	*Number of occasions*
2000	3
2001	1

In addition, in the normal course of Government business DTI Ministers will have had more informal contact with representatives from the Institute of Management on other occasions.

Objective 1 Regions

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is in relation to the provision of *(a)* operating aid, *(b)* employment aid and *(c)* investment aid in the Objective 1 regions under Article 87(3)a of the EC Treaty; and what representations she has received on this issue. [12398]

Ms Hewitt: Our policy is to support aid which addresses market failure and which speeds economic reform but which does not distort competition. I have received no recent representations about aid in Objective 1 regions.

Fossil Fuel

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the installed capacity of fossil fuel generation for each fossil fuel type in the UK in each year since 1990. [13290]

Ms Hewitt: The available information is as follows:

Capacity of coal stations owned by major power producers[1] in the UK in DNC[2] terms

MW

End month	*Coal fired*	*Oil fired*	*Mixed or dual fired[3]*	*Gas fired (CCGT)[4]*	*Gas turbines and oil engines*
March 1990	34,583	12,847	5,434	—	3,356
March 1991	34,298	11,895	5,172	—	3,130
March 1992	32,686	10,817	4,806	229	2,968
March 1993	30,523	8,556	5,781	1,129	2,539
March 1994	29,132	6,317	5,694	5,463	2,248
March 1995	27,774	5,145	5,534	8,364	1,895
March 1996	27,494	5,214	5,534	9,034	1,890
December 1996[5]	25,976	3,989	8,445	12,052	1,721
December 1997	25,976	4,069	7,530	12,252	1,526
December 1998	25,324	2,829	6,928	14,638	1,492
December 1999	25,581	2,829	7,017	16,110	1,333
December 2000	24,835	3,514	6,872	19,349	1,243

[1] Companies whose prime purpose is the generation of electricity. The total fossil fuel capacity of other generators was 3,284 MW in March 1990 rising to 5,358 MW in December 2000.
[2] Declared net capability.
[3] Mixed or dual fired covers stations that can be fuelled by more than one fuel either as alternatives or simultaneously. So as not to disclose information provided in confidence about individual stations, this category also includes gas fired stations that are not combined cycle gas turbine stations.
[4] Combined cycle gas turbine stations.
[5] In 1996 a change was made to measure capacity at the end of the calendar year rather than at the end of March.
Source:
Digest of UK Energy Statistics 2001 Table 5.7 and the corresponding tables for earlier years.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the total amount of electricity generated from fossil fuel sources *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each fossil fuel type, in the UK in each year since 1990. [13288]

Ms Hewitt: The available information is as follows:

GWh

	Electricity supplied from coal	*Electricity supplied from oil*	*Electricity supplied from gas*	*Total electricity supplied from fossil fuels*
1990[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	246,114
1991[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	245,368
1992[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	236,034
1993	170,276	20,038	32,930	223,244
1994	161,739	14,075	49,526	225,340
1995	157,240	12,480	63,323	233,043
1996	146,856	13,677	82,959	243,492
1997	119,627	7,854	109,515	236,996
1998	122,953	6,360	117,858	247,171
1999	106,112	5,685	143,052	254,849
2000	119,960	5,597	146,807	272,364

[1] Before 1993 electricity supplied statistics were disaggregated by type of station rather than type of fuel so only the total for fossil fuels is available.
Source:
Digest of UK Energy Statistics 2001 Table 5.6 and corresponding tables for earlier years.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the total installed capacity of renewable energy generation in the UK in each year since 1990. [13292]

Ms Hewitt: The available information is as follows:

MW

End December	*Capacity of renewable energy generation in the UK in DNC[1] terms*
1990	1,234.8
1991	1,572.7
1992	1,644.5
1993	1,743.0
1994	1,795.3
1995	1,831.1
1996	1,962.0
1997	2,008.1
1998	2,171.3
1999	2,273.4
2000	2,439.7

[1] Declared net capacity

Source:
Digest of UK Energy Statistics 2001 Table 7.4 and corresponding tables for earlier years.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what has been the proportion of electricity generated from *(a)* renewable and *(b)* UK-based renewable sources since 1990 (i) in total and (ii) compared with each fossil fuel type; [13286]

(2) what was the *(a)* total amount of electricity generated from renewable sources in the UK in each year since 1990 and *(b)* proportion of all electricity generated from (i) renewable sources and (ii) UK-based renewable sources in each year since 1990. [13291]

Ms Hewitt: The available information is as follows. Nuclear sources account for the proportion of generation that was neither from renewables nor fossil fuels. On b(i), the fuel source of imported electricity is not recorded separately in DTI statistics. It is assumed that electricity imported from France in these years was from non-fossil sources:

Year	*Electricity generated from renewable sources in the UK (GWh)*	*Proportion of total electricity generated in the UK that was from: Renewable sources (percentage)*	*Fossil fuel sources (percentage)*
1990	5,894	1.8	77
1991	5,409	1.7	76
1992	6,502	2.1	74
1993	5,883	1.8	69
1994	7,307	2.2	69
1995	7,283	2.2	70
1996	6,101	1.8	68
1997	7,428	2.1	68
1998	9,231	2.5	68
1999	10,199	2.8	69
2000	10,476	2.8	73

Source:
Digest of UK Energy Statistics 2001 Tables 5.6 and 7.44 and the corresponding tables for earlier years

Postal Service

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she proposes to improve the postal service; and if she will make a statement. [12591]

Mr. Alexander: Under our reform package for postal services, which was fully implemented on 26 March this year, Consignia has greater commercial freedom to compete more efficiently and effectively. There is now a new independent regulator, the Postal Services Commission, whose primary responsibility is to maintain the provision of a universal postal service at a uniform tariff. The commission has set tough standards of service for Consignia and is monitoring them closely. In addition, the commission can and has licensed other companies to compete with Consignia which will benefit consumers through more choice and better quality services. The commission recently completed a comprehensive consultation exercise on the introduction of competition and is expected to come forward with a report and recommendations shortly.

The Consumer Council for Postal Services, known as Postwatch, replaced the Post Office Users National Council, and will investigate consumer complaints if these have not been satisfactorily resolved with Consignia. Postwatch has wider powers and duties than POUNC and works closely with Postcomm to monitor the quality of postal services in the UK.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kosovo

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the bodies found in the mass grave at Dragodan, Pristina have been identified, broken down by *(a)* ethnic background and *(b)* sex. [10450]

Mr. MacShane: The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has exhumed 210 bodies from individual graves at the cemetery in Dragodan, Pristina. Of the bodies exhumed, 36 were females and 139 were male. The gender of 35 bodies could not be identified.

According to the Missing Persons Unit of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), 52 of the 210 bodies have been identified to date. Five bodies were Kosovo Serbs (four male and one female). Forty-seven bodies were Kosovo Albanians (40 male and seven female).

High Commission and Embassy Offices

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total cost was of running *(a)* British high commission offices and *(b)* British embassy offices in each of the last three years. [12083]

Mr. MacShane: The total costs of running British high commissions and embassies for the years in question are as follows:

£ million

	(a) British high commissions	*(b) British embassies*
1998–99	148.35	510.99
1999–2000	113.50	442.74
2000–01	127.01	479.40

The apparent fall in costs between the first and second years is due to the switch from cash accounting to resource accounting.

Gibraltar

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the consequences of a failure of the Government of Gibraltar to participate in the Brussels process. [12017]

Peter Hain: When the Foreign Secretary met the Spanish Foreign Minister on 26 July for talks under the Brussels process, they confirmed that Gibraltarian engagement would be an important element in carrying the process forward and that they would welcome the attendance of the Chief Minister of Gibraltar at future ministerial meetings. This remains the case and both we and the Government of Spain very much hope that the Chief Minister of Gibraltar will participate at the ministerial meeting due to be held in Barcelona on 20 November.

The Government believe that through the dialogue in the recently resumed Brussels process, we shall build a better future for the people of Gibraltar, including normalising relations with Spain, and that all should welcome this. I refer the hon. Member to my speech to Westminster Hall on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 88–92WH.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he *(a)* last met and *(b)* next plans to meet representatives of the Spanish Government to discuss the future of Gibraltar. [12383]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 121W.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of Gibraltar. [12381]

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's briefing of 30 October on the future of Gibraltar. [12961]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friends to my statement in Westminster Hall on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 88–92WH.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy relating to the sovereignty of Gibraltar. [12831]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 737–39, and to the speech I made in Westminster Hall on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 88–92WH.

South and Central America

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements were made for discussions with representatives of *(a)* Government, *(b)* industrial, *(c)* commercial and *(d)* other organisations during his visit to south and central America. [12880]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has not yet visited south or central America since taking office. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, together with a delegation of business leaders, visited Brazil, Argentina and Mexico in July-August.

Plan for Africa

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution his Department has made to the Plan for Africa. [11349]

Mr. Bradshaw: The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD—formerly known as the New African Initiative) will require a broad international response, ranging form support to some of NEPAD's programmatic elements to action in the EU, OECD, UN and other international forums. No specific financial commitments have yet been met.

The Prime Minister has appointed Baroness Amos as his personal representative in developing a G8 Action Plan for Africa to be adopted at the at the 2002 G8 Summit in Canada. The first meeting of G8 Heads of State personal representatives was held in London 17 to 19 October. They agreed to consult widely with other development partners, with the private sector, civil society and international organisations. They have further meetings planned which will include dialogue with African partners. The elements in the Action Plan will be evolved in the context of these meetings.

Private Military Companies

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will publish his Green Paper on private military companies. [13427]

Peter Hain: Preparation of the Green Paper is now well advanced. I will keep the House informed of progress.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan (Children)

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will meet representatives of Save the Children to consider what action can be taken by the Government to reunite separated children with their families in the Afghanistan area. [12696]

Clare Short: As part of our response to the current crisis, my Department is supporting Save the Children's work in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which encompasses health, education and shelter in addition to child protection activities.

We are also supporting the Red Cross movement and UNICEF for their work in child protection, food supply, water and sanitation, shelter and health.

All these organisations are experienced in the important activity of reuniting separated families in humanitarian crises.

Pakistan (Refugee Camps)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what she is doing to ensure that refugee camps in Pakistan comply with internationally agreed standards; [12906]

(2) if she will make a statement on the standards in the refugee camps in Pakistan. [12907]

Clare Short: Pakistan has been shouldering the burden of some 2 million refugees from Afghanistan for many years. This is in addition to the estimated 100,000 people who have moved into Pakistan from Afghanistan since 11 September. Over the last 20 years, these refugees have been hosted in camps or absorbed into communities. The majority of the camps in Pakistan pre-date the agreement of the international sphere standards.

We must of course do all we can to ensure that all refugees are properly cared for. And the international community must do more to give Pakistan all possible support in coping with this burden and making progress towards improving standards in camps.

So far my Department has committed £3 million to UNHCR's operations in response to the current crisis, to support its operations for refugees. We have also provided a specialist site planner to UNHCR in Pakistan to assist with the setting up of new refugee camp sites. In addition we have allocated £5 million to support NGOs, much of which will be directed towards Afghans in Pakistan.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Physical Agents Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of *(a)* the impact on British businesses of the proposed physical agents directive and *(b)* its cost to British business. [11855]

Dr. Whitehead: Regulatory Impact Assessments of the common position on both proposed physical agents directives on vibration and noise have been prepared by the Health and Safety Executive. The RIA on the vibration directive has already been submitted to the European Scrutiny Committee and is available in the House of Commons Library; I will shortly submit the RIA on the noise directive and place it in the Library.

Property Blight

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on compensation payable to residents for property blight arising from the construction of the Aston Clinton bypass. [11862]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency is able to confirm that two properties need to be acquired in order to construct the A41 London-Birmingham Trunk Road (Aston Clinton Bypass). They are being acquired under Compulsory Purchase Order (C.P.O) (No. SW14) 1997 and compensation for these properties will be at market value. Statutory property blight, which could require us to buy a property adversely affected by the announcement of a road scheme before a C.P.O is issued, did not apply in this instance because no request to purchase was received from the owner occupiers.

Building Inspectors

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the system of buildings inspection by approved inspectors. [12645]

Dr. Whitehead: Building control by approved inspectors is provided for under the Building Act 1984 and the Building (Approved Inspectors etc.) Regulations 2000. People intending to carry out work subject to the building regulations may opt to engage an approved inspector as an alternative to asking the local authority to carry out building control. This competitive situation is widely regarded as a stimulus to better, more efficient building control services.

Air Travel

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he proposes to encourage people to travel by air. [R] [12974]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are working hard to help return the aviation industry to business as usual as quickly as possible.

Following the events of 11 September security measures have been enhanced at all UK airports and for all flights from the UK. We are carrying out a fundamental review of aviation security to ensure that air travel is as safe from terrorist attacks as we can make it while, at the same time, balancing security with our freedom to travel.

Alongside increased security measures and intervention to provide the industry with third party war risk insurance, the Government are also actively involved in helping to restore confidence in air travel. As part of this I undertook a programme of visits to airports on 25 October, taking in Gatwick, Edinburgh, Birmingham and Bristol, which gave me the opportunity to press home the message that we should not let the fear of terrorism undermine our freedom to fly.

Croydon Tramlink

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of Croydon Tramlink. [12754]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for the Mayor of London and Transport for London.

Port Health

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the expenditure on Port Health was in each of the last five years and what the estimated outturn is for the next three years. [12725]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* English local authorities have reported the following expenditure on Port Health. This information was not collected centrally after 1997–98.

£000

	Net current expenditure
1993–94	4,579
1994–95	4,273
1995–96	4,335
1996–97	4,226
1997–98	4,040

Bypass Schemes

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what European Union guidelines he uses in evaluating the environmental impact of proposed bypass schemes. [13150]

Mr. Jamieson: When draft orders are prepared for a road scheme, including a bypass, where the land required exceeds one hectare an environmental statement assessing the environmental impact is required under European Community Directive 85/337/EEC as amended by Directive 97/11/EC. The EC Directive sets out the information specified in the environmental statement but guidelines on evaluating the environmental impact are matters for each member state.

Civil Aviation Industry

Paul Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what *(a)* action he is taking and *(b)* further plans he has to support the civil aviation industry following the terrorist attacks on 11 September; [13236]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* trades unions and *(b)* civil aviation industry representatives with regard to the problems facing the civil aviation industry since 11 September. [13237]

Mr. Jamieson: We have had discussions with airlines and other bodies connected with the aviation industry, including union representatives, to consider the economic consequences for the industry of the 11 September terrorist attacks. The Government have underwritten, on a temporary basis, third party war risk insurance for UK airlines and service providers to the aviation industry and are considering whether further support should be made available within European Commission guidelines.

Aircraft Seating

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans he has to increase the minimum distance between the seat back cushion and the back of the seat in front on all UK-registered aircraft over 5,700 kg MTWA which carry 20 passengers or more; [11810]

(2) what plans he has to commission research into the need to alter the minimum vertically projected distance between *(a)* seat rows and *(b)* a seat and any fixed structure forward of the seat on all UK-registered aircraft over 5,700 kg MTWA which carry 20 passengers or more; [11923]

(3) what assessment he has made of recommendations of the Anthropometric Study to Update Minimum Aircraft Seating Standards initiated by the Joint Aviation Authorities; [11921]

(4) what plans he has to increase the minimum distance between the seat base and back of the seat in front on all UK-registered aircraft over 5,700 kg MTWA which carry 20 passengers or more. [11922]

Mr. Jamieson: The Anthropometric Study to Update Minimum Aircraft Seating Standards was initiated by the Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA) in order to examine how the most recent data on human dimensions may be used to assess the way passengers sit in their seats and their ability efficiently to evacuate an aircraft in an emergency. In addition some other aspects, such as the adoption of recommended brace positions, were also examined.

The study, commissioned by the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on behalf of the JAA, was carried out by consultants ICE Ergonomics. It made a number of recommendations based on dimensions between seats and between seats and other structures.

The development and application of airworthiness requirements and operational procedures related to emergency evacuation is the responsibility of the Safety Regulation Group of the CAA. Currently the CAA is the only member of the JAA to set legal minimum requirements for seat spacing. The Authority will consider the study's recommendations in consultation with other members of the JAA and industry, and, if considered appropriate, proposals will be made for amending the airworthiness requirements.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to commission prospective research together with clinical and basic scientific support, into the incidence and cause of thrombo embolic disease among air travellers. [11919]

Mr. Jamieson: The World Health Organisation has recently announced a global research project into a number of aspects of Deep Vein Thrombosis. This Department, together with the Department of Health, is considering the extent to which the Government should participate in this work and will shortly announce plans.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce compulsory foldaway foot leg rests in all UK-registered aircraft over 5,700 keg MTWA which carry 20 passengers or more. [11920]

Mr. Jamieson: Foot leg rests are already provided in many aircraft but not normally in economy class seats. Although their provision might improve the comfort of passengers, there is no evidence to suggest their absence represents a health risk. This is not therefore a matter for regulation but rather a commercial matter for airlines to decide what level of comfort to offer in a particular class of seating.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on providing financial guarantees to the successor company to Railtrack; and if he will make a statement. [11336]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick)

on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 195W, and to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 671W.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes he has made in the financial provision for transport services as a result of Railtrack's going into administration. [11339]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1230W.

WALES

Objective 1 Money

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of current allocated Objective 1 money has been spent in Wales; and what percentage is committed to projects in Wales. [11121]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The operation of Objective 1, and the allocation of its funds, is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings he has attended in the last 12 months on Objective 1 money with *(a)* HM Treasury, *(b)* the Department of Trade and Industry, *(c)* the European Commission, *(d)* the National Assembly for Wales and *(e)* the Welsh Development Agency. [11120]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In the course of the last 12 months I have had meetings with representatives of all the bodies listed to discuss Objective 1 funding, among other issues.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many publications were issued by his Department in each of the last four years. [11820]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department was established on 1 July 1999 and issued no publications in 1999, one in 2000 and has issued one so far this year.

Joint Committee of Health Ministers

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1153, what the conclusions were of the joint committee of Health Ministers from the UK Government and the devolved administrations held on 22 October. [12883]

Mr. Touhig: JMC (Health) provides a forum for Ministers responsible for health services in all parts of the United Kingdom to work together on areas of shared interest to deliver improved health services for the people they serve. At the meeting on 22 October, the Health Ministers exchanged experiences on their respective modernisation agendas and affirmed the importance of continuing to share best practice, working in partnership on issues where they had similar aims and values for improving the patient experience of healthcare.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside his Department. [13136]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

World Athletics Championships

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 10 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 449–50W, on the World Athletics Championships, what indications she received from Mr. Gyulai regarding the IAAF's continuing commitment to holding the World Athletics Championships in London; and if they discussed a contingency plan for the games to be held outside the UK. [5383]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 19 July 2001]:* It has been my priority to keep the International Association of Athletic Federations IAAF fully informed at every stage about the review of the UK's arrangements for the 2005 World Athletics Championships. My Department has had the following contact with the IAAF prior to the decision to withdraw support for the Lee Valley project.

2 July: I spoke to Istvan Gyulai, General Secretary of the IAAF by telephone to inform him that Sport England had commissioned Patrick Carter to review the Lee Valley project and to advise him that the Government were committed to staging the 2005 World Athletics Championships.

6 August: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport met Lamine Diack, President of the IAAF, and Istvan Gyulai at the World Athletics Championships in Edmonton.

25 September: At my request, a senior DCMS official spoke to Istvan Gyulai to inform him that the Government were considering Patrick Carter's report and that we would advise him of the position as soon as the Government, Sport England and UK Athletics had reached a conclusion on staging the World Athletics Championships.

During these discussions the question of switching the Championships outside the UK was not specifically raised. Once the decision to withdraw support from the Lee Valley project had been taken, David Moorcroft, Chief Executive of UK Athletics and I spoke to Lamine Diack and Istvan Gyulai on 4 October by telephone to let them know of our decision that Lee Valley was not viable and to say that we wanted to suggest to the IAAF that the Championships be switched to Sheffield. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport and I met Lamine Diack, President of the IAAF, Istvan Gyulai and Robert Stimpson, IAAF Treasurer on 5 October. This meeting was also attended by David Hemery and David Moorcroft from UK Athletics, Patrick Carter and by officials from DCMS and Sport England.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many parliamentary written questions regarding the Millennium Dome have been tabled since 1 May 1997; and how many answers to such questions have been subject to commercial confidentiality. [10620]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* Of some 1,360 questions that have been answered on Dome and Millennium Experience issues since May 1997, 78 questions have been answered by my Department on which information requested has been subject to commercial confidentiality. This represents 5.73 per cent. of all questions answered.

In addition, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has answered 21 questions relating to the Millennium Dome in which commercial confidentiality has been cited.

Television

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the commercial value of the spectrum which will become available following the switch-off of analogue television. [12340]

Dr. Howells: The value of the spectrum will depend on a range of issues including the amount of spectrum that may become available, what the spectrum can be used for and how it might be packaged into licences for an award process, together with prospective licensees' own perception of the value of the resource at the time of award in the context of their business plans. It is not possible to anticipate these issues. However, to help consideration of the spectrum planning issues, we will shortly release a consultation document, as a strand of the Draft Digital Television Action Plan published recently, seeking views on the various ways that the spectrum might be ordered after switch over.

European City of Culture

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many applications she has received for membership of the advisory committee on the selection of the European City of Culture 2008; how many of the applicants are resident in Wales; when she expects to announce the membership of the panel; and if she will make a statement. [12848]

Dr. Howells: We have received 47 nominations and applications for membership of the independent advisory panel on the selection of the UK nomination for European Capital of Culture 2008. Of these, four are resident in Wales. We are also identifying possible candidates from the DCMS and Cabinet Office public appointments databases, which include many more people resident in Wales. We expect to announce the membership of the panel by March 2002. It will include at least one member from each of the four countries of the UK.

Consultation Documents

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many consultation documents were issued by her Department and its predecessors from *(a)* 15 October to 14 January, *(b)* 15 January to 14 April, *(c)* 15 April to 14 July and *(d)* 15 July to 14 October in each year from 1996. [12899]

Dr. Howells: My Department consults the public in a variety of ways, not simply through the publication of documents. Since 1998 we have, for example, held ministerially-led seminars in connection with our Departmental Spending Review; used specialist working groups to help formulate our national tourism strategy Tomorrow's Tourism; put consultation documents on our internet site, and issued press releases seeking views on whether particular buildings should be listed.

No central record of every consultation document issued since October 1996 is held, but the approximate figures for DCMS and its predecessor, the Department of National Heritage, are:

From	*To*	*Number of documents issued*
15 October 1996	14 January 1997	0
15 January 1997	14 April 1997	0
15 April 1997	14 July 1997	1
15 July 1997	14 October 1997	2
15 October 1997	14 January 1998	0
15 January 1998	14 April 1998	2
15 April 1998	14 July 1998	2
15 July 1998	14 October 1998	2
15 October 1998	14 January 1999	2
15 January 1999	14 April 1999	1
15 April 1999	14 July 1999	2
15 July 1999	14 October 1999	0
15 October 1999	14 January 2000	3
15 January 2000	14 April 2000	0
15 April 2000	14 July 2000	4
15 July 2000	14 October 2000	3
15 October 2000	14 January 2001	5
15 January 2001	14 April 2001	4
15 April 2001	14 July 2001	1
15 July 2001	14 October 2001	4
15 October 2001	7 November 2001	1

Commonwealth Stadium

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much Government money has been given to the Commonwealth stadium in Manchester. [13014]

Mr. Caborn: None. The cost of the stadium, currently estimated at £110 million, is being met by Manchester city council with the support of a £77 million lottery grant from Sport England.

Television Licences

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures she has taken to ensure that the mailing of households not recorded as holding television licences by the Television Licensing Authority is cost-effective. [12662]

Dr. Howells: Statutory responsibility for the administration and enforcement of the television licensing system rests with the BBC. Decisions on the resources allocated to different enforcement activities are therefore a matter for the BBC rather than the Government. However, the Corporation is accountable to the National

Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee as to the value for money of the collection and enforcement arrangements.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside his Department. [13129]

Dr. Howells: No cases of computer hacking or fraud, either by outsiders or internal staff were recorded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2000 or in 2001 to date.

Two computers have been lost so far in 2001 with three computers lost in 2000.

No Departmental computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers within or outside the Department.

Correspondence

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for North Thanet on political bias by broadcasting stations; and if she will make a statement. [12787]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* I wrote to the hon. Member yesterday and I have arranged for copies of my letter to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses today.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter to her dated 14 June, from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Miss M. Cowley. [6522]

Mr. Morley: My Private Secretary replied to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton on 3 August 2001.

After a request from my right hon. Friend, the reply was resent on 14 August 2001 signed by myself.

Foxhunting

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of job losses in the countryside if foxhunting does not restart before Christmas. [10006]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the potential number of job losses consequent on the suspension of hunting as a result of foot and mouth disease.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals were culled in Powys during the foot and mouth outbreak. [R] [12836]

Mr. Morley: The numbers of animals slaughtered on infected premises, dangerous contacts, contiguous premises and slaughter on suspicion cases in Powys are available on the DEFRA website (www.defra.gov.uk). The website is updated daily.

Figures for Powys as at 5 November 2001

		Dangerous contacts			
Animals	*IP*	*Contiguous*	*Non-contiguous*	*SOS*	*Total*
Cattle	5,357	9,440	2,224	697	17,718
Sheep	50,941	67,747	36,892	8,149	163,729
Pigs	2	7	47	0	56
Goats	22	15	0	0	37
Deer	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Total	56,322	77,209	39,163	8,846	181,540

Note:
Data drawn from DEFRA Disease Control System database and are subject to revision as quality assurance of data is carried out.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assistance the Arthur Rank Foundation is giving to farmers in Chorley affected by foot and mouth. [13228]

Mr. Morley: The Arthur Rank Foundation has used its charitable funds to provide relief for rural communities who have been affected by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. This includes, among other things, the establishment of a National Fodder Bureau. This bureau maintains a database of people who wish to sell or donate fodder and matches them up with farmers who cannot source their own supplies. The National Fodder Bureau has been receiving matched funding from the Countryside Agency pound for pound on donations (excluding corporate donations) and gift aid. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs announced on 6 November that the Government had agreed to a new tranche of match funding, comprising up to £2 million until 31 December 2001.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Murder Investigations

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to appoint a judge of international standing from outside the jurisdiction to undertake the investigation of allegations of collusion in the cases of the murders of Pat Finucane, Robert Hamill, Rosemary Nelson and Billy Wright; when he expects these investigations to be completed; when he will publish the terms of reference for them; what powers he will give the judge to compel potential witnesses and interview people disapplying the Official Secrets Acts; what arrangements will be made to hear the views of the victims' families; and what commitment he has made to publish the terms of his agreement to establish a public inquiry. [11492]

Jane Kennedy: The package of proposals published after the Weston Park talks contained details of the investigation by a judge of international standing into the cases of Chief Superintendent Breen and Superintendent Buchanan, Lord Justice and Lady Gibson, Billy Wright, Patrick Finucane, Rosemary Nelson, and Robert Hamill. We are currently working with the Irish Government on the appointment. Further details will be published in due course.

Reproductive Health

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations made submissions to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission calling for the inclusion of a right to equal and free access to reproductive health care; and if he will list these organisations, together with the number of people represented by them. [12312]

Mr. Browne: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. I have asked the Chief Commissioner to write to the hon. Member. A copy of his letter will be placed in the Library.

HEALTH

National Organ Register

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of the population have joined the national organ register. [10759]

Jacqui Smith: There are currently 9,170,045 people on the national health service organ donor register. This is 15 per cent. of the population.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients died in each year from 1995 to 2000 while on the waiting list for *(a)* heart, *(b)* heart and lung, *(c)* lung and *(d)* liver transplants; [10960]

(2) how many people are awaiting a *(a)* kidney transplant, *(b)* heart transplant, *(c)* heart and lung transplant, *(d)* lung transplant and *(e)* liver transplant; and if he will make a statement on the shortfall in organs available for transplant; [10959]

(3) how many organ transplants were carried out in the last five years for which figures are available. [10760]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is in the tables.

Thoracic and liver patients who died while on the active waiting list in the UK from 1995 to 2000 by organ and year of death

Organ	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Heart	55	57	59	55	54	37
Heart/lung	32	39	32	22	26	42
Lung	50	50	54	66	71	49
Liver	50	50	62	74	76	65
Total	187	196	207	217	227	193

Solid organ waiting list in the UK as of 21 October 2001 by organ and status

Organ	Active	Suspended	Total
Kidney	4,779	1,263	6,042
Kidney/pancreas	104	29	133
Pancreas	11	21	32
Heart	106	11	117
Heart/lung	77	2	79
Lung	232	2	234
Liver	151	2	153
Total	5,460	1,330	6,790

Solid organ transplants in the UK from 1996 to 2000 by organ and year of transplant

Organ	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Total
Kidney	1,682	1,666	1,581	1,581	1,670	8,180
Kidney/pancreas	19	21	22	31	32	125
Pancreas	3	9	0	3	0	15
Heart	276	264	261	227	204	1,232
Heart/lung	50	43	51	49	33	226
Lung	116	103	88	100	98	515
Liver	617	659	651	679	665	3,271
Other Multi-organ	24	14	19	15	6	78
Total	2,787	2,779	2,673	2,695	2,708	13,642

Pneumococcal Vaccine

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to *(a)* provide and *(b)* promote pneumococcal vaccine for pensioners aged over 65 years; and if he will make a statement; [10104]

(2) what plans the JCVI has to consider the effectiveness of pneumococcal vaccine on elderly patients and make recommendations on its future use for NHS patients aged over 65 years; [10106]

(3) what evaluations his Department has made of the clinical effectiveness of the pneumococcal vaccine for those aged over 65 years; [10103]

(4) what estimates he has made of the *(a)* cost and *(b)* savings to the NHS if everyone aged 65 years and more were given the pneumococcal vaccine; [10105]

(5) what evaluations his Department has carried out into the cost effectiveness of administering the pneumococcal vaccine to all those aged over 65 years; [10107]

(6) what plans her Department has to submit evidence to the JCVI on the effectiveness of pneumococcal vaccine for those aged 65 years and older; and if he will make a statement. [10102]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* Based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), pneumococcal vaccine is currently recommended for use in certain risk groups with certain medical conditions, which put them at higher risk of pneumococcal infection. The JCVI regularly reviews its advice and the Department also keeps the evidence base on this topic under review.

Pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for all those aged two years or older in whom pneumococcal infection is likely to be more common and/or dangerous, ie those with:

Asplenia or severe dysfunction of the spleen

Chronic renal disease or nephrotic syndrome

Immunodeficiency or immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, including HIV infection at all stages

Chronic heart disease

Chronic lung disease

Chronic liver disease including cirrhosis

Diabetes mellitus.

It is the responsibility of general practitioners and nurses to identify and immunise their at risk patients.

The Department has not carried out a cost effectiveness study of administering the pneumococcal vaccine to all aged 65 years and over but continues to recommend the vaccine based on underlying ill health rather than age.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the clinical and cost effectiveness of implementing an age-based pneumococcal vaccine campaign; [10736]

(2) which health authorities operate age-based pneumococcal vaccine campaigns. [10737]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The Department has not carried out a cost effectiveness study of administering pneumococcal vaccine based on age and does not hold data on which health authorities operate age-based pneumococcal vaccine, as the Department continues to recommend the vaccine based on underlying ill health rather than age.

Pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for all those aged two years or older in whom pneumococcal infection is likely to be more common and/or dangerous, ie those with:

Asplenia or severe dysfunction of the spleen

Chronic renal disease or nephrotic syndrome

Immunodeficiency or immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, including HIV infection at all stages

Chronic heart disease

Chronic lung disease

Chronic liver disease including cirrhosis

Diabetes mellitus.

It is the responsibility of general practitioners and nurses to identify and immunise their at risk patients.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many specialist pharmacist inspectors the National Care Standards Commission plans to have in its establishment; how many will be in post from 1 April 2002; and what their role will be. [11013]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The planned establishment for pharmacist inspectors in the National Care Standards Commission is 66. The number which will be in post at 1 April 2002 is not yet known, as invitations to transfer have not yet been issued to staff eligible to transfer from health authorities and trusts. The ministerial scheme to effect the transfer of staff (the Statutory Transfer Order) will be prepared later this year. The role of pharmacist inspectors in the National Care Standards Commission will continue to be to provide professional support to regulation, with the new regulator, from 1 April 2002.

Maternity Units

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities have midwife-led maternity units. [10013]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* Using a definition of midwife-led units to cover free standing units, separate units co-located with other hospital services and midwife-led areas which are part of a consultant-led unit, the following health authorities have midwife-led units:

Trent Region:

North Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, South Humber, Nottinghamshire, South Derbyshire, Doncaster, Sheffield and Nottingham.

South Eastern Region:

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Kent, East Surrey, East Sussex, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire, North and Mid Hampshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Southampton and South West Hampshire

South West Region:

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, North and East Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire.

North West Region:

South Lancashire, Morecambe Bay, St. Helens and Knowsley and Salford and Trafford.

Northern and Yorkshire Region:

East Riding and Hull, Northumberland, North Cumbria, Tees and Wakefield (to open February 2002).

West Midland Region:

Shropshire, North Staffordshire, South Staffordshire, Worcestershire Coventry, Birmingham.

Eastern Region:

North Essex health authority and Suffolk health authority.

London Region:

Kensington Chelsea and Westminster, Barking and Havering, Lambeth Southwark and Lewisham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest, Camden and Islington, Barnet Enfield and Haringey, East London and The City, Hillingdon, Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich, Ealing Hammersmith and Hounslow, Merton Sutton and Wandsworth, Brent and Harrow, Kingston and Richmond and Croydon.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many publications were issued by his Department in each of the last four years. [11835]

Ms Blears: The Department has issued the following number of publications over the last four years:

	Number of publications issued
1998	974
1999	884
2000	1,035
2001	[1]946

[1] As of 31 October 2001

Note:
These figures include documents issued as books, leaflets, circulars or in electronic format only

NHS Dentists

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of dentists providing treatment on the national health service in each health authority in England and Wales in each of the last four years. [11872]

Ms Blears: The number of general dental services dentists in England and Wales is shown in the table for June in each of the years 1998 to 2001 for the current health authorities.

The total number of dentists in England and Wales increased by 7 per cent. in the three years from June 1998 to June 2001. The commitment of individual dentists to the general dental services can vary.

General dental service: Total number of dentists at 30 June each year from 1998 to 2001: England and Wales

Health authority by region	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
England and Wales	17,691	18,245	18,686	18,995
England	16,763	17,270	17,700	18,004
Northern and Yorkshire	1,990	2,030	2,030	2,110
Bradford	146	148	148	142
Calderdale and Kirklees	185	185	188	195
County Durham and Darlington	153	161	165	171
East Riding and Hull	136	141	145	153
Gateshead and South Tyneside	119	122	119	124
Leeds	265	268	254	279
Newcastle and North Tyneside	161	173	164	168
North Cumbria	103	102	102	104
North Yorkshire	268	279	280	292
Northumberland	107	100	100	97
Sunderland	79	76	82	85
Tees	182	186	189	196
Wakefield	86	89	94	104
Trent	1,447	1,495	1,560	1,570
Barnsley	61	64	67	61
Doncaster	88	85	96	98
Leicestershire	261	267	277	278
Lincolnshire	136	149	156	157
North Derbyshire	102	105	104	112
North Nottinghamshire	106	107	122	117
Nottingham	210	219	222	223
Rotherham	70	70	73	75
Sheffield	178	176	186	197
Southern Derbyshire	162	177	178	172
South Humber	73	76	79	80
West Midlands	1,545	1,571	1,612	1,632
Birmingham	313	314	321	315
Coventry	83	86	88	89
Dudley	84	81	85	91
Herefordshire	67	72	73	73
North Staffordshire	114	116	119	128
Sandwell	86	86	81	86
Shropshire	136	132	141	146
Solihull	55	62	63	65
South Staffordshire	161	158	166	171
Walsall	58	61	63	54
Warwickshire	148	152	164	166
Wolverhampton	60	65	66	69
Worcestershire	180	186	182	179
North West	2,213	2,239	2,237	2,253
Bury and Rochdale	127	124	123	118
East Lancashire	159	157	160	158
Liverpool	153	151	144	150
Manchester	173	180	167	169
Morecambe Bay	106	110	114	111
North Cheshire	88	91	97	93
North West Lancashire	161	165	169	165
Salford and Trafford	151	148	152	154
Sefton	96	97	92	95
South Cheshire	265	251	247	253
South Lancashire	93	95	93	99
St. Helens and Knowsley	94	105	106	106

General dental service: Total number of dentists at 30 June each year from 1998 to 2001: England and Wales

Health authority by region	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Stockport	111	107	116	120
West Pennine	144	146	143	148
Wigan and Bolton	166	175	180	181
Wirral	126	137	134	133
Eastern	1,772	1,858	1,914	1,976
Bedfordshire	165	176	191	188
Cambridgeshire[1]	—	223	227	241
Hertfordshire	429	453	468	494
Norfolk[1]	—	266	266	277
North Essex	289	295	302	305
South Essex	210	220	235	241
Suffolk	212	225	225	230
London	2,948	3,011	3,102	3,137
Barking and Havering	109	117	117	123
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	346	347	373	371
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	262	267	293	294
Brent and Harrow	196	198	196	213
Camden and Islington	204	208	220	233
Croydon	140	141	136	150
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	345	361	341	348
East London and The City	185	204	191	196
Hillingdon	93	96	97	101
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	222	219	237	216
Kingston and Richmond	149	155	155	155
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	273	259	272	261
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	264	275	293	301
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	160	164	181	175
South East	3,082	3,225	3,326	3,376
Berkshire	277	282	307	303
Buckinghamshire	252	272	283	288
East Kent	193	200	206	204
East Surrey	190	189	189	202
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	296	308	317	328
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	211	225	224	226
North and Mid Hampshire	178	188	197	212
Northamptonshire	160	167	169	167
Oxfordshire	210	223	244	253
Southampton and South West Hampshire	190	193	199	199
West Kent	352	364	369	357
West Surrey	269	294	288	295
West Sussex	304	320	334	342
South and West	1,766	1,841	1,919	1,950
Avon	396	411	431	436
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	158	161	171	178
Dorset	251	263	271	272
Gloucestershire	210	217	218	215
North and East Devon	180	184	191	204
Somerset	161	162	176	174
South and West Devon	210	228	240	249
Wiltshire	200	215	221	222
Wales	928	975	986	991
Bro Taf	228	238	243	247
Dyfed Powys	145	160	165	167
Gwent	176	183	180	180
Morgannwg	176	185	185	186
North Wales	203	209	213	211

[1] June 1998 data are not available. Cambridge and Norfolk HAs were created in April 1999 from the previous HAs: Cambridge and Huntingdon; East Norfolk; and North West Anglia. The total number of dentists in these HAs was 467 in June 1998 and 489 in June 1999.

Notes:

1. Some dentists have contracts in more than one health authority. These dentists have been counted only once, in the HA in which they hold their main contract. Dentists include principals on a HA list of dentists, and their assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

2. At 30 June 2001 there were 592 dentists working in the personal dental service (PDS) in England, of which 385 were working solely in the PDS. There are no PDS pilots in Wales.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the success of trials involving digital hearing aids in the 20 trial hospitals under the Government pilot programme; [12169]

(2) what research his Department has undertaken to assess the possibility of establishing a system to enable members of the public to purchase digital hearing aids at the cost price through the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [12170]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has commissioned the Institute of Hearing Research to evaluate the "modernising NHS hearing aid services" project. The final evaluation report will be available next year.

The Department is not conducting research to evaluate allowing people to pay for digital hearing aids on the national health service. NHS hearing aid services, which include hearing tests, hearing aids and follow up care, are available free to children and adults who are resident in the United Kingdom.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what preliminary evaluation of the first wave sites in the digital hearing aid trial he has received; and if a copy will be placed in the Library. [12158]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has received interim evaluation reports based on data collected from a relatively small sample of patients from the Institute of Hearing Research in July and October. The evaluation is still ongoing, so reports have not been placed in the Library.

The final evaluation report will be available next year.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what timescale his Department is working under to extend the pilot programme of provision of digital hearing aids to the rest of the NHS; and what plans his Department has made regarding the future funding of digital hearing aids on the NHS between 2002–03 and 2003–04. [12011]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The Department expects to make decisions about extending the modernisation of national health service hearing aid services to other audiology departments from 2002–03, and about future funding of digital hearing aids on the NHS, in the light of the research evaluation which is being carried out by the Institute of Hearing Research.

Twenty NHS trusts in England are fitting digital hearing aids as part of the "modernising NHS hearing aid services" project.

BMA Guidance

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy relating to the British Medical Association's guidance on withholding and withdrawing life-prolonging medical treatment; and what observations he has sent to the Association on this subject. [12225]

Ms Blears: The document issued by the British Medical Association aims to identify the range of clinical, ethical and legal factors which need to be considered in making decisions on withdrawing and withholding medical treatment. It covers also potential procedures, including consulting the health care team and seeking a second opinion where necessary, which may assist in ensuring high quality decision-making in this area.

The guidance is a helpful contribution on this subject for practitioners. We have not made any observations to the association on this subject and have no plans to do so.

North Durham NHS Trust

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the *(a)* individuals invited for interview by the NHS Appointments Commission for the post of chair of the North Durham NHS Trust and *(b)* reasons for their selection for interview; [R] [11983]

(2) which *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations were consulted by the NHS Appointments Commission on the appointment of the chair of the North Durham NHS Trust; and if he will publish their comments; [R] [11984]

(3) what reasons were given by the NHS Appointments Commission for not reappointing Mr. Kevin Earley to the post of chair of the North Durham NHS Trust. [R] [11985]

Ms Blears: Appointment of chairs of national health service trusts is the responsibility of the NHS Appointments Commission. The appointments process they follow has been published and has been approved by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. It is an open and transparent process but rightly protects the identity of individual candidates and the assessment of their performance at interview or elsewhere. I understand that the Appointments Commission drew the advertisements for this appointment to the attention of local hon. Members and local authorities, but in accordance with their agreed procedures, did not consult on the appointment.

Smoking-related Illnesses

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of expenditure in each of the last three financial years on NHS treatment of smoking-related illnesses. [12165]

Ms Blears: Treating illness and disease caused by smoking is estimated to cost the national health service up to £1.7 billion every year in terms of general practitioner visits, prescriptions, treatment and operations.

Air Ambulance Services

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received regarding public funding of air ambulance services; and if he will make a statement; [12528]

(2) which air ambulance services receive public funding. [12529]

Ms Blears: We have received a number of letters of support from a wide variety of organisations suggesting that there should be public funding of air ambulances. Evidence supporting the introduction of air ambulances in the national health service, however, is not convincing. In 1995, the Department commissioned Sheffield University to report on air ambulances. The report failed to show benefits which would justify NHS investment. However, in recognition of the growing public interest in this

subject, further research has been commissioned into the contribution made by air ambulances in the care and transportation of seriously ill patients in a modern NHS. The Department will review the position on this issue when the outcome of this further research is available.

Information on the funding of individual air ambulance services is not collected centrally.

Social Services Departments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 29 October, *Official Report*, column 559W, on the community care services special grant, if he will list the sources of the money allocated by his Department which previously were not earmarked for social services. [12094]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 November 2001]*: The £300 million allocated to councils over this year and next is additional funding for social care. £80 million of this funding has been provided by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and a further £20 million from Her Majesty's Treasury. The remaining £200 million will be found from unallocated funds within the Departmental expenditure limit.

Hospital Meals

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost per hospital meal is *(a)* before and *(b)* after the implementation of the Government's better hospital food programme; and if he will make a statement. [12765]

Ms Blears: The better hospital food programme, announced in the NHS Plan, is designed to improve the quality and availability of food in hospitals. It is a long term programme, the first stage of which requires hospitals, by 31 December 2001 to ensure that their meal services meet or exceed required standards and meet nutritional requirements, to provide a 24-hour catering service so that patients can obtain food when they need it, to adopt the national design for menus, and to provide on their menus dishes designed for the National Health Service by the team of leading chefs.

The initial stage of the programme is therefore about bringing standards up to the required level in places where they do not currently meet these.

The costs of each component part of the programme will vary from hospital to be hospital, and will be affected by a range of factors including current levels of investment in catering services, the type of catering service in use and the number of patients choosing dishes designed by the leading chefs.

Since hospitals are not required to implement the programme until 31 December 2001, and because at this stage costs will vary considerably, precise details regarding the average additional costs are not currently available. These will become available in the coming months.

Once standards have been brought to a more equal level across the service, it will be easier to accurately forecast any additional costs of future improvements.

Human Organs

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what Government bodies and agencies deal with matters referred to in the Chief Medical Officer's advice of January relating to the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissue from post-mortem examination; what work has been undertaken by them; and what further work remains for them to do; [12373]

(2) what recent study he has made of the psychological aspects of the removal and retention of human organs and tissue; what further work he plans; and how such work will be carried out; [12371]

(3) what recent research he has undertaken on international practice relating to the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissue; and if he will make a statement; [12372]

(4) what action he proposes to take to put into practice the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer in respect of the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissue; [12370]

(5) what work has been done on the recommendation from the Chief Medical Officer for a review of the legislation on organ donation; and when he is planning to begin consultations. [10958]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* We are committed to implementing the Chief Medical Officer's recommendations on the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissue made in the light of the Redfern and Kennedy reports. The Department is principally responsible for this programme. We have established the Retained Organs Commission as a special health authority to oversee, among other things, the return of organs and tissue to families who want that to happen. The Home Office is leading a review of the coroners' system which was set up in July this year. Close links are being maintained between the two Departments and with the Commission.

As part of the implementation programme, we shall shortly be consulting publicly on a number of documents, including codes of practice on communications with families about post mortems and on the import and export of body parts. Linked to the Department's wider "Good Practice in Consent" initiative, we shall be piloting consent forms for hospital post mortems and for consent to the post-mortem removal, retention and use of organs and tissue where such actions are not required by the Coroner. We shall be seeking views also on an interim statement on the use of organs and tissue, based on the current law.

For the medium to longer term, the Department is leading a comprehensive review of the law in England and Wales which will examine, among other things, the taking, storage and use of organs and tissue from the living and the dead and options for future regulatory control. We shall be issuing an initial consultative paper on the review in the near future.

As part of the review we shall be gathering further information about how these matters are treated in other countries, notably elsewhere in the European Union, in North America and in parts of the Commonwealth.

We do not now propose to legislate separately to amend the Human Tissue Act 1961 to clarify that consent must be sought from those with parental responsibility for the retention of organs or tissue from post mortem on children beyond the time necessary to establish the cause of death. This proposal, as well as our intention to introduce a penalty for non-compliance, will be considered as part of the comprehensive review.

We are aware that many families affected by organ removal and retention may require a range of support, including psychological support, from the statutory and voluntary services. On the advice of the Chief Medical Officer, we have made a clear commitment to improve bereavement services. We shall be considering what else may need to be done to meet individual and family needs; and whether the Department needs to commission any research or other survey on psychological aspects. The consultative process will have an important part to play here.

CT Scanner (Blackpool Victoria Hospital)

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide funding for an additional CT scanner at Blackpool Victoria Hospital. [12921]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* In the coming months, the Department will be drawing up and discussing the criteria for allocating a further 50 computer tomography scanners nationally, funded through the NHS Cancer Plan for 2003–04. It is hoped that a list of sites will be agreed early in the next financial year. Blackpool Victoria Hospital can apply to be considered for an additional scanner under this initiative.

Zyban

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received in the last six months on the safety of bupropion (Zyban). [12729]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Since the marketing of bupropion (Zyban) in June 2000, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been kept informed by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the Government's independent expert scientific advisory body, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM), on matters relating to its safety.

In the last six months this has included the following CSM advice issued on 31 May 2001, the purpose of which was to minimise the risk of adverse effects especially seizures:

(i) The dosing regimen should be amended to delay the increase in dose (from day four to day seven of treatment) in order to give more time for drug levels to stabilise.

(ii) Existing warnings relating to the other risk factors for seizure should be strengthened to emphasise that Zyban should only be used in patients with these factors if there are compelling clinical reasons.

The CSM has continued to review the balance between the effectiveness of Zyban in helping people to stop smoking, and the health benefits that this brings, with the risk of adverse effects. This balance is considered to remain favourable. There is some indication that the latest advice issued by CSM has helped to further improve the safe use of Zyban, since the rate of reporting of suspected adverse reactions in the United Kingdom has decreased since then. The CSM will continue to monitor its safety record of Zyban closely.

Delayed Discharges

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what definition of a health and social care change agent is used in relation to investment in reducing delayed discharges. [12700]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* A health and social care change agent is defined as a member of the change agents team who addresses the issue of delayed discharge by practical action and advice to support local national health service and social services management. The work of the change agents is likely to cover local implementation of relevant standards of the National Service Framework for Older People, particularly including development of care trusts, where these may impact on bed blocking locally.

NHS Magazine

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many copies of the NHS Magazine are sold per issue; and how many copies are distributed free of charge. [12702]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Twenty-two copies of NHS Magazine are sold to overseas and private sector subscribers per issue. The remaining 61,000 are distributed free of charge.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what involvement Ministers have in *(a)* writing the editorial page of the NHS Magazine and *(b)* sanctioning the content of articles. [12701]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Ministers do not see any of the content of NHS Magazine prior to publication. Content is approved by officials in the Department.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost of is of producing NHS Plan News. [12726]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The average cost of producing NHS Plan News is 0.2p a copy.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost of publishing the NHS Magazine is. [12703]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The average cost of publishing the NHS Magazine is 1.4p a copy.

Service Agreements

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the departmental public service agreements will be updated to reflect the commitments contained in the NHS National Plan. [12699]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The Department's public service agreement already reflects the commitments contained in the NHS Plan. The public service agreement can be found at Annexe 3, page 142, of the NHS Plan.

Ambulances

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to allow GPs to override telephone protocols when making emergency requests for ambulances. [12776]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Protocols for making emergency requests for ambulances are agreed locally between general practitioners and each ambulance trust. There are no plans to override these arrangements.

All national health service ambulance trusts use call prioritisation systems. This means that calls to immediately life threatening conditions will get a quicker response. Ambulance services are required to take patients to hospitals that are identified by a doctor as urgent so that these patients arrive at hospital within 15 minutes of the arrival time specified by the doctor in 95 per cent. of cases.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* instructions on performance levels have been given to the Isle of Wight ambulance service this year; and when, distinguishing that which is general to the ambulance services from that which is specific to the island's service. [12927]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Ambulance services in England measure their performance against a number of criteria. We place a high priority on performance in responding to category A calls, those calls which may be immediately life-threatening. There is no different standard on performance levels set for the Isle of Wight. All ambulance services, including that on the Isle of Wight, were originally set a target of reaching 75 per cent. of category A calls in eight minutes by 31 March 2001.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the target response time for non-urgent ambulance responses is; and what the average response time has been in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [12462]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* There are no nationally laid down standards for ambulance responses to patients with non-emergency illnesses and injuries.

Information on response times for all National Health Service ambulance trusts is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy is in the Library and available at www.doh.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Mixed Sex Wards

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital beds were in mixed sex wards in each of the last five years. [12717]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Hospital wards are usually subdivided into bays and these are designated male or female. Depending on case mix and local need, the exact proportion of male to female bays will vary. We are therefore unable to provide information at the level of the individual ward.

The national health service is working to eliminate mixed sex accommodation. Guidance on maintaining privacy and dignity was first issued to the service in 1997 and since then NHS trusts have been working towards clear targets to promote privacy and dignity in hospital wards.

These targets include the abolition of Nightingale wards for older people and £120 million has been allocated over the next three years to make progress towards this. Schemes to modify 233 wards have already been approved to commence work this year and further schemes will begin in the next two years.

Chest Pain Clinics

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the locations of the rapid access chest pain clinics. [12724]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The information requested is in the table.

List of rapid access chest pain clinics

Number/hospital	*NHS trust*
Northern and Yorkshire region	
1. Bradford Royal Infirmary	Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust
2. Sunderland Royal Hospital	City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust
3. Dewsbury and District Hospital	Dewsbury Health Care NHS Trust
4. Queen Elizabeth Hospital	Gateshead Health NHS Trust
5. Hull Royal Infirmary	Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust
6. St. James' University Hospital	Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
7. Hartlepool General Hospital	North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust
8. North Tyneside General Hospital	Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust
9. Wansbeck General Hospital	Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust
10. Pinderfields Hospital	Pinderfields and Pontefract NHS Trust
11. Pontefract General Infirmary	Pinderfields and Pontefract NHS Trust
12. Scarborough Hospital	Scarborough and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust
13. Bishop Auckland General Hospital	South Durham Health Care NHS Trust
14. Darlington Memorial Hospital	South Durham Health Care NHS Trust
Trent region	
15. Barnsley District General Hospital	Barnsley District General Hospital NHS Trust
16. Bassetlaw District General Hospital	Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Trust
17. Doncaster Royal Infirmary	Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Trust
18. Scunthorpe General Hospital (and Goole Hospital)	Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust
19. Nottingham City Hospital	Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust
20. Nottingham University Hospital	Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham University NHS Trust
21. Rotherham General Hospital	Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust

List of rapid access chest pain clinics

Number/hospital	*NHS trust*
22. Northern General Hospital	Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
23. Royal Hallamshire Hospital	Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
24. Kings Mill Centre for Health Care Services	Sherwood Forest Hospitals
25. Derbyshire Royal Infirmary	Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
26. Grantham Hospital (and Skegness Hospital)	United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
27. Lincoln County Hospital	United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
28. Louth Hospital	United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
29. Pilgrim Hospital	United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
30. Glenfield General Hospital	University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
West Midlands region	
31. Birmingham Heartlands Hospital	Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS Trust
32. City Hospital	City Hospital NHS Trust
33. City General Hospital	North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust
34. Royal Shrewsbury Hospital	Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust
35. New Cross Hospital	Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust
36. Sandwell District General Hospital	Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust
37. Walsall	Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust
38. Walsgrave Hospital	University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust
39. Alexandra Hospital	Worcestershire Acute NHS Trust
40. Kidderminster General Hospital	Worcestershire Acute NHS Trust
41. Worcester Royal Infirmary	Worcestershire Acute NHS Trust
North West region	
42. University Hospital Aintree	Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust
43. Blackburn Royal Infirmary	Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Healthcare NHS Trust
44. Victoria Hospital	Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust
45. Royal Bolton Hospital	Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust
46. Burnley General Hospital	Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust
47. Bury General Hospital	Bury Health Care NHS Trust
48. Manchester Royal Infirmary	Central Manchester and Manchester Childrens NHS Trust
49. Chorley District General Hospital	Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust
50. Countess of Chester Hospital	Countess of Chester NHS Trust
51. Macclesfield District General Hospital	East Cheshire NHS Trust
52. CTC Liverpool	Liverpool Cardiothoracic Centre NHS Trust
53. Leighton Hospital	Mid Cheshire Hospital NHS Trust
54. Furness General Hospital	Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust
55. Royal Lancaster Infirmary	Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust
56. Westmorland General Hospital	Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust
57. Halton General Hospital	North Cheshire NHS Trust
58. Warrington Hospital	North Cheshire NHS Trust
59. North Manchester General Hospital	North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust
60. Royal Oldham Hospital	Oldham NHS Trust
61. Royal Preston Hospital	Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
62. Birchill Hospital	Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust
63. Royal Liverpool University Hospital	Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen Hospitals University NHS Trust
64. Hope Hospital	Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trust
65. Wythenshawe Hospital	South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust
66. Ormskirk and District General Hospital	Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust
67. Southport and Formby District General Hospital	Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust
68. Whiston Hospital	St. Helens and Knowsley Hospital NHS Trust
69. Stepping Hill Hospital	Stockport NHS Trust
70. Tameside General Hospital	Tameside Acute Care NHS Trust
71. Trafford General Hospital	Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust
72. Royal Albert Edward Infirmary	Wigan and Leigh Health Services NHS Trust
73. Arrowe Park Hospital	Wirral Hospital NHS Trust
Eastern region	
74. Addenbrookes Hospital	Addenbrooke's NHS Trust
75. Basildon Hospital	Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS Trust
76. Lister Hospital	East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust
77. Queen Elizabeth II Hospital	East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust
78. Colchester General Hospital	Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust
79. Ipswich Hospital	Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust
80. James Paget Hospital	James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust
81. Queen Elizabeth Hospital	Kings Lynn and Wisbech Hospitals NHS Trust
82. Luton and Dunstable Hospital	Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust
83. Broomfield Hospital	Mid Essex Hospitals Services NHS Trust
84. Princess Alexandra Hospital	Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust
85. Southend Hospital	Southend Hospital NHS Trust
86. Hemel Hempstead General Hospital	West Hertfordshire NHS Trust
87. Watford Hospital	West Hertfordshire NHS Trust

List of rapid access chest pain clinics

Number/hospital	*NHS trust*
London region	
88. King George Hospital	Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust
89. Oldchurch Hospital	Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust
90. Barnet General Hospital	Barnet and Chase Farm Hospital NHS Trust
91. Bromley Hospital	Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust
92. Chelsea and Westminster Hospital	Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust
93. Ealing Hospital	Ealing Hospital NHS Trust
94. St. Helier Hospital	Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust
95. Charing Cross Hospital	Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust
96. Hammersmith Hospital	Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust
97. Homerton Hospital	Homerton Hospital NHS Trust
98. Kingston Hospital	Kingston Hospital NHS Trust
99. Lewisham University Hospital	Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust
100. Mayday University Hospital	Mayday Health Care NHS Trust
101. Newham General Hospital	Newham Healthcare NHS Trust
102. North Middlesex Hospital	North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust
103. Central Middlesex Hospital	North West London Hospitals NHS Trust
104. Northwick Park Hospital	North West London Hospitals NHS Trust
105. Queen Mary's Hospital	Queen Mary's, Sidcup NHS Trust
106. St. George's Hospital	St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust
107. St. Mary's Hospital	St. Mary's Hospital NHS Trust
108. Whipps Cross Hospital	Whipps Cross University Hospitals NHS Trust.
109. Whittington Hospital	Whittington Hospital NHS Trust
110. Queen Mary's Roehampton	South West London Community Trust
South East	
111. Ashford Hospital, Middlesex	Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust
112. St. Peter's Hospital	Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust
113. Royal Sussex County Hospital	Brighton Health Care NHS Trust
114. Darent Valley Hospital	Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust
115. Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital	East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust
116. Eastbourne District General Hospital	Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust
117. Conquest Hospital	Hastings and Rother NHS Trust
118. Wexham Park Hospital	Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Trust
119. Kettering General Hospital	Kettering General Hospital NHS Trust
120. Medway Maritime Hospital	Medway NHS Trust
121. Milton Keynes General Hospital	Milton Keynes General NHS Trust
122. North Hampshire Hospital	North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust
123. Northampton General Hospital	Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust
124. Horton Hospital	Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust
125. John Radcliffe Hospital	Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust
126. St. Mary's Hospital	Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust
127. Royal Berkshire Hospital	Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust
128. Royal Surrey County Hospital	Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust
129. St. Richards Hospital	Royal West Sussex NHS Trust
130. Wycombe Hospital	South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust
131. Southampton General Hospital	Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust
132. Crawley Hospital	Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust
133. East Surrey Hospital	Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust
134. Worthing Hospital	Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust
South West	
135. Cheltenham General Hospital	East Gloucestershire NHS Trust
136. Yeovil District Hospital	East Somerset NHS Trust
137. Gloucestershire Royal Hospital	Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust
138. Frenchay Hospital	North Bristol NHS Trust
139. Southmead Hospital	North Bristol NHS Trust
140. North Devon District Hospital	Northern Devon Healthcare Trust
141. Derriford Hospital	Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust
142. Poole Hospital	Poole Hospital NHS Trust
143. Royal Bournemouth Hospital	Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch NHS Trust
144. Royal Cornwall Hospital	Royal Cornwall Hospitals and West Cornwall Hospital NHS Trust
145. Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital	Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Trust
146. Royal United Hospital Bath	Royal United Hospitals, Bath NHS Trust
147. Salisbury District Hospital	Salisbury Health Care NHS Trust
148. Torbay Hospital	South Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
149. Princess Margaret Hospital	Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust
150. Taunton and Somerset Hospital	Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust
151. Bristol Royal Infirmary	United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust
152. Dorset County Hospital	West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust
153. Weston General Hospital	Weston Area NHS Trust

Public Health Laboratory Service

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the expenditure on the Public Health Laboratory Service for each of the past five years. [12719]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The gross expenditure on the Public Health Laboratory Service for each of the past five years is given in the table. These figures are in cash terms for the whole period.

£000

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Revenue expenditure	109,696	118,899	120,392	125,751	129,836
Capital expenditure	3,539	3,892	3,624	4,067	4,567
Total	113,235	122,791	124,016	129,818	134,403

Welfare Foods Scheme

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the detailed expenditure plans of the welfare foods scheme. [12720]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The planned net programme expenditure on welfare foods in 2001–02 is £114.5 million for England. No decisions have been made about future years.

Occupational Health and Safety Service

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on establishing the Occupational Health and Safety Service for general practitioners. [12770]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* £6 million was included in health authority main allocations in England for commissioning occupational health and safety services for general medical practitioners and their staff during 2001–02. Guidance on the provision and range of service delivery standards was issued to health authorities on 28 June 2001.

GPs

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he is making on achieving 48-hour access to general practitioners. [12772]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Health authorities were asked to set plans to achieve 48 hour access for 60 per cent. of patients by April 2002. These plans are being monitored through the usual performance management mechanisms. The 60 per cent. milestone is the first on the way to achieving 100 per cent. coverage by 2004.

As part of regular performance monitoring, health authorities were asked to carry out a survey of primary care access on 26 September. Data from the survey are currently being analysed and will be available shortly.

Overseas Health Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the legislation required to enable health authorities and primary care trusts to send patients abroad for routine treatment. [12766]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The recent judgments of the European Court of Justice in the joined cases Geraets-Smits/Peerbooms and Case Vanbraekel (joined Cases C-157/99 and Case 368–98 respectively) marked a development in the interpretation of directly applicable provisions of European Community law. The cases concerned the interpretation of directly applicable Treaty provisions and these have to be applied even in the face of inconsistent domestic law.

The relevant provisions of the National Health Service Act 1977 will be amended in the interests of legal certainty. This can be done by regulations made under the European Communities Act 1972 and this is in hand. In the meantime health authorities and primary care trusts are legally able to commission services abroad.

Working with the three test-bed sites, the Department is examining the detailed practical and legal issues involved in sending patients abroad. This work may raise legal issues requiring further amendments to specific regulations.

Overseas Doctors

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what tests of linguistic aptitude will be taken by doctors from EU countries applying to work in the NHS. [12708]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* European Economic Area doctors (and others with enforceable Community rights) do not have to prove to the registration authority that they have a knowledge of English in order to have their qualifications recognised in the United Kingdom.

National health service employers themselves are responsible for ensuring that the doctors they employ have the necessary language, communication and professional skills to carry out their jobs safely.

Research and Development

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve research and development in each of the NHS regions. [12727]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* As the Minister with responsibility for research at the Department, my noble Friend Lord Hunt of Kings Heath announced in March 2000 plans for the modernisation of national health service research and development funding set out in "Research and Development for a First Class Service". They included the establishment of a funding system for NHS priorities and needs research and development, which should be introduced in 2002–03. This system will open new avenues for funding research activity across the NHS and replace in a more co-ordinated way the support hitherto provided from

budgets held at the Department's regional offices. I am placing in the Library a copy of a position paper published in February 2001.

Widdrington Health Centre

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place between NHS officials and the district valuer about the planned Widdrington Health Centre, Northumberland; and whether agreement has been reached in time for the funds available from the single regeneration budget to be used for the project. [13122]

Jacqui Smith: Discussions between Northumberland health authority and the district valuer, concerning the rental levels for the buildings of the new Widdrington Health Centre, are ongoing and a final settlement is expected very shortly. Single Regeneration Budget funds have been identified to provide optometry and dental facilities within the health centre and agreement has been reached for these funds to be used within the 2001–02 and 2002–03 financial years.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Correspondence/Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will place in the Library for each year since 1995 the average response time for providing a substantive answer to *(a)* hon. Member's correspondence, *(b)* correspondence from members of the public and *(c)* written parliamentary questions in the (i) House of Commons and (ii) House of Lords; [7019]

(2) if he will place in the Library for each year since 1995 the total number of *(a)* letters from hon. Members, *(b)* letters from members of the public and *(c)* parliamentary questions from (i) hon. Members and (ii) Lords dealt with by his Department; what percentage took (A) more than one month and (B) more than three months to provide a substantive answer; and if he will make a statement. [7020]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

General information on the volumes of correspondence received across Whitehall and on overall performance is published by the Cabinet Office. Figures for 2000 were published on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 324–28W and on 19 July 2001, columns 454–56W.

Total number of parliamentary questions by parliamentary session since 1995

Session	Total	Percentage: Over one month	Percentage: Over three months
Commons			
1995–96	2,667	1.50	0
1996–97	17	0	0
1997–98	3,666	1.67	0
1998–99	2,173	0.41	0
1999–2000	2,878	0.14	0.04
2000–01	1,254	0.56	0
Lords			
1995–96	148	0	0
1996–97	2	0	0
1997–98	208	2.4	0
1998–99	0	0	0
1999–2000	151	0	0
2000–01	43	0	0

Workstep Programme

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the workstep programme, with particular reference to *(a)* progression to open employment and *(b)* maintenance of an infrastructure for sheltered employment. [11318]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Workstep was introduced on 1 April 2001 and replaces the supported employment programme. It is designed to help disabled people progress to working without support and to provide longer-term support for those who need it. Our targets for progression into open employment are around 10 per cent. from among existing participants and 30 per cent. from people joining Workstep after 1 April this year.

However, we have been very clear that no one should be pressurised to progress from the programme if this is not the right choice for them. Longer-term support will still be available for supported employees who need it. But it is equally important that they have access to the development opportunities the programme will offer in the longer-term.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many left the new deal for lone parents whose youngest child is aged *(a)* five to 11 and *(b)* 11 to 16 years in each year since the inception of the new deal, broken down by destination. [9643]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

Numbers leaving NDLP by destination to July 2001—Great Britain

Thousand

Period	Total	Left income support: Employment[1]	Left income support: Transfer to other benefits[2]	Left income support: Ineligible[3]	Still on income support: Employment[1,4]	Still on income support: Withdrawn for other reasons[5]	Still on income support: Unknown destination[6]
October 1998-September 1999							
Age of youngest child[7]							
0–4	7.66	2.10	0.04	0.15	0.07	4.79	0.50
5–11	7.46	2.11	0.03	0.12	0.09	4.65	0.46
12–16	1.89	0.60	0.06	0.07	0.02	1.03	0.11
Not recorded[8]	6.50	4.38	0.11	0.31	0.02	1.45	0.23

Numbers leaving NDLP by destination to July 200.—Great Britain

Thousand

Period	Total	Left income support		Still on income support			
		Employment[1]	Transfer to other benefits[2]	Ineligible[3]	Employment[1,4]	Withdrawn for other reasons[5]	Unknown destination[6]
October 1999-September 2000							
Age of youngest child[7]							
0–4	21.74	10.65	0.13	0.54	0.11	9.60	0.72
5–11	20.80	11.00	0.09	0.45	0.17	8.45	0.64
12–16	5.93	3.32	0.34	0.24	0.02	1.81	0.20
Not recorded[8]	4.12	2.02	0.06	0.16	0.03	1.70	0.16
October 2000-July 2001							
Age of youngest child[7]							
0–4	20.24	10.27	0.12	0.55	0.09	8.63	0.58
5–11	17.94	9.76	0.08	0.40	0.13	7.08	0.49
12–16	5.76	3.33	0.37	0.20	0.04	1.67	0.15
Not recorded[8]	1.34	0.53	0.03	0.08	0.00	0.64	0.06

[1] These totals do not include people who have moved into full-time work but remain on the NDLP caseload as they are in receipt of in-work support.
[2] Includes those making a claim for Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) in order to join the New Deal for 18–24 year olds or the new deal for the long-term unemployed. Excludes lone parents who claim JSA in order to access work based learning for adults/training for work.
[3] Those lone parents who become ineligible for NDLP due to a change in circumstances, e.g. partnering.
[4] Lone parents working less than 16 hours in an average week, and remaining on income support. A very small number found employment after their initial interview but before joining the caseload. These are no counted in the "Total" leavers column.
[5] Lone parents who leave the programme but remain on income support for a number of reasons, e.g. change in childcare arrangements, new additions to the family, etc.
[6] Currently it is not known whether these people are on income support or not.
[7] Age of youngest child when attended initial interview.
[8] This figure includes children from each of the above age ranges.
Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

Jobcentre Plus

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which is the most accessible pathfinder jobcentre available to residents in the Vale of York; and if he will make a statement on the type of advice which will be provided by that jobcentre. [8274]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are establishing a new business that draws together the Employment Service and the parts of the Benefits Agency which support people of working age. This new business is called Jobcentre Plus and will come into being at the end of this financial year. To demonstrate the improved and more work-focused service we intend to offer in Jobcentre Plus, we are putting in place around 49 pathfinder offices throughout the country from 22 October.

Jobcentre Plus will offer a significantly enhanced telephone service that will improve access to the service for those who do not live near a Jobcentre Plus office. Each Jobcentre Plus pathfinder office will have a dedicated telephone contact centre open from 8.30am to 6.00pm. Customers will be able to make their initial claim to benefit through this service and book appointments with personal advisers. Customers will also be able to access job vacancies over the telephone through Employment Service Direct.

Jobcentre Plus will also have its own internet site with information on the service and links to the Employment Service job bank and worktrain sites, which offer a vast range of job and training opportunities and advice on job searching.

There are several Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices in rural locations, and the managers in those places will be further developing the service they offer to meet the needs of rural communities.

The development of services for people in rural communities is not confined to the Jobcentre Plus pathfinders, with both the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service already undertaking valuable outreach work. In North Yorkshire, for example, the Northallerton and Richmond Jobcentres are engaged in outreach work to some of their outlying rural areas. Vacancy lists are put on display in a large number of local post offices and Jobcentre clinics are held in three locations—Hawes, Leyburn and Catterick—for half a day each week.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in the new Jobcentre Plus offices *(a)* have been fully trained, *(b)* are undertaking training programmes and *(c)* are waiting to begin their training. [11223]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: 3,840 staff in the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices have been fully trained, 648 are undertaking training programmes and 295 are waiting to begin their training. Over 80 per cent. of staff are fully trained as of 30 October. Every member of staff should be fully trained by the end of November.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received regarding safety procedures and safety precautions in Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices; and if he will make a statement. [11113]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus is a new service which brings together the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency which deal with people of working age. Jobcentre Plus will provide a far more personalised, customer friendly and work-focused service for both employers and individuals. The first 49 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices opened on 22 October.

Central to the new service is our ability to provide face-to-face advice to members of the public. That can be done only in a predominantly unscreened environment. To that end we have invested considerable sums of money in building a far more friendly and safer environment than any we have had in the past. In particular, we take the issue of the safety of both the public and our staff very seriously. We have therefore been involved in discussions with the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) about their members' concerns about the new working arrangements, both at national and local level.

Employment Service and Land Securities Trillium risk assessors have carried out risk assessments in each pathfinder office. Drawing on those assessments, and following consultation with local trade union health and safety representatives, we have introduced a series of extra security measures. These include: wide coverage by closed circuit television; training for staff in how to handle difficult situations; better management in each office to avoid difficult situations building up; panic alarms; and more visible and more effective security guards. Additionally, in each pathfinder area there are screened facilities to deal with individuals and parts of the business which pose a greater risk. All pathfinder risk assessments will be reviewed in November and any additional security measures recommended by these reviews will be introduced. We believe that these measures demonstrate that we are taking staff safety seriously.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations his Department has received about the layout and furnishings of the new Jobcentre Plus offices. [11261]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus is a new service which brings together the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency which deal with people of working age. Jobcentre Plus will provide a far more personalised, customer friendly and work-focused service for both employers and individuals. The first 49 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices opened on 22 October. Central to this new service is our ability to provide face-to-face advice to members of the public. That can be done only in a predominantly unscreened environment.

We have been involved in lengthy discussions with the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) regarding our proposals in respect of layout and furnishings including the generic risk assessment process. We have also consulted with the Health and Safety Executive and professionals in the field of office design.

We have consequently invested considerable sums of money in building a friendly and safe environment which not only looks radically different but also supports the service delivery aspirations of Jobcentre Plus.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what resources will be available to staff in the new Jobcentre Plus offices to ensure that claimants are made aware of their full benefit entitlement. [11254]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus is a new service which brings together the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency which deal with people of working age. Jobcentre Plus will provide a far more personalised, customer friendly and work-focused service for both employers and individuals. The first 49 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices opened on 22 October.

People wanting to make a claim to benefit in Jobcentre Plus offices will be encouraged to make initial contact by phone. The member of staff in the call centre will use a script which is designed to help them identify the customer's benefit entitlement. The customer will then have an appointment in a Jobcentre Plus office. At this meeting a member of customer service staff, who is specially trained in benefit information, will explore the customer's benefit needs in more detail. The benefits systems will also support staff in providing full and detailed advice across welfare benefits.

Customers will also be offered review meetings, which will allow Jobcentre Plus staff to keep in touch with them from both a labour market and a benefit perspective.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what training programmes have been initiated in order to ensure that all staff in the new Jobcentre Plus offices are able to provide claimants with the best service possible. [11264]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Each individual member of staff within the Jobcentre Plus pathfinders has their training needs identified in conjunction with their line manager. This information then forms a personal training plan for that individual. The training is planned so that when they are required to start their job, they have completed and consolidated all their necessary training.

The training programmes fit into three different areas: IT and telephony, procedural, and the "New Beginnings" programme. The latter introduces the individual to the new Jobcentre Plus new culture and expectations. The procedural training is job specific and ensures that individuals know how to do their job. The IT and telephony training shows staff how to use the new IT and telephony systems.

The three types of training, delivered to the right people at the right time, has ensured and will ensure that individuals have the skills, knowledge and confidence to deliver the best service possible to the public within Jobcentre Plus.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to discuss recent trends in occupational pension provision with the occupational pension industry; and if he will make a statement. [12441]

Mr. McCartney: The Department holds regular meetings with representatives of the pensions industry. These discussions include an assessment of trends in occupational pension schemes and other forms of retirement savings and the role Government can play in supporting and encouraging pension provision.

The Government acknowledge the contribution that occupational pension schemes play in the provision of income in retirement and want to encourage continued employer involvement. As part of the process of reform and support, we have already announced the replacement of the minimum funding requirement and the simplification review of pensions regulation, led by Alan Pickering.

Social Security Regulations

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what reason was given to him by the Social Security Advisory Committee for its decision not to examine the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001; what discussions he had with the Social Security Advisory Committee prior to that decision; and if he will publish the minutes of such discussions. [12159]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The Social Security Advisory Committee considered these regulations and decided, under section 173 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, that these regulations need not be formally referred to them. Under the Act the committee is not obliged to give my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a reason for its decision and does not normally do so. My right hon. Friend had no discussions with the committee prior to that decision.

Social Security (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the level of spending on social security in Scotland in each of the last five years *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the United Kingdom total, broken down to show spending on (i) benefit payments, (ii) Scotland's pro-rata share of United Kingdom administration costs and (iii) actual spending on central and local administration and the branch network for facilities in Scotland. [12193]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Information is not available in the format requested. However, analysis of social security expenditure by country, region and per head of population for the years 1995–96 to 1999–2000 is available in HM Treasury's publication "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) 2001–02", published in April 2001 under Command Number 5101.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases of forgery of the standard acknowledgement letters issued to asylum seekers have been detected in the last 12 months; and what the value of benefits involved was. [11743]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The information is as follows.

1. Figures are not kept centrally within the Immigration and Nationality Directorate for forgery of Standard Acknowledgement Letters (SALs). The Immigration Service National Forgery Section (NFS) is a national unit specialising in document fraud. In the last 12 months (from 31 October 2000 to 31 October 2001), the NFS was asked by the Immigration Service and other enforcement agencies or departments to examine 121 SALs of which 111 were found to be fraudulent. Of these, 104 were counterfeit and seven forged.

2. Many of the documents examined by NFS were examples of large batches of suspected fraudulent SALs detected in various operations conducted by the police and Immigration Service. Four such operations alone, conducted in various parts of the country during the past 12 months, are known to have involved over 2,000 counterfeit SALs, with more detections expected as operations continue.

3. In the operations which the NFS was associated with, the most frequent use of fraudulent SALs was to obtain illegal employment. While a limited number of examinations of SALs were conducted of documents presented at Benefits Agency offices, the NFS does not have information about the value of any benefits that might have been involved.

DEFENCE

HMS Fearless

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the new date for the withdrawal of HMS Fearless is; and if he will make a statement. [13282]

Mr. Ingram: There is no new date for the withdrawal of HMS Fearless. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 19 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 93W.

Tanks (Desert Conditions)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of converting the tanks of 1 UK Armoured Division for desert conditions. [13272]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 24–25W, which sets out the estimated cost of converting Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks (CR2 MBTs) for desert conditions. The establishment for one (UK) Armoured Division, post Strategic Defence Review, is 174 CR2 MBTs. Depending on which desertation option were used, the estimated cost for 174 CR2 MBTs would therefore be either £24.36 million or £43.5 million.

Exercise Saif Sareea

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the type and number of UK armoured vehicles and tanks that were in Oman for Saif Sareea II, stating in each case the percentage of those vehicles that were considered *(a)* fully serviceable and *(b)* unserviceable during the exercise; and if he will make a statement. [11768]

Mr. Ingram: The types and number of each UK armoured vehicle, including tanks, that were in Oman for Saif Sareea II, are as follows: 65 Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks; 49 Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicles; 12 AS90 self propelled artillery; and 269 reconnaissance and other armoured vehicles.

The serviceability of these vehicles varied through the exercise as they passed through operational and maintenance cycles. The average percentage availability of each armoured vehicle type throughout the main period of the exercise was as follows: Challenger 2 83 per cent.; Warrior 83 per cent.; AS90 71 per cent.; and reconnaissance and other armoured vehicles 80 per cent.

Overall the armoured vehicle fleet, and indeed the rest of the UK military equipment deployed on Saif Sareea, performed very effectively.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the percentage rate of serviceability of helicopters on exercise Saif Sareea was; what the principal cause of helicopter non-serviceability was; and if he will make a statement. [13293]

Mr. Hoon: The average rate of helicopter serviceability achieved during the whole period of Exercise Saif Sareea was 54.5 per cent. The overall serviceability of helicopters on the exercise was affected by the requirement to conduct non-exercise related maintenance on a number of airframes. More generally, Exercise Saif Sareea provided our aviation assets with valuable experience of operating in a demanding desert environment. The impact on overall serviceability was one of a number of key factors. There was no single, principal cause of helicopter unserviceability.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the conclusions of the evaluation of equipment deployed in Operation Saif Sareea. [13279]

Mr. Hoon: The process of evaluating performance during Exercise Saif Sareea and identifying lessons for our future operations and exercises is already under way, and will address equipment serviceability. Much of the information captured in this process will be of an operationally sensitive nature. Accordingly, there are no plans to publish it.

Sea Harriers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from ground support staff at Yeovilton about the proposal to relocate the Sea Harriers; and if he will make a statement. [13425]

Mr. Ingram: No representations have been received about the proposal to relocate the Sea Harriers.

Nuclear Installations (Security)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to deploy *(a)* armed forces personnel and *(b)* reservists for key point duty to guard nuclear power stations; and if he will estimate the full cost of such a deployment over one year. [13278]

Mr. Ingram: Security at nuclear power stations is a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry and the police, who can request the support of the armed forces to guard these and other key points should other resources prove insufficient. There have been no such requests during the last year and costs would, in the event, fall to the requesting authority.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the US Defence Secretary on the issue of air exclusion zones over civil nuclear plants; whether there is to be a joint US-UK policy on this issue; and if he will make a statement on current RAF plans to defend the Sellafield nuclear site from aerial attack. [13235]

Mr. Hoon: Since 11 September, Ministers and officials in a number of Government Departments have been in discussions with their US counterparts on a range of domestic security issues, though not specifically about air exclusion zones over civil nuclear plants.

The Royal Air Force has an established and well-practised air defence capability which is ready to detect, deter and destroy any aircraft intending to attack any target within the UK, including civil nuclear plants. Some improvements have been made to our air defence posture since 11 September. I am withholding details of these improvements in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Nor can I disclose the details of security measures taken at individual civil nuclear sites.

Support Amphibious and Battlefield Rotorcraft Project

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce an initial acquisition contract for the SABR project; and if he will make a statement. [13281]

Dr. Moonie: The Support Amphibious and Battlefield Rotorcraft programme is designed to replace the capability provided by the Sea King Mk4 and Puma helicopter around the turn of the decade. The project is in its early stages and we have yet to decide how the capability requirement will best be met. It is too soon, therefore, to say when acquisition contracts might be placed.

Recruitment (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about *(a)* the composition of and *(b)* the work of the Specialist Ethnic Minority Recruiting and Diversity Action Teams. [13113]

Mr. Ingram: The Ethnic Minority Recruiting Teams (named 'Diversity Action Team' in the naval service) consist of a mix of ranks, male and female, who are chosen with the aim of providing approachable role models for potential recruits. Team members are based in areas with high ethnic minority populations.

The naval service team consists of two officers, three senior ratings and five junior ratings with two civilians. The Army team consists of one officer and five senior NCOs, supplemented by a further nine junior NCOs who are volunteers from their units and serve on six month attachments. The RAF team consists of one officer, seven senior NCOs and four junior NCOs.

The teams work with the ethnic minority target audience to raise awareness of the armed forces, help to provide individuals with an accurate picture of life in each service, and provide advice on the career opportunities the services offer. They participate in many events and activities across the UK, such as careers fairs, visits to

schools and colleges, community cultural and religious centres and youth organisations. They give presentations and talk to ethnic minority youth, offer careers advice and help candidates prepare for interviews, and nurture potential candidates.

European Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department has taken to meet the capability requirement of the European Security and Defence Policy's Headline Goal. [13285]

Mr. Hoon: At last year's Capability Commitments Conference, the UK identified a pool of forces and capabilities as its contribution towards achievement of the Headline Goal. All national contributions to the Headline Goal are made on a voluntary basis. Their commitment to an individual operation would depend on priorities and other commitments at the time.

UK forces can operate across the full range of Petersberg tasks, including the most demanding. In the maximum scale operation envisaged at Helsinki—a corps level deployment of up to 60,000—the UK component could be about 12,500 strong. Maritime and air deployments of up to 18 warships and 72 combat aircraft could be made in addition.

At the forthcoming Capabilities Improvement Conference, I will present further information on UK plans aimed at addressing some of the shortfalls identified since last year's conference. The UK contribution is and will continue to be consistent with our commitments to NATO. It is high quality and focused on key enabling capabilities.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the next meeting between the European Security and Defence Policy's political and military committees and their NATO counterparts will take place. [13284]

Mr. Hoon: The EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) and NATO's North Atlantic Council (NAC) as well as the EU's and NATO's respective Military Committees meet on a regular basis and at least once per Presidency. Further meetings may be requested.

Both of the mandated meetings have already been held during the current Belgian Presidency, although a further meeting between the two Military Committees is provisionally planned for 3 December 2001. Meetings will be programmed during the forthcoming Spanish Presidency between January and June 2002; a PSC/NAC meeting is provisionally planned for 14 May 2002.

Fylingdales and Menwith Hill

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the role of *(a)* Fylingdales and *(b)* Menwith Hill in performing communications services in connection with action against terrorism. [12066]

Mr. Ingram: RAF Fylingdales provides the UK with early warning of ballistic missile attack against the UK and Western Europe, and the US with early warning for North America. It does not perform a communications role.

RAF Menwith Hill is an integral part of the world-wide US Department of Defense communications network, which supports UK, US and NATO interests. Information concerning detailed operations at the base, including any role in performing communications services in connection with actions against terrorism, is withheld under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on access to Government Information on the grounds of national security.

Defence Aviation and Repair Agency

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the outcome was of the investment appraisal conducted by the Defence Aviation Repair Agency into options to provide modern infrastructure for its Aircraft Business Unit, refer[illegible] to on 20 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 8W. [12445]

Mr. Ingram: The investment appraisal looking into the infrastructure options for DARA's Fixed Wing Aircraft Business Unit is due to be completed in January 2002.

UK Service Men (Race Relations)

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice his Department provides to UK service men to inform them of their rights under the Race Relations Act 1976 when working on sovereign bases overseas; and if he will make a copy available in the Library. [12735]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces aim to achieve a working environment free from harassment, intimidation and unlawful discrimination wherever personnel are located. Guidance disseminated by the armed services reflects this policy and makes clear that any individual has the right to pursue a complaint through the internal redress procedures. All such complaints are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. Although the Race Relations Act 1976 may not in all circumstances apply to personnel serving in the sovereign bases overseas, our own policies and internal procedures do not differentiate between service personnel in different locations.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is possible for UK service men serving on sovereign bases overseas to bring a case against the Ministry of Defence under the Race Relations Act 1976. [12758]

Mr. Ingram: The Race Relations Act 1976 makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate on racial grounds against an employee in relation to employment at an establishment in Great Britain. In this context sovereign bases do not form part of the territory of Great Britain.

Section 8 of the Race Relations Act provides that employment will be regarded as being at an establishment in Great Britain unless the employee does his work wholly outside Great Britain. Therefore, whether a member of the armed forces serving on a sovereign base (or elsewhere outside Great Britain) could bring a complaint under the Race Relations Act 1976 would depend upon whether the alleged act or acts of discrimination took place at a time when he or she worked wholly outside Great Britain. If the complaint related to a period when that person did not work wholly outside Great Britain then the Act would be applicable.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what allowance he has made for using existing aircraft on the new aircraft carriers. [13007]

Dr. Moonie: The Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) will be configured to operate the Future Joint Combat Aircraft (FJCA) as its primary aircraft. In addition to FJCA, the current CVF requirement document sets out a number of aircraft which should be considered for operation in a secondary role. This includes existing fixed and rotary wing aircraft which are compatible with carrier operations. Use of existing aircraft will depend, among other things, on their operational capability when CVF enters service—currently planned for 2012.

Gibraltar Regiment

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to recruit from the Gibraltar regiment in order to offset the shortfall in armed forces personnel. [13010]

Mr. Ingram: There are no such plans.

Armed Forces (Non-married Partners)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many servicemen and women are living with partners to whom they are not married but who are recognised as falling within the scope of benefits payable under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. [12641]

Mr. Ingram: None. Unmarried partners are not currently recognised as eligible for benefits under the terms of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. We have no reliable data on the numbers affected. All three services are currently involved in work to examine whether or not unmarried people living in partnership should receive benefits similar to those received by married couples. This work is designed to provide more factual and authoritative information than is currently available, including on numbers.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces occupy married quarters with partners to whom they are not married. [12639]

Dr. Moonie: Entitlement to Service Families Accommodation (SFA) is based mainly on marital status and includes lone parents with dependent children for whom they have prime responsibility. It is also applied to certain single service personnel when serving in specific appointments. Service personnel are not allowed to occupy SFA to cohabit with a partner who is not their legal spouse. If such cases come to light, they are advised that they are in breach of their licence, and unless they regularise the position, they are issued with a notice to vacate the property.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the rules governing death-in-service benefits for the non-married partners of servicemen and women are within the scope of the review of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. [12640]

Mr. Ingram: Following a review of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme, proposals for a new scheme were issued for public consultation in March of this year. These proposals did not specifically cover benefits for unmarried partners though the issue had been considered during the initial stage of the review when it was considered that change was not appropriate. The issue was raised in responses to the public consultation and will be given further consideration as we take the review forward.

HOME DEPARTMENT

HMP Downview

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will decide on whether HMP Downview will be a local prison; and if he will make a statement. [11639]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The tactical use of the prison estate is a matter for the Director General of the Prison Service. The particular type of prisoner that is held in each prison changes depending on the profile of the national prison population. The Prison Service Management Board regularly reviews the use of the estate. The current pressure on women's prisons means that Downview is being used to hold convicted and sentenced prisoners.

The Prison Service will continue to identify the most suitable accommodation for the projected numbers and types of prisoners; this will include consideration on whether Downview will hold remand prisoners.

I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman is advised if the decision is taken to place remand prisoners into Downview.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the costs broken down to include overtime, detached duty allowances and hotel costs arising from employment of female prison staff detached from other prisons to HMP Downview between 17 July and 31 December. [11641]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* Regular assessments are made on the continued need for the employment of female staff from other prisons at Downview. The number of staff required is dependent on the need to safely accommodate the numbers of women sent to prison custody by the courts.

Female detached duty staff commenced during October reaching a maximum of 20 officers. Based on this staffing level, the monthly costs are estimated to be £57,000 for detached duty costs (including accommodation costs) and £16,200 for contract hours (overtime). Were this staffing level to remain until 31 December, the estimate for the total costs is £171,000 for detached duty costs and £48,600 for contract hours.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent estimate he has made of the cost of renovating C wing at HMP Downview to be suitable for female remand prisoners; and what account was taken of such estimates in the advice which he received on converting Downview to a female prison. [11642]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* A decision has not yet been taken on whether Downview prison will hold remand prisoners. Initial views are that C wing does not lend itself for an easy or cost-effective

conversion to hold remand prisoners. Detailed estimates for such a renovation or for replacing it with a new accommodation block have not yet been carried out.

The decision to select Downview as the prison needing to change function to hold women prisoners was based on a number of criteria including its geographical location, ability to relocate the existing male population and an assessment of the future shape of the prison estate. Funding for a change of function had been secured under a previous spending review settlement; the Prison Service has not requested further funding for this change. I will ensure that the hon. Member is advised if the decision is taken to place remand prisoners into Downview.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of racial harassment were reported to the National Asylum Support Service's Investigations Team by asylum seekers, concerning the behaviour of accommodation providers or their agents in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001, broken down by (i) month and (ii) region. [13046]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The number of allegations of racial harassment reported to the National Asylum Support Service Investigations Team concerning the behaviour of accommodation providers or their agents in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 is as follows:

Year/Month	*Number*
2000	
October	6
November	3
December	3
2001	
January	2
February	2
March	4
April	4
May	2
June	1
July	0
August	1
September	4
October	1

The figures are not broken down by region. These figures represent the reports which the Investigation Section received and information on who reported the incident is not recorded. Figures are unavailable for the period before the Investigations Team became fully operational.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum applicants were removed from the UK in each month since 1 April; and how many of these were *(a)* principal applicants and *(b)* dependants of a principal applicant. [13050]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The number of asylum seekers who were removed from the United Kingdom in each month from April 2001 onwards is given in the table. Information more recent than June is not yet available.

Month	*Total asylum seekers*[1] *removed*[2,3]	*Principal applicants removed*[2,3]	*Dependants removed*[2,3]
April	830	780	55
May	915	870	45
June	840	730	115

[1] Persons who had sought asylum at some point.
[2] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest five. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
[3] Includes persons departing voluntarily after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum appeals, having been received by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, are awaiting onward transmission to the Immigration Appellate Authority; and how many asylum appeals, having been forwarded by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, are awaiting determination by the Immigration Appellate Authority. [13049]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* Provisional data indicate that on 31 July 2001 there were approximately 41,000 asylum appeals lodged with Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) which had not been sent to the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA). For every appeal lodged, IND has to review the grounds advanced and may as a consequence need to reconsider all the circumstances of the case. Appeals are not forwarded to the IAA until this consideration has been completed and appeal papers have been prepared.

On 31 July 2001 there were approximately 17,010 asylum cases awaiting determination by the IAA at adjudicator level, 981 cases awaiting leave to appeal to the Immigration Appellate Tribunal and 824 cases awaiting determination by the Immigration Appellate Tribunal.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of racial harassment were reported to the National Asylum Support Service's Investigations Team by asylum seekers, concerning the behaviour of resident communities in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001, broken down by (i) month and (ii) region; and if he will make a statement. [13045]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The number of allegations of racial harassment reported to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) Investigations Team concerning the behaviour of resident communities in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 is as follows:

	Number
2000	
May	'4
June	'19
July	'38
August	'46
September	'36
October	27
November	32
December	25
2001	
January	39
February	61
March	44
April	42

	Number
May	56
June	65
July	61
August	96
September	58
October	112

[1] The Performance Monitoring Investigations Section (PMI) became fully operational in October 2000. Figures prior to October 2000 represent those cases reported to the Investigations Sections. Further allegations may have been investigated within the wider Operations Section within NASS but there are no statistics for this.

The figures are not broken down by region. These figures represent the reports which the Investigation Section received and information on who reported the incident is not recorded.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken from receipt of an asylum appeal to the Immigration Appellate Authority is, (b) determination of the appeal by an adjudicators and *(c)* final determination of the appeal by the Immigration Appeal Tribunal. [13048]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* For the 12 months ending 31 July 2001, data from the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) for those cases where data are available indicate that the cumulative average times taken from the receipt of an asylum appeal by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to:

(a) the receipt of an appeal by the IAA is eight weeks;

(b) the determination by an adjudicator is 24 weeks;

(c) the final determination by the Immigration Appeal Tribunal is 42 weeks.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications are awaiting an initial decision by the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate. [13052]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The most recent available figure shows 43,100 asylum applications awaiting an initial decision at the end of August 2001. This figure has been rounded to the nearest hundred. A physical count was ordered by the Home Secretary to ensure absolute validity of the statistics. Problems with the backlog figures had arisen from an accumulation of errors since the last manual count of outstanding asylum applications in 1996.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum applicants were removed from the UK in each financial year since 1993–94. [13051]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The information requested, where available, is given in the table. These figures exclude dependants. Financial year information prior to 1995–96 is not available.

Year	Asylum seekers[1] removed[2,3]
1995–96	3,540
1996–97	5,705
1997–98	7,010
1998–99	7,185
1999–2000	7,915
2000–01	[4]8,930

[1] Persons who had sought asylum at some point, excluding dependants.

[2] Figures rounded to the nearest five.

[3] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme.

[4] Provisional figure.

Information on the number of asylum seekers removed from the United Kingdom is published regularly in the annual statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics", a copy of which is available in the Library, and via the RDS website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions have been issued to National Asylum Support Service caseworkers investigating incidents of racial harassment regarding police reports; if reports by third parties are considered; and if he will make a statement. [13043]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* Casework instructions have been issued to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) caseworkers investigating incidents of racial harassment. All incidents and alleged incidents of racial harassment are taken seriously and are investigated by the Performance Monitoring Investigations Section (PMI) within NASS. All incidents are investigated in the same way irrespective of whether they have been reported directly by the victim, their representative or a third party.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the administrative costs of the introduction of the voucher scheme for asylum seekers were. [12871]

Angela Eagle: Vouchers were introduced on 3 April 2000 when the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) assumed responsibility for providing support to destitute asylum seekers.

Total staffing and related administrative costs of NASS for the period 3 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, including the costs of processing application forms, allocating accommodation and administering the voucher scheme were £15.6 million[1]. Vouchers are printed and distributed by third party providers under contract to the Home Office and payments made under the voucher contract are included in the administrative costs of NASS. Details of payments made under this contract are commercially confidential.

[1] Figure rounded to the nearest £0.1 million.

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what status is given to unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the United Kingdom who are found not to qualify for *(a)* asylum and *(b)* exceptional leave to remain for humanitarian reasons but who cannot be removed from the United Kingdom. [13905]

Angela Eagle: It is our policy not to remove a failed asylum seeker from the United Kingdom if he or she is unaccompanied and under 18 years of age unless adequate reception arrangements can be made in the country of origin. Until now, if reception arrangements could not be made, four years' exceptional leave to remain has been granted.

We have now decided that if a failed asylum seeker who has no other basis to remain in the United Kingdom is aged between 14 and 17 at the time a decision is made and adequate reception arrangements cannot be made, he or she will be granted a period of exceptional leave until his or her 18th birthday. He or she will be able to apply for further leave at the end of this period in the same way as anyone else, but will be expected to leave the United Kingdom if he or she does not so apply or any application is rejected.

If a failed asylum seeker, for whom adequate reception arrangements cannot be made, is still aged under 14 at the time the asylum decision is made, he or she will continue to be granted four years' exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom in view of age and vulnerability. This will enable Local Authority social services departments to plan for the child's long term future. The child will then be able to apply for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom in the same way as adults who have completed four years' exceptional leave. In this way, we are continuing to protect children while they are in need but closing a loophole which affords settlement in the United Kingdom to those who would not normally qualify.

Immigration Advisers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations giving immigration advice for profit are registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner; and how many such individuals and organisations are in the process of registering with OISC. [13047]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* I understand that, as of 5 November 2001, the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) had registered 130 immigration advisers in business for profit. Of these, 83 are sole practitioners and 47 are organisations comprising two or more practitioners. The OISC has under consideration 15 registration applications from sole practitioners and eight from organisations comprising two or more practitioners.

Identity Cards

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the value of *(a)* compulsory and *(b)* voluntary identity cards in combating terrorism in the United Kingdom. [13408]

Angela Eagle: The Government have no plans to introduce a compulsory or voluntary identity card scheme as part of their response to the atrocities in the United States on 11 September.

However the policy on identity cards is kept under review and the Government are considering whether a universal card which allowed people to prove their identity more easily and provided a simple way to access a range of public services would be beneficial. Such an entitlement card scheme could also help to combat illegal working which disproportionately affects the poorer sections of our society by undercutting the minimum wage and encouraging unscrupulous employers. It could also reduce fraud against individuals, public services and the private sector.

The Government do not consider that an entitlement card scheme would have a significant effect in combating terrorism in the United Kingdom.

The introduction of an entitlement card would be a major step and the Government would not proceed without consulting widely and considering all the views expressed very carefully.

Rape Crisis Centres

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the funding of rape crisis centres. [12332]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office started to fund the Rape Crisis Federation with effect from 1 April 2001 for its work in supporting the network of rape crisis centres throughout the country. This year's grant is £406,000.

Police Fraud Teams

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the *(a)* size and *(b)* case load of police fraud teams in each year since 1996. [12648]

Mr. Denham: *(a)* I am afraid that this information is not kept centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, for the last two years Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary has collected data from all forces in England and Wales according to a range of 62 staff functions, one of which is fraud. The staff function for fraud is defined as "staff who predominantly investigate fraud cases (not including staff who are predominantly employed in asset confiscation duties)" and "staff who are predominantly employed to support the investigation of fraud cases (not including staff who are predominantly employed to support asset confiscation duties)". The data are as follows:

	1999–2000		*2000–01*	
Police force area	*Police officer*	*Civilian staff*	*Police officer*	*Civilian staff*
Avon and Somerset	17	1	15	2
Bedfordshire	8	1	13	3
Cambridgeshire	7	0	6	0
Cheshire	16	0	15	3
City of London	74	12	70	11
Cleveland	10	0	10	0
Cumbria	4	0	4	0
Derbyshire	10	1	12	1
Devon and Cornwall	10	0	18	5
Dorset	13	1	14	2
Durham	5	0	4	0
Dyfed-Powys	7	0	5	1
Essex	0	0	0	0
Gloucester	8	1	8	1
Greater Manchester	36	0	35	0
Gwent	5	0	5	0
Hampshire	11	3	12	3
Hertfordshire	10	0	11	0
Humberside	9	1	10	1
Kent	14	4	13	11
Lancashire	0	0	0	0
Leicester	0	0	7	0
Lincolnshire	7	0	7	0
Merseyside	0	4	0	4
Metropolitan police	118	0	68	2
Norfolk	7	0	7	0
North Wales	9	0	0	0

Police force area	1999–2000 Police officer	1999–2000 Civilian staff	2000–01 Police officer	2000–01 Civilian staff
North Yorkshire	6	0	6	0
Northamptonshire	8	2	8	4
Northumbria	14	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	11	1	17	1
South Wales	15	2	3	0
South Yorkshire	21	2	20	5
Staffordshire	10	2	10	2
Suffolk	6	0	8	2
Surrey	12	0	17	3
Sussex	2	1	0	2
Thames Valley	15	4	15	5
Warwickshire	1	0	6	1
West Mercia	7	0	5	0
West Midlands	28	12	29	9
West Yorkshire	42	0	43	0
Wiltshire	3	0	4	0
England and Wales	616	55	560	84

(b) I am afraid that this information is not kept centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the recorded crime figures for fraud and forgery for all police forces in England and Wales between April 1996 and March 2001 are as follows:

Police force area	Fraud and forgery: April 1996 to March 1997	April 1997 to March 1998	April 1998[1] to March 1999	April 1999 to March 2000	April 2000 to March 2001
Avon and Somerset	4,209	3,655	9,950	8,518	9,211
Bedfordshire	2,027	1,742	4,114	4,760	4,299
Cambridgeshire	1,491	1,375	2,389	3,251	2,780
Cheshire	2,325	1,848	2,146	2,192	2,390
Cleveland	1,350	1,525	2,261	2,744	2,880
Cumbria	946	1,156	1,388	1,310	1,094
Derbyshire	1,400	1,271	4,200	4,739	4,670
Devon and Cornwall	2,272	2,255	7,064	6,925	6,564
Dorset	1,315	1,264	6,334	5,866	5,045
Durham	1,193	1,163	1,311	1,314	1,394
Essex	2,526	2,458	4,366	5,470	6,615
Gloucestershire	1,551	1,484	2,527	3,284	3,105
Greater Manchester	5,411	6,519	15,830	20,043	18,579
Hampshire	3,998	3,669	5,130	6,393	5,847
Hertfordshire	1,225	1,418	2,312	2,935	3,982
Humberside	2,588	2,381	3,582	3,745	3,787
Kent	2,879	3,034	5,687	7,387	7,965
Lancashire	3,394	3,557	4,446	4,024	5,935
Leicestershire	3,417	2,795	7,227	8,398	6,925
Lincolnshire	1,344	1,144	2,723	1,641	1,662
City of London	384	507	862	1,214	1,145
Merseyside	3,999	4,275	4,884	4,794	5,021
Metropolitan police	41,157	43,437	80,541	105,150	83,453
Norfolk	1,222	1,056	2,488	3,251	2,742
Northamptonshire	1,211	1,230	4,425	4,225	3,661
Northumbria	2,017	2,315	4,991	5,022	5,365
North Yorkshire	989	976	2,563	2,551	2,498
Nottinghamshire	3,223	2,869	4,736	6,195	7,038
South Yorkshire	2,567	2,262	3,951	4,794	5,551
Staffordshire	2,106	2,196	3,830	4,885	6,083
Suffolk	1,302	1,069	2,099	2,182	2,372
Surrey	1,315	1,456	2,994	3,808	5,133
Sussex	2,677	3,059	7,790	8,615	9,886
Thames Valley	4,467	4,016	11,778	14,191	16,085
Warwickshire	932	910	2,401	2,383	2,067
West Mercia	1,960	1,865	3,961	4,210	3,898
West Midlands	5,781	4,987	15,675	26,856	29,322
West Yorkshire	5,034	5,458	10,608	11,533	10,626
Wiltshire	914	824	1,933	2,086	2,200
Dyfed-Powys	621	448	1,402	1,136	1,226
Gwent	1,415	1,402	2,395	2,586	2,532
North Wales	956	841	1,869	1,570	1,777
South Wales	2,865	3,061	6,340	6,597	4,914
England and Wales total	135,975	136,232	279,503	334,773	319,324

[1] New Home Office counting rules were issued for recorded crime on 1 April 1998

Police Authority Vehicles

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to police authorities on the purchase and hire of road vehicles. [12911]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 648W.

In 1996 the Police Information Technology Organisation placed a leasing Framework for police vehicles with two suppliers. These arrangements are due to run until July 2002.

Forensic Laboratories

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average length of time it took each of the national forensic laboratories to complete an investigation, from referral to conclusion in the last 12 months. [12040]

Angela Eagle: Figures available to the Home Office only include the work of the Forensic Science Service in England and Wales. Response times vary dependent on the offence type. There can be more than one referral in an investigation. The average turn around time for individual referrals was 26 days for the 12-month period from April 2000 to March 2001. In the year to date since March 2001 the average turn round time was 28 days.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many forensic scientists were employed by the national forensic laboratories in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [12039]

Angela Eagle: The average number of forensic scientists employed by the Home Office Forensic Science Service in each of the last five years is:

Year	*Number*
1996–97	814
1997–98	855
1998–99	1,027
1999–2000	1,221
2000–01	1,603

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by his Department; if he will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans he has to sell further such assets over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review; and if he will make a statement. [10833]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Within its total estate the Home Office possesses the following recorded stocks of antiques, paintings and fine wines:

Antiques

5 (no.) Pair of chandeliers
5 (no.) Chandeliers
1 (no.) Wall lantern
1 (no.) Hanging lantern
1 (no.) Pair of hanging lanterns
4 (no.) Wall brackets
1 (no.) Card table
2 (no.) Sofa tables
2 (no.) Console tables
2 (no.) Tea tables
1 (no.) Coffee table
1 (no.) Cricket table
5 (no.) Side tables
1 (no.) Refectory table
1 (no.) Pair of refectory tables
1 (no.) Dining table
3 (no.) Billiards tables
1 (no.) Loo table
1 (no.) Armchair
A set of 10 (no.) Side Chairs
1 (no.) Chaise Longue
A set of 12 (no.) Elbow chairs
1 (no.) Pair of Elbow chairs
A set of 6 (no.) Dining Chairs
1 (no.) Long stool
A set of 4 (no.) Benches
A set of 9 (no.) Dining Chairs
1 (no.) Joynt stool
1 (no.) pair of standard chairs
1 (no.) Settle
3 (no.) Display cabinets
3 (no.) Dressers
3 (no.) Coffers
A set of 4 (no.) Applique
A set of 9 (no.) Applique
1 (no.) Copper cistern
A collection of copper and brass pans and bowls
1 (no.) Wall mirror
5 (no.) Pair of antlers on shields
1 (no.) Stag's head on shield
1 (no.) Navel officer's sword and scabbard
1 (no.) Console
1 (no.) Pianoforte
A set of 7 (no.) Candelabrum
1 (no.) Secretaire bookcase
2 (no.) bookcases
1 (no.) Bracket clock
1 (no.) Standish
2 (no.) Sliver chalices
2 (no.) Statues
9 (no.) Pairs of fire dogs
8 (no.) Fire baskets
2 (no.) Fire backs
2 (no.) Persian carpets
1 (no.) Caucasian rug
1 (no.) Turkish carpet
1 (no.) Carpet
2 (no.) Tapestries
3 (no.) Drawings
1 (no.) Coloured print
4 (no.) Engravings

Paintings

12 (no.) Paintings

Fine Wines

Nil.

No antiques, paintings or fine wines have been sold during the past three years and there are no plans to sell any.

None of these items are held centrally by the Home Office, but by those involved in training and service delivery. Some of these items are gifts provided by those visiting or taking part in seminars and conferences from overseas.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the working and implementation of antisocial behaviour orders; and if he will make a statement. [9478]

Mr. Denham: During the passage of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 a commitment was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael), the then Home Office Minister, to review antisocial behaviour orders after two years. The review is currently under way.

Fly Tipping

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals were convicted of fly tipping in England in each year since 1997. [12409]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The available information, taken from the Home Office court proceedings database, showing the number of persons convicted of 'fly-tipping' offences in England during the period 1997 to 2000 is given in the table.

Number of persons convicted of the given environmental offence at all courts, England 1997 to 2000

Offence description/principal statute	*Number of persons convicted*
Prohibition on unauthorised or harmful deposit, treatment or disposal etc. of waste—Environmental Protection Act 1990 sec. 33	
1997	113
1998	157
1999	183
2000[1]	199

[1] Excluding any convictions at magistrates courts in Staffordshire

Note:
All data are given on a principal offence basis

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will receive a determination on applications M 1103515 and M 1103516 from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. [12663]

Angela Eagle: The applicants' representative was requested on 19 October to provide additional evidence to enable us to give further consideration to these cases. A decision will be made as soon as possible after this has been received.

Special Constables

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has reviewed the 1997 Her Majesty's inspectorate of contabulary conclusion that special constables should not be paid; and if he will make a statement. [7092]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office funded two recent research studies which have made recommendations on the recruitment and retention of special constables[1].

Voluntary service to the community is a key element of the special constabulary but we are reviewing the allowances paid to special constables and a number of other options for achieving radical improvements in the conditions of service and the management of special constables.

[1] "An Investigation into the Premature Wastage of Special Constables" by Jackie Alexander. Home Office Police Research Unit, May 2000 (www.pras.org); and

"Attracting and Keeping Special Constables" by Alan Hedges. July 2000 (circulated to all police forces July 2000).

Race Relations Act

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will make changes to the authorisation under section 19D of the Race Relations Act 1976 concerning discrimination of the basis of ethnic or national origin in the examination of passengers. [13906]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. and noble Friend Lord Rooker has been reviewing the authorisation made on 23 April by his predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche)—the Race Relations (Immigration and Asylum) (No. 2) Authorisation 2001—each month on the basis of statistical evidence and intelligence material produced by the Immigration Service. The authorisation permitted the Immigration Service to pay particular attention to arriving passengers from certain specified ethnic or national groups, namely Afghans, Albanians, Kurds, Pontic Greeks, Roma, Somalis, Tamils and persons of Chinese ethnic origin carrying Japanese or Malaysian travel documents.

My right hon. and noble Friend has amended the authorisation to remove Pontic Greeks from the list of specified groups, on the grounds that while intelligence suggests that members of this group may pose a threat to the United Kingdom's immigration control in future, there is not sufficient evidence at present to maintain their current inclusion in the authorisation. The remaining groups covered by the authorisation remain unchanged.

A copy of the authorisation has been placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Parliamentary Questions

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she had with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), prior to Questions to the Secretary of State for Scotland held on 6 November, regarding the content and wording of his supplementary oral question to her. [13541]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with back-bench colleagues.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Parliamentary Questions

John Barrett: To ask the Advocate-General what discussions she had with the hon. Members for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) and for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), prior to Questions to the Advocate-General for Scotland on 6 November, regarding the content and wording of their supplementary oral questions to her. [13540]

The Advocate-General: I am always personally available to all hon. Members for discussion of any matter of interest to hon. Members, within my responsibilities as Advocate-General.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the extended magistrates' sitting hours pilots in Manchester and London are expected to commence; what funding has been identified to facilitate these; and if he will make a statement. [12003]

Mr. Wills: The Government plan to pilot studies to find the most cost-effective means of extending court hours. The aim is to test whether extended hours would have an impact on delays, deter local criminals, improve access to justice and help reassure local communities. Planning is under way involving all criminal justice partners in London and Manchester. The pilots are expected to start next year. Funding of £5.4 million has been identified to facilitate these.

Judiciary

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the figures for women and men barristers who were judicial appointees at each level of the courts in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001 reflect the proportion of women and men called to the Bar between 10 and 15 years earlier. [12853]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The relevant data are not readily available in the form requested and I will write to my hon. Friend. Statistics from the Judicial Appointments Annual Report for 2000–01 show the overall average years in practice at the time of appointment for the main competitions held was 21.0 years for both barristers and solicitors. Figures from the Bar Council show that 10.8 per cent. of barristers with over 20 years' experience were women. Figures in the Annual Report show that the proportion of women, both barristers and solicitors, appointed in open competitions in 2000–01 was 28.4 per cent.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women appointees to the judiciary in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001 were Queen's counsel at the time of their appointment. [12865]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The total number of QCs appointed to the judiciary in open competitions in 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 was 36, 35 and 53 respectively.

Information on the gender breakdown is not readily to hand but I will write to my hon. Friend with the information.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women appointees to the judiciary in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001 were solicitors at the time of their appointment. [12849]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The total number of solicitors appointed to the judiciary in open competitions in 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 was 294, 211 and 277 respectively. Information on the gender breakdown is not readily to hand but I will write to my hon. Friend with the information.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average ages were of *(a)* women and *(b)* men appointees to the full-time Crown court judiciary in the last 12 months. [12864]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information in the form requested is not readily available. Circuit judges are not generally appointed to sit exclusively in the Crown court. Many sit also in civil and family work and the balance of time spent sitting in the Crown court will vary between appointees and from one year to the next. The average age of candidates approved for appointment for the Circuit Bench in 2000–01 was 51.4 years. I will write to my hon. Friend with further information about appointments made to the Circuit Bench over the course of the last year showing the average age by female and male appointees.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women appointees to the judiciary in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001 were single parents at the time of their appointment. [12851]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information about marital status and children is not specifically sought from candidates and therefore no records are held. Members of the legal profession, irrespective of their background or personal circumstances are encouraged to apply for judicial office. Candidates are appointed on merit against the published criteria for appointment.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men appointed to the judiciary in (i) 1999 and (ii) 2000 had previously taken an employment break in order to care for children. [12850]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information about employment breaks to care for children is not specifically sought from applicants for judicial office; therefore there are no records available.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to put in place creche facilities associated with the courts with the aim of encouraging younger women with children to apply for appointment to the judiciary; and what other plans she has to offer such encouragement. [12852]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor is not aware of a specific demand for such creche facilities. The Lord Chancellor gives general encouragement to women to apply for judicial office. With this in mind, among the initiatives he has introduced are a permanent part-time working facility and flexible part-time sitting arrangements for those who have had career breaks for family reasons. In addition the lower age limits for judicial office are applied flexibly.

Judicial Review

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many and what proportion of applications for leave to apply for judicial review were *(a)* heard in court and *(b)* upheld in the last year for which data are available; and if he will make a statement. [12672]

Mr. Wills: The following information is based on judicial review cases, both civil and criminal, received between 1 October 2000 and 30 September 2001.

Number of applications received—4,554

Number of substantive applications heard—1,176 (as percentage of applications received)—25.8 per cent.

Number of substantive applications allowed—607 (as percentage of applications received—13.3 per cent.

Hereford Crown Court

Mr. Maples: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he intends to renew the lease on Hereford Crown court; and if he will make a statement. [13194]

Mr. Wills: The Court Service has instructed managing agents acting on its behalf to renew both of the two current leases that we hold on accommodation at the Shire Hall, Hereford which expire on 31 December 2001. These negotiations are now proceeding.

TREASURY

Government Debt

6. **Stephen Hesford:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of servicing Government debt in each of the last five years. [11331]

Ruth Kelly: As a result of the action this Government have taken to deliver economic stability, such as cutting borrowing, and making the Bank of England independent, Budget 2001 forecast gross debt interest for 2001–02 to be £23.1 billion, £3.0 billion lower than in 2000–01.

The forecast for gross debt interest in 2001–02 is £4.5 billion lower than the cost of debt interest in 1996–97 and £6.2 billion lower than in 1997–98.

Under the last Government, this was money spent on paying the price of economic failure. Under this Government, money saved on debt interest can now be used to invest in Britain's key public service.

Contingency Fund

14. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for further allocations to spending Departments from the contingency fund during the remainder of this financial year. [11343]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Contingencies Fund is used to advance urgent resources to departments pending approval of the spending through estimates in the normal manner. There are therefore no plans to make allocations from it, as it is not a budgeting concept. Allocations may be made from the Departmental Expenditure Limit Reserve to meet genuinely unforeseen contingencies. Any such resources additional to departmental budgets will be reported to Parliament through the Supplementary Estimates procedure in the normal way.

Terrorist Funds

15. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is putting in place to tackle the financing of international terrorism. [11344]

21. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the measures taken to cut off the supply of funding to terrorism. [11351]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friends to the remarks made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 8 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 397-52.

Third-world Debt

16. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of the UK in pressing for reductions in third-world debt. [11345]

Mr. Boateng: The UK has consistently been at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief for the developing countries. The UK pushed for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative to be speeded up, and as a result, 23 countries are now receiving debt relief. These countries will receive $54 billion in debt relief, which will reduce their debts to below the developing country average. The UK's 100 per cent. bilateral policy on debt relief means that it stands ready to write off £1.9 billion of debts for all 42 HIPCs. The Chancellor also announced last December that the UK would hold in trust any payments from those HIPCs yet to receive debt relief. We call on other G7 countries to follow our lead.

Student Loans

18. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future of student loans. [11347]

Mr. Andrew Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced in October that she is leading a review of student funding. This will examine the appropriate balance between the contribution made by students, their families and the state to support our ambitions to widen access and participation in higher education.

Banking Services

19. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in implementing the findings of the Cruickshank report on UK banking. [11348]

Ruth Kelly: There have been three recent developments.

First, the Julius Review Group published in July its report reviewing the banking codes. The Government are now considering the response of the industry to the report's recommendations.

Second, the Government published their response to consultation on competition in payment systems in August. The Government will bring forward legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Third, the Competition Commission reported to the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in October with the findings of its inquiry into the provision of banking services to small and medium sized enterprises. The Government are considering these findings.

Tax and Benefit Integration

20. **Roger Casale:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further plans he has to integrate the tax and benefit systems. [11350]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to further integration of the tax and benefit system to tackle poverty and to promote incentives to work and save.

Over the last Parliament a number of reforms were introduced, including the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit, the Children's Tax Credit and the Minimum Income Guarantee for Pensioners.

In the next stage of reform, the Government intend to introduce a new system of tax credits from 2003 which will help to support families, make work pay and tackle child poverty.

The Pension Credit, also introduced from 2003, will help reward saving, support pensioners on low to modest incomes and tackle pensioner poverty.

NHS Investment

22. **Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had from health professionals in the NHS on public investment in health services. [11352]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I am always interested in the views of health service professionals and receive regular representations on a range of public service issues.

Discount Rate

23. **Mr. Burnett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason the Treasury discount rate is set at 6 per cent. in real terms. [11353]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The discount rate is based on several factors, including the cost of public sector capital and the estimated rate of social time preference. The 6 per cent. rate currently recommended was set in 1989 and was derived from the evidence then available. A review is currently under way of the project appraisal and capital appraisal system to ensure it embodies best practice in present circumstances.

27. **Paul Holmes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent analysis his Department has undertaken of the influence on the relative values of public sector comparators and public-private partnership costs of changing the discount rate. [11359]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The project appraisal and capital approval system used in government is currently under review. However, the rationale for any change in the discount rate would have implications for other parts of the appraisal process, so the overall effect would depend on a combination of these factors.

September 11

24. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to minimise the impact of the terrorist attacks on 11 September and the bombing of Afghanistan on the British economy and business confidence; and if he will make a statement. [11354]

Ruth Kelly: The Government will publish forecasts for the UK economy and the public finances in the forthcoming pre-Budget report, taking into account all developments and influences on prospects.

29. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revisions he has made to his estimates for economic growth and tax revenues in 2001–02 and 2002–03 following the events of 11 September. [11361]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's latest forecasts for the UK and world economies and the public finances were published in "Budget 2001" (HC279). Updated forecasts will be presented as part of the forthcoming pre-Budget report.

Productivity

25. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the competitiveness of the UK economy in terms of productivity. [11355]

Mr. Boateng: The Government make regular assessments of UK competitiveness and productivity and are committed to increasing UK productivity at a faster rate than that of their major competitors. Budget 2001 gave the most recent assessment of UK productivity, and Government policy in this area was set out in "Productivity in the UK: Enterprise and the Productivity Challenge", published in June this year. The forthcoming pre-Budget report will provide a further update on UK productivity relative to our main competitors.

Public-private Partnerships

26. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from interested organisations regarding public-private partnerships. [11357]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers receive representations from various organisations and individuals on a wide range of issues.

28. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the viability of future public-private partnership schemes. [11360]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government's approach to public-private partnerships was set out in the Treasury document, "Public-private partnerships: the Government's approach", published in March 2000.

Public Services

30. **Mr. Challen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on what recent measures he has taken to promote the improvement of public services. [11362]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government's prudent stewardship of public finances since 1997 has made it possible to provide unprecedented levels of investment for key public services. £43 billion of additional funding has been allocated to Departmental Expenditure Limits by 2003–04. Three quarters of these increased funds will be spent in the Government's priority areas of health, education, transport, housing and law and order. This investment in public services is tied to commitments by Departments to deliver improved service standards and key reforms, the targets for which are set out in their public service agreements.

Housing Market

31. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of the level of interest rates on the housing market. [11363]

Ruth Kelly: In August this year mortgage rates averaged 6.0 per cent. This compares with an average of over 11 per cent. during the period 1979–97. As a result, mortgage interest payments on the average mortgage are now over £1,500 a year lower than if interest rates were still at the levels seen from 1979–97.

Regional Development Agencies

32. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent research he has commissioned on the impact of his policies on the economic plans of the Regional Development Agencies. [11365]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Regional Development Agencies are key to meeting economic development challenges faced at the regional level. To support their objectives, the RDAs need a stable national macroeconomic environment in which to operate, which we have provided through the national framework of macroeconomic reforms and policies we have implemented since 1997. Within that framework, we have also given RDAs the flexibility and autonomy they need to address regional priorities and deliver economic growth within and between every region.

To understand more fully the regional impact of national policies, and to ensure that the economic plans of the RDAs can best work within them, the Treasury is supporting through the Evidence-Based Policy Fund a research project, led by DTLR, to identify public expenditure flows into the regions. This project is due to be completed early in 2002.

Single European Currency

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to hold a referendum on joining the single European currency. [11346]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's policy on membership of the single currency remains as set out by the Chancellor in October 1997 and restated by the Prime Minster in February 1999. The Government have said they will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. Once the assessment has been completed, the Government will make a decision on UK membership of the single currency. If the Government recommend UK entry, it will be put to a vote in Parliament and then to a referendum of the British people.

Census Returns

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of forms from the *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 1991 Census were returned. [11678]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, dated October 2001:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the percentage of forms returned from (a) the 2001 and (b) the 1991 Census (11678).

The Office for National Statistics presently estimates that the response rate to the 2001 Census in England and Wales will reach 98 per cent. of households. Around 88 per cent. of the estimated number of households returned forms by post, a further seven per cent. were collected by enumerators and possibly three per cent. were vacant dwellings and second homes. We will not know the precise response rates until all the forms have been processed and analysed.

In the 1991 Census in England and Wales, nearly 98 per cent. of forms for households identified by enumerators as being occupied, were returned.

Charities

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent measures he has put in place to help charities. [11583]

Mr. Boateng: In April 2000 the Government introduced a number of measures to help charities and to encourage greater charitable giving. The Getting Britain Giving package of measures included improvements to the Gift Aid and Payroll Giving schemes and a new income tax relief for giving shares to charities. The Government are supporting The Giving Campaign, led by the charitable sector, to promote the new reliefs and encourage a culture of giving.

Interest Rates

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent meetings he has had with the Governor of the Bank of England regarding interest rates; and if he will make a statement. [11356]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor and the Governor meet regularly to discuss a wide range of issues. The level of interest rates is a matter for the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England.

VAT Fraud

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evaluation he has made of HM Customs and Excise's strategy to tackle trader-based intra-EU VAT fraud. [9185]

Mr. Boateng: Full details of Customs' strategy to tackle missing trader-based intra-EU VAT fraud will be published at the time of the Pre-Budget report.

Individual Pension Accounts

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 71W, on individual pension accounts, how many individual pension accounts have been taken out to date. [13294]

Ruth Kelly: This information is not collected by the Government.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Syms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on HM Customs and Excise proposals to employ staff in mobile anti-smuggling squads; and what assessment he has made of the impact this proposal will have on the port of Poole. [12546]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* HM Customs and Excise keeps under constant review its resource deployment in the light of risk analysis and results. It has for some time used flexible mobile teams to tackle smuggling around the coast and at ports and airports. Deployment changes are intelligence-led and so designed to achieve the greatest possible impact on smuggling.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff were *(a)* employed in Customs and Excise investigation and fraud teams and *(b)* engaged in counter-smuggling activities in each year since 1996; and what his estimate is for 2001 and plans for 2002. [12653]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* For the financial years 1996–97 to 1999–2000 the number of Customs' staff employed in Investigation and Anti-smuggling teams were as follows:

	Investigation[1]	*Anti-smuggling*
1996–97	1,679	2,829
1997–98	1,783	2,854
1998–99	1,864	2,872
1999–2000	1,907	2,877

[1] This includes non-core activity (corporate and support services)

For 2000–01 and 2001–02 Customs were complemented for 3,315 and 3,445 detection staff and 1,864 and 2,101 investigation staff respectively. From 2000–01 the figures for Investigation no longer include the non-core support services activity.

Broadband Tax Incentives

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the introduction of regional tax incentives for broadband communications in the Objective 1 areas. [12395]

Mr. Boateng: The Government keep all areas of the tax system under review. The 100 per cent. capital allowances for information and communications technology expenditure by small firms, announced in Budget 2000, include capital expenditure on broadband. These are available in Objective 1 areas as in the rest of the UK.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Questions

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for what reason guidance to officials in his Department on drafting replies to parliamentary questions requires them to offer commentary on the motivation of the hon. Member asking the question; and if he will make a statement. [10971]

Mr. Leslie: Civil servants are required to draft answers to parliamentary questions in accordance with the requirements of the "Guidance to Officials on Drafting Answers to Parliamentary Questions". A copy of the Guidance is in the Library of the House. In addition, more detailed internal guidance is issued to officials in my Department advising them of Minsters' requirements on layout and style. Officials are asked to set out the background to the parliamentary question and, if known, the reason why the question has been asked. Similar guidance has been issued under successive Administrations. Such information can help to ensure that answers provided to hon. Members are relevant to their concerns.

Cabinet Office Properties

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the number, value and location of properties newly leased in each of the last five years by the Cabinet Office, including and distinguishing between the Department itself, its next step agencies and its non-departmental public bodies, differentiating between purchases made as a result of the creation of new bodies and those purchases made by established bodies. [7809]

Mr. Leslie: Information requested, covering 1996–97 to 2000–01 (inclusive) is as follows:

Year/number/location	*Status*	*Value (£)*
1996–97		
Number of acquisitions made: 0	—	—
1997–98		
Number of acquisitions made: 2		
England		
Basingstoke	Core department. Established body	355
Birmingham	Executive agency. Established body	3
1998–99		
Number of acquisitions made: 0	—	—

Year/number/location	Status	Value (£)
1999–2000		
Number of acquisitions made: 5		
England		
London x 2	Core department. Established body	1,648
Manchester	NDPB. Established body	341
Scotland		
Edinburgh	Executive agency. Established body	18
Glasgow	NDPB. Established body	54
2000–01		
Number of acquisitions made: 2		
England		
London	Core department. Established body x 1. New body x 1	2,527

Notes:
Unless otherwise stated, the figures shown in the 'value' column comprise rent, service charges and all other accommodation related running costs incurred in 2000–01.
Figures exclude VAT.
Figures in respect of the Government Offices for the Regions and the Regional Co-ordination Unit have been excluded, as these have been included in the Answer already provided by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Failing LEAs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list, for each local education authority found to be failing by Ofsted, *(a)* the date of inspection, of report, and of receipt of action plan by her Department, *(b)* the date of second inspection, of report, and of receipt of action plan by her Department, *(c)* the date of subsequent milestone events such as decisions to involve private partners in the management of local education authority services, to award, implement or terminate contracts with private partners, and to assist in or restructure the local education authority and *(d)* the names of partners to whom contracts have been awarded. [9909]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* There have been 21 authorities in which the Secretary of State has intervened following a critical Ofsted report. The information requested is contained in tables, which have been placed in the Library.

Primary Schools

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the average funding per pupil provided to *(a)* primary schools in Cheshire, *(b)* secondary schools in Cheshire, *(c)* primary schools in Hertfordshire, *(d)* secondary schools in Hertfordshire, *(e)* primary schools in England and *(f)* secondary schools in England in the last financial year. [11079]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	Primary	Secondary
Cheshire	1,903	2,532
Hertfordshire	1,926	2,639
England	2,010	2,663

The figures do not include School Standards Grant.

GCSE Results

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the 100 secondary schools with the worst GCSE examination results in England in order of their performance indicating in each case the responsible local education authority; and if she will make a statement. [11483]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The Department will publish 2001 GCSE (and GNVQ equivalent) results for schools in England in the secondary school performance tables on 22 November.

The White Paper "Schools Achieving Success" describes the programme of challenge and support designed to ensure that in all schools at least 25 per cent. of pupils should achieve 5 A*-C grades at GCSE (or equivalent) by 2006. Many of the schools currently below this target are working in deprived areas and adding considerable value given the prior attainment of their intake. We are working with schools and LEAs to identify what support is needed to deliver equality of outcome for their pupils.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the local education authorities which are *(a)* partly and *(b)* wholly run by private sector entities; which they are; and if she will make a statement. [11487]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* There are 10 interventions that involve private sector companies delivering services or functions under contract. The LEAs still remain responsible and accountable for the services in question.

Intervention authorities where private sector involved in the delivery of services

Bradford
Hackney
Haringey
Islington

Leeds
Sandwell
Southwark
Thurrock
Walsall
Waltham Forest.

State Schools (Private Firms)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which state schools in England have had their management taken over by private firms. [11535]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* None. The legal responsibility for managing a school rests with the governing body and head teacher, even where they are supported by expertise from the private sector.

Free School Meals

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children, on average, were receiving free school meals in *(a)* specialist schools and *(b)* other secondary schools in the state sector, on 30 September. [11539]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Free school meals data are not available for September.

The percentages of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in specialist secondary schools and other maintained secondary schools as at January 2001 are 14.7 per cent. and 16.2 per cent. respectively, and in those specialist secondary schools designated between January and October 2001 is 15.9 per cent.

Independent School Fees

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received on her policy relating to the provision of support towards the cost of independent school fees by her Department. [12005]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Earlier this year I received representations from the Independent Schools Council and others on proposals for more open access to independent schools. Their proposals sought Government assistance to subsidise the cost of school fees that could not be met by children's parents. However, the Government have a manifesto commitment from 1997 to phase out the Assisted Places Scheme (APS) and to use the available resources to raise standards and enhance opportunities for children in maintained schools. Savings from phasing out the APS are going towards the significant reduction in infant class sizes, as demonstrated in the achievements of the past four years. Any new scheme that would assist relatively few children to attend independent schools would be incompatible with the long-standing commitment to phase out APS.

Teachers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 469–70W, on teacher recruitment, what was the allocation of the recruitment and retention fund, 2000–01 to each local education authority. [12155]

Mr. Timms: A press notice (PN 2001/0191) announcing the details of the fund and the allocations to local education authorities was issued on 2 April 2001. A copy can be found on the departmental website www.dfes.gov.uk.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her written answer of 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 461W, on teachers, if she will list the *(a)* age profile and *(b)* reasons for leaving of the teachers leaving service in the maintained schools in each of the last four academic years. [12172]

Mr. Timms: Qualified full and part-time regular teachers (headcount) who left service in the maintained schools sector in England are as follows:

1996–97

Age at end of financial year	*Age retirement*	*Ill-health retirement*	*Premature retirement*	*All retirements*	*Left for reasons other than retirement*
Less than 25	0	[1]—	0	[1]—	400
25 to 29	0	[1]—	0	[1]—	3,600
30 to 34	0	[1]—	0	[1]—	3,300
35 to 39	0	100	0	100	2,600
40 to 44	0	400	0	400	3,200
45 to 49	0	1,200	0	1,200	3,200
50 to 54	0	1,800	4,500	6,300	1,700
55 to 59	[1]—	1,100	4,500	5,600	700
60 and over	1,700	100	1,300	3,200	200
Total	1,700	4,800	10,300	16,800	18,900

[1] less than 50

1997–98

Age at end of financial year	*Age retirement*	*Ill-health retirement*	*Premature retirement*	*All retirements*	*Left for reasons other than retirement*
Less than 25	0	0	0	0	500
25 to 29	0	[1]—	0	[1]—	4,100
30 to 34	0	[1]—	0	[1]—	3,900
35 to 39	0	100	0	100	2,900
40 to 44	0	300	0	300	3,700

1997–98

Age at end of financial year	Age retirement	Ill-health retirement	Premature retirement	All retirements	Left for reasons other than retirement
45 to 49	0	800	[1]—	800	4,200
50 to 54	0	1,300	5,600	6,900	2,300
55 to 59	0	800	4,500	5,200	800
60 and over	1,900	100	1,100	3,100	300
Total	1,900	3,400	11,200	16,600	22,600

[1] less than 50

1998–99

Age at end of financial year	Age retirement	Ill-health retirement	Premature retirement	All retirements	Left for reasons other than retirement
Less than 25	0	0	0	0	500
25 to 29	0	[1]—	0	[1]—	4,600
30 to 34	0	[1]—	0	[1]—	4,000
35 to 39	0	[1]—	0	[1]—	2,900
40 to 44	0	200	0	200	3,300
45 to 49	0	600	0	600	4,100
50 to 54	0	1,000	1,300	2,200	2,800
55 to 59	0	500	1,700	2,100	1,100
60 and over	1,900	100	800	2,900	300
Total	1,900	2,300	3,800	8,000	23,700

[1] less than 50

1999–2000

Age at end of financial year	Age retirement	Ill-health retirement	Premature retirement	All retirements	Left for reasons other than retirement
Less than 25	0	0	0	0	500
25 to 29	0	0	0	0	4,700
30 to 34	0	[1]—	0	[1]—	4,300
35 to 39	0	[1]—	0	[1]—	3,400
40 to 44	0	100	0	100	3,500
45 to 49	0	500	[1]—	500	4,500
50 to 54	0	1,000	1,300	2,200	3,600
55 to 59	0	600	2,000	2,600	1,400
60 and over	2,300	100	900	3,300	300
Total	2,300	2,300	4,300	8,800	26,200

[1] less than 50

The totals may not be the sum of the component parts due to rounding.

The most recent data available are for March 2000.

The figures exclude 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers not included on the Teacher Pension Scheme records.

The reasons for leaving cannot be broken down accurately into any additional categories.

Some teachers who left service will return subsequently.

Student Statistics

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students there are in the *(a)* further education and *(b)* higher education sector. [12263]

John Healey: There were 4.2 million students in the FE sector in 1999–2000. This figure includes funded and non-funded students in FE colleges and funded students in external institutions, specialist designated institutions and higher education institutions. Data for 2000–01 are not yet available.

Numbers for students in higher education are as follows:

HE students in England—2000–01[1]

Thousand

	Postgraduates	Undergraduates	Total
Full-time	136.1	874.5	1,010.6
Part-time	179.4	461.6	641.0
Total	315.5	1,336.1	1,651.6

[1] Provisional

Note:

The figures cover HE students in HE and FE institutions, including the Open University.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many higher education students are in their *(a)* first, *(b)* second, *(c)* third and *(d)* fourth of study. [12264]

Margaret Hodge: The information is given in the following table.

Higher Education Students in the UK[1]—2000–01

Year of study	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total*
1	503.9	285.5	789.4
2	324.6	141.8	466.3
3	253.2	67.2	320.3
4	91.5	40.2	131.7
Other	22.9	71.8	94.7
Total	1,196.0	606.5	1,802.5

[1] Covers all home and overseas postgraduates and undergraduates in HE institutions in the UK.

Higher Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teaching staff have been employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in higher education in each of the last five years. [12306]

Margaret Hodge: The available data on the number of teaching staff employed in higher education are given in the table.

Academic Staff in UK Higher Education Institutions

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*
1995–96	111,460	15,120	126,580
1996–97	110,770	16,790	127,570
1997–98	110,480	17,590	128,080
1998–99	112,370	18,760	131,140
1999–2000	113,790	21,960	135,750

Note:
Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10
Source:
Higher Education Statistics Agency's Staff Record

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many unfilled vacancies there were in the higher education sector for all grades of lecturer posts in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 2000. [12308]

Margaret Hodge: This information is not held centrally. Individual universities, as employers, are responsible for monitoring their own vacancies.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what monitoring is carried out by her Department of the payment by higher education institutions of nationally recommended pay awards. [12309]

Margaret Hodge: The higher education employers and trades unions will monitor the implementation of the pay awards they have agreed. The Government do not play a part.

Universities

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female university teachers are aged (i) 20 to 25, (ii) 25 to 30, (iii) 31 to 35, (iv) 36 to 40, (v) 41 to 44, (vi) 45 to 49, (vii) 50 to 54, (viii) 55 to 59, (ix) 60 to 65, (x) 66 to 70 and (xi) 71 years and over. [12307]

Margaret Hodge: The available data on age and gender of university staff are given in the table.

Academic staff in UK higher education institutions 1999–2000

Age	*Female*	*Male*	*Total*
20–24	1,620	1,520	3,140
25–30	9,100	12,110	21,210
31–35	8,720	13,710	22,430
36–40	7,590	12,120	19,710
41–44	5,760	8,780	14,540
45–49	6,660	11,170	17,830
50–54	5,480	13,000	18,480
55–59	2,590	8,690	11,550
60–65	870	5,190	6,060
66–70	50	390	440
71+	140	220	360
Total	48,580	87,170	135,750

Note:
Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.
Source:
Higher Education Statistics Agency's Staff Record.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the *(a)* recruitment and retention of university staff and *(b)* total funding figures for universities in England and Wales per university for the last five years. [12321]

Margaret Hodge: The recruitment and retention of staff is a matter for higher education institutions. However, in England the Government are providing £50 million in 2001–02, rising to £110 million in 2002–03 and £170 million in 2003–04. This is to support the initiatives set out in the human resources strategies which each higher education institution has submitted to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, including measures to promote recruitment and retention and modernisation of reward systems. In Wales, these issues are now a matter for the National Assembly.

Data on funding for higher education institutes can be found in the Higher Education Statistics Agency publication "Resources for higher education institutions" copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Teacher Shortages

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the forthcoming allocation of funds to local education authorities for 2002–03 will be adjusted to reflect cost of living issues and teacher shortages in the south-east. [12743]

Mr. Timms: Education standard spending assessments for 2002–03 will continue to reflect the additional costs faced by local education authorities on the same basis as in 2001–02.

Specialist Schools

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many specialist schools there were in each local education authority in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1998 and *(c)* 2000; and how many there were in each specialty in 2000. [12966]

Mr. Timms: The number of operational Specialist Schools, as of 1996, 1998 and 2000, by LEA by specialism, is given in the following tables.

Specialist Schools

Number of operational Specialist Schools by LEA by specialism (information given is as of September each year)

Local education authorities	*Total secondary schools in LEA*	*1996*				
		Arts	*Language*	*Sports*	*Technology*	*Total*
Barking & Dagenham, LB of	8	—	—	—	1	1
Barnet, LB of	21	—	1	—	1	2
Barnsley	14	—	—	—	—	0
Bath & North East Somerset	13	—	—	—	—	0
Bedfordshire	17	—	—	—	—	0
Bexley, LB of	16	—	—	—	1	1
Birmingham	77	—	—	—	3	3
Blackburn with Darwen	9	—	—	—	—	0
Blackpool	8	—	—	—	—	0
Bolton	16	—	—	—	1	1
Bournemouth	10	—	—	—	—	0
Bracknell Forest	6	—	—	—	—	0
Bradford	27	—	—	—	1	1
Brent, LB of	13	—	1	—	2	3
Brighton and Hove	10	—	—	—	—	0
Bristol, city of	20	—	—	—	—	0
Bromley, LB of	17	—	1	—	3	4
Buckinghamshire	34	—	1	—	1	2
Bury	14	—	—	—	—	0
Calderdale	15	—	—	—	1	1
Cambridgeshire	30	—	—	—	2	2
Camden, LB of	10	—	—	—	—	0
Cheshire	45	—	1	—	1	2
Corporation of London	0	—	—	—	—	0
Cornwall	31	—	—	—	2	2
Coventry	19	—	—	—	1	1
Croydon, LB of	21	—	—	—	—	0
Cumbria	42	—	—	—	2	2
Darlington	7	—	—	—	1	1
Derby, city of	13	—	—	—	2	2
Derbyshire	47	—	—	—	1	1
Devon	37	—	1	—	1	2
Doncaster	17	—	—	—	—	0
Dorset	20	—	—	—	2	2
Dudley	22	—	—	—	1	1
Durham	36	—	—	—	1	1
Ealing, LB of	13	—	—	—	1	1
East Riding of Yorkshire	18	—	—	—	—	0
East Sussex	27	—	—	—	—	0
Enfield, LB of	17	—	—	—	1	1
Essex	79	—	1	—	8	9
Gateshead	10	—	—	—	1	1
Gloucestershire	42	—	1	—	2	3
Greenwich, LB of	13	—	—	—	1	1
Hackney, LB of	9	—	—	—	—	0
Halton	7	—	—	—	—	0
Hammersmith & Fulham, LB of	8	—	—	—	—	0
Hampshire	71	—	1	—	1	2
Haringey, LB of	10	—	—	—	—	0
Harrow, LB of	10	—	—	—	—	0
Hartlepool	6	—	—	—	—	0
Havering, LB of	18	—	—	—	—	0
Herefordshire	14	—	—	—	—	0
Hertfordshire	77	—	3	—	1	4
Hillingdon, LB of	17	—	—	—	—	0
Hounslow, LB of	14	—	—	—	—	0
Isle of Scilly	1	—	—	—	—	0
Isle of Wight	5	—	—	—	1	1
Islington, LB of	9	—	—	—	—	0
Kensington & Chelsea, RB of	4	—	—	—	—	0
Kent	102	—	1	—	5	6
Kingston upon Hull, city of	15	—	—	—	—	0
Kingston-upon-Thames, RB of	10	—	—	—	—	0
Kirklees	25	—	1	—	2	3
Knowsley	11	—	—	—	—	0
Lambeth, LB of	10	—	—	—	1	1
Lancashire	87	—	2	—	9	11
Leeds	43	—	—	—	1	1
Leicester City	16	—	—	—	—	0
Leicestershire	45	—	—	—	1	1
Lewisham, LB of	12	—	—	—	—	0

Specialist Schools

Number of operational Specialist Schools by LEA by specialism (information given is as of September each year)

Local education authorities	*Total secondary schools in LEA*	*1996*				
		Arts	*Language*	*Sports*	*Technology*	*Total*
Lincolnshire	63	—	—	—	4	4
Liverpool	33	—	—	—	2	2
Luton	12	—	1	—	1	2
Manchester	23	—	1	—	1	2
Medway	19	—	—	—	2	2
Merton, LB of	9	—	—	—	—	0
Middlesbrough	11	—	—	—	—	0
Milton Keynes	11	—	—	—	—	0
Newcastle upon Tyne	12	—	1	—	2	3
Newham, LB of	15	—	—	—	2	2
Norfolk	52	—	—	—	3	3
North East Lincolnshire	12	—	—	—	—	0
North Lincolnshire	14	—	—	—	—	0
North Somerset	10	—	—	—	—	0
North Tyneside	11	—	1	—	1	2
North Yorkshire	45	—	—	—	1	1
Northamptonshire	38	—	—	—	3	3
Northumberland	15	—	1	—	2	3
Nottingham, City of	19	—	—	—	2	2
Nottinghamshire	50	—	—	—	1	1
Oldham	15	—	—	—	—	0
Oxfordshire	35	—	—	—	2	2
Peterborough, city of	13	—	—	—	1	1
Plymouth, city of	18	—	—	—	1	1
Poole	8	—	—	—	—	0
Portsmouth	10	—	—	—	—	0
Reading	8	—	—	—	2	2
Redbridge	17	—	—	—	2	2
Redcar & Cleveland	11	—	—	—	1	1
Richmond-u-Thames, LB of	8	—	—	—	—	0
Rochdale	14	—	—	—	1	1
Rotherham	17	—	—	—	1	1
Rutland	3	—	—	—	1	1
Salford	14	—	—	—	—	0
Sandwell	19	—	—	—	1	1
Sefton	22	—	—	—	1	1
Sheffield	27	—	—	—	3	3
Shropshire	22	—	—	—	1	1
Slough	11	—	—	—	1	1
Solihull	13	—	1	—	1	2
Somerset	30	—	—	—	1	1
South Gloucestershire	14	—	1	—	—	1
South Tyneside	11	—	—	—	2	2
Southend-on-Sea	12	—	—	—	—	0
Southampton	14	—	—	—	—	0
Southwark, LB of	13	—	—	—	—	0
St. Helens	12	—	—	—	—	0
Staffordshire	55	—	—	—	—	0
Stockport	14	—	—	—	1	1
Stockton on Tees	13	—	—	—	—	0
Stoke on Trent	17	—	—	—	1	1
Suffolk	38	—	—	—	2	2
Sunderland	17	—	—	—	—	0
Surrey	53	—	1	—	6	7
Sutton, LB of	14	—	—	—	—	0
Swindon	10	—	—	—	—	0
Tameside	18	—	—	—	1	1
Telford and Wrekin	13	—	—	—	2	2
Thurrock	11	—	—	—	—	0
Torbay	8	—	1	—	—	1
Tower Hamlets, LB of	15	—	—	—	1	1
Trafford	18	—	—	—	2	2
Wakefield	18	—	—	—	1	1
Walsall	20	—	1	—	—	1
Waltham Forest, LB of	17	—	—	—	—	0
Wandsworth, LB of	9	—	—	—	1	1
Warrington	12	—	1	—	2	3
Warwickshire	37	—	—	—	1	1
West Berkshire	10	—	1	—	1	2
West Sussex	36	—	1	—	—	1
Westminster, LB of	8	—	—	—	—	0

Specialist Schools

Number of operational Specialist Schools by LEA by specialism (information given is as of September each year)

Local education authorities	Total secondary schools in LEA	1996 Arts	Language	Sports	Technology	Total
Wigan	21	—	1	—	2	3
Wiltshire	29	—	—	—	1	1
Windsor & Maidenhead, RB of	9	—	—	—	—	0
Wirral	23	—	—	—	1	1
Wokingham	9	—	—	—	—	0
Wolverhampton	18	—	—	—	2	2
Worcestershire	29	—	1	—	—	1
York, city of	11	—	—	—	—	0
Total[1]	3,152	—	31	—	146	177
Special Schools		0	0	0	0	0
Total		0	31	0	146	177

[1] Excluding special schools

Specialist Schools

Number of operational Specialist Schools by LEA by specialism (information given is as of September each year)

Local education authorities	1998 Arts	Language	Sports	Technology	Total	2000 Arts	Language	Sports	Technology	Total
Barking & Dagenham, LB of	—	—	1	1	2	—	—	1	1	2
Barnet, LB of	—	1	—	1	2	—	1	1	1	3
Barnsley	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	1	—	1
Bath & North East Somerset	—	—	1	1	2	1	—	1	3	5
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—	0	1	—	—	—	1
Bexley, LB of	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Birmingham	—	—	—	5	5	2	1	4	13	20
Blackburn with Darwen	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	2	2
Blackpool	—	1	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	2
Bolton	—	—	—	—	0	—	1	1	1	3
Bournemouth	—	—	—	—	0	1	1	—	—	2
Bracknell Forest	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Bradford	—	—	1	1	2	—	1	2	2	5
Brent, LB of	—	1	—	2	3	—	1	—	2	3
Brighton and Hove	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	1	2
Bristol, city of	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	1	2
Bromley, LB of	—	1	—	3	4	—	1	—	3	4
Buckinghamshire	—	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	2	5
Bury	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Calderdale	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	0
Cambridgeshire	1	—	—	2	3	1	1	—	5	7
Camden, LB of	—	1	—	1	2	1	1	—	2	4
Cheshire	—	1	—	2	3	—	1	—	4	5
Corporation of London	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Cornwall	—	1	2	6	9	—	1	3	5	9
Coventry	—	1	—	3	4	1	1	—	3	5
Croydon, LB of	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Cumbria	—	2	—	3	5	—	2	—	4	6
Darlington	—	—	—	1	1	—	1	—	1	2
Derby, city of	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	1	2
Derbyshire	—	1	—	3	4	—	1	—	3	4
Devon	—	1	2	2	5	—	1	2	3	6
Doncaster	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Dorset	—	—	—	2	2	—	2	1	2	5
Dudley	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Durham	1	2	—	3	6	1	2	1	8	12
Ealing, LB of	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	2	1	3
East Riding of Yorkshire	—	—	—	2	2	—	1	—	3	4
East Sussex	—	—	2	—	2	—	—	3	1	4
Enfield, LB of	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Essex	—	1	1	8	10	1	3	3	9	16
Gateshead	1	—	—	1	2	1	1	1	1	4
Gloucestershire	—	1	—	5	6	—	2	1	8	11
Greenwich, LB of	2	—	—	2	4	3	—	—	2	5
Hackney, LB of	—	—	—	2	2	—	1	—	3	4
Halton	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	1	1
Hammersmith & Fulham, LB of	—	—	—	—	0	1	—	—	—	1
Hampshire	—	1	—	1	2	1	3	—	2	6
Haringey, LB of	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Harrow, LB of	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Hartlepool	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	1	2
Havering, LB of	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Herefordshire	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	1	2
Hertfordshire	—	4	—	1	5	—	5	—	3	8

Specialist Schools

Number of operational Specialist Schools by LEA by specialism (information given is as of September each year)

Local education authorities	1998 Arts	1998 Language	1998 Sports	1998 Technology	1998 Total	2000 Arts	2000 Language	2000 Sports	2000 Technology	2000 Total
Hillingdon, LB of	1	1	—	—	2	1	1	—	1	3
Hounslow, LB of	—	1	—	1	2	—	1	—	1	2
Isle of Scilly	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	1	1	—	1	—	1	2
Islington, LB of	—	—	—	—	0	—	1	—	1	2
Kensington & Chelsea, RB of	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Kent	—	1	—	6	7	—	3	1	6	10
Kingston upon Hull, city of	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	1	1
Kingston-upon-Thames, RB of	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Kirklees	—	1	1	3	5	—	1	1	4	6
Knowsley	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	1	—	2
Lambeth, LB of	1	—	—	1	2	1	—	—	2	3
Lancashire	—	2	—	11	13	—	2	—	13	15
Leeds	1	—	—	1	2	1	1	2	1	5
Leicester City	—	—	—	—	0	—	1	1	1	3
Leicestershire	—	—	1	5	6	2	—	1	5	8
Lewisham, LB of	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	4	4	2	—	—	6	8
Liverpool	—	—	—	5	5	—	1	1	4	6
Luton	—	1	—	1	2	1	—	—	1	2
Manchester	—	1	1	2	4	1	1	2	3	7
Medway	—	—	—	2	2	—	1	—	2	3
Merton, LB of	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Middlesbrough	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Milton Keynes	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	4
Newcastle upon Tyne	—	1	1	2	4	—	1	1	5	7
Newham, LB of	—	—	1	2	3	—	—	1	2	3
Norfolk	—	—	—	4	4	1	1	2	6	10
North East Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	0	1	—	—	2	3
North Lincolnshire	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	1	2
North Somerset	—	—	—	1	1	1	1	—	2	4
North Tyneside	—	1	—	2	3	—	1	—	2	3
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	4	4	1	—	—	5	6
Northamptonshire	1	2	—	5	8	1	4	1	6	12
Northumberland	—	1	—	3	4	—	1	1	5	7
Nottingham, city of	—	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	2	2
Nottinghamshire	—	—	1	2	3	—	—	1	2	3
Oldham	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	1	1	2
Oxfordshire	—	1	—	4	5	1	1	1	4	7
Peterborough, city of	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Plymouth, city of	—	—	—	1	1	2	1	—	3	6
Poole	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Portsmouth	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Reading	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Redbridge	—	—	—	2	2	—	1	—	2	3
Redcar & Cleveland	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Richmond-u-Thames, LB of	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Rochdale	—	1	1	1	3	—	1	1	1	3
Rotherham	—	—	1	1	2	—	—	1	1	2
Rutland	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Salford	—	—	—	—	0	—	1	—	1	2
Sandwell	—	1	1	1	3	—	1	1	1	3
Sefton	—	1	—	1	2	—	1	1	1	3
Sheffield	—	1	—	3	4	—	1	—	3	4
Shropshire	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Slough	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Solihull	—	1	—	1	2	—	1	—	1	2
Somerset	1	—	—	3	4	1	1	—	5	7
South Gloucestershire	—	1	—	1	2	—	1	—	2	3
South Tyneside	—	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	2	2
Southend-on-Sea	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	1	1
Southampton	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Southwark, LB of	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
St. Helens	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	2	2
Staffordshire	—	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	2	2
Stockport	—	1	—	1	2	—	1	—	1	2
Stockton on Tees	—	—	—	—	0	1	1	1	1	4
Stoke on Trent	—	—	—	—	0	1	—	—	—	1
Suffolk	—	—	—	5	5	—	1	—	7	8
Sunderland	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	1	2	3
Surrey	—	3	—	6	9	—	3	—	7	10
Sutton, LB of	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Swindon	—	—	—	—	0	1	—	—	1	2
Tameside	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	1	2
Telford and Wrekin	—	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	2	2

Specialist Schools

Number of operational Specialist Schools by LEA by specialism (information given is as of September each year)

Local education authorities	*1998*					*2000*				
	Arts	*Language*	*Sports*	*Technology*	*Total*	*Arts*	*Language*	*Sports*	*Technology*	*Total*
Thurrock	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Torbay	—	1	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	1
Tower Hamlets, LB of	1	—	—	1	2	1	1	—	1	3
Trafford	—	—	1	2	3	—	—	1	2	3
Wakefield	—	—	—	2	2	—	1	—	2	3
Walsall	—	1	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	2
Waltham Forest, LB of	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	2	2
Wandsworth, LB of	1	1	—	1	3	1	1	2	1	5
Warrington	1	1	—	1	3	1	1	—	1	3
Warwickshire	—	—	—	2	2	1	—	—	4	5
West Berkshire	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	2	5
West Sussex	—	2	—	5	7	—	2	1	5	8
Westminster, LB of	1	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1
Wigan	1	1	1	2	5	1	1	1	4	7
Wiltshire	—	—	—	5	5	1	1	2	4	8
Windsor & Maidenhead, RB of	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Wirral	—	—	—	2	2	—	1	—	2	3
Wokingham	—	—	—	—	0	—	1	—	—	1
Wolverhampton	—	1	—	2	3	1	1	—	3	5
Worcestershire	—	1	—	—	1	—	1	2	2	5
York, city of	—	—	—	2	2	—	2	—	2	4
Total[1]	17	57	26	225	325	56	99	65	308	528
Special Schools	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	5	8
Total	17	57	26	225	325	57	99	67	313	536

[1] Excluding special schools

Special Educational Needs

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 711W, on special educational needs, what written responses she has received since 23 October about the further revision of the draft SEN code document. [12967]

Mr. Timms: The Secretary of State has received a letter dated 29 October from the organisation Spearhead (Special Education at Home).

The Department has also received two letters from hon. Members, both dated 26 October, enclosing correspondence from constituents which appears to refer to the earlier draft of the Code placed before Parliament in June, rather than the latest version.

Fast Food and Drinks

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her policy on the provision of fast food and drinks machines in school corridors. [12999]

Mr. Timms: It is for local education authorities and schools in England to determine whether or not there should be any provision for fast food and drinks machines in school corridors.

Publications (Charges)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the publications provided by her Department and the National Centre for Literacy and Numeracy where charges will be levied on schools for the making of *(a)* overhead transparencies and *(b)* enlarged copies; and if she will state the level of income received from schools as a result. [13020]

Mr. Timms: The licensing for the copying of extracts from published texts is the responsibility of the Copyright Licensing Agency. The new licence for schools, which took effect from April 2001, automatically includes permission to make overhead transparencies and enlarged copies. There is no requirement for schools to make any separate payment for this or to report such copying.

Publications produced by the National Centre for Literacy and Numeracy on behalf of the Department may be copied free of charge by schools.

Secondary Schools (Norfolk)

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which secondary schools in Norfolk had unfilled teacher posts at the latest available date. [13239]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which secondary schools in Norfolk had no spare capacity to admit new pupils at the latest available date. [13240]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not collect detailed information on this. It is for local education authorities to plan and keep under review the supply of school places and to ensure that there are sufficient school places. Each year LEAs must publish a School Organisation Plan which sets out how they plan to deal with any surplus or deficit of school places over a rolling five year period.

Where an LEA can demonstrate overall growth in the need for places it may apply to the Department for capital funding.

Pupils (Assaults)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the cases of *(a)* state primary and *(b)* state secondary school teachers who have been (i) suspended and (ii) convicted for assault on pupils since the abolition of corporal punishment. [13397]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not collect this information.

Schools Reorganisation (Merton)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on progress by the schools reorganisation programme in the London borough of Merton towards its completion date of September 2002. [R] [12748]

Mr. Timms: The responsibility for the implementation of statutory proposals for school reorganisation rests with local education authorities. Merton local education authority is implementing the reorganisation of schools in the borough from a three to a two-tier system in stages over the academic years 2001–02 to 2003–04, with the new structure effectively in place from September 2002. Officials of the Department are providing support as necessary to the school reorganisation programme and, as recently as 5 November, had a meeting with Merton officers to discuss progress.

Funding (Music)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria her Department uses to allocate varying levels of support from the Music Standards Fund to local education authorities. [12779]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Music Standards Fund allocations in the current financial year are largely based on the levels established in 2000–01. This is to honour our formal commitment to ensuring that no LEA would receive less money through the Music Standards Fund in 2001–02 than in 2000–01. We also pledged to ensure that no LEA would be required to increase the level of its own match-funded contribution in 2001–02.

The original MSF formula (from which this year's allocations are drawn) was introduced in the second year of the Music Standards Fund. It is made up of three main parts:

an allocation based on each LEA's section 122 return which was intended to protect music services at pre-Music Standards Fund levels,

an allocation based on bids made by individual LEAs in 1999–2000 for expanding their existing music services,

an allocation based on our assessment of the need in each authority. 'Need' in this context was assessed in terms of the number of pupils in each authority, weighted to take account of socio-economic indicators for deprivation.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the amount allocated to local education authorities for Music Standards Fund grants in 2001–02 will be paid in full. [12786]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* In general, the Music Standards Fund grant is match-funded. For some LEAs support is provided at 100 per cent. and no match-funding is required. Where match-funding is required the LEAs need to make a contribution if they are to receive DfES grant.

All LEAs required to do so have agreed to make their contributions and so they, together with those funded at 100 per cent., will receive the full grant.

LEAs may retain any grant that remains unspent at the end of the year.

School Provision (Hackney)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions her Department has had with the Commission for Racial Equality, with regard to the trust which is to run schools in Hackney. [12785]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* None on this matter, but there is of course regular communication between my Department and the Commission for Racial Equality across the range of education policy issues.

Skills Councils

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which organisations her Department has identified to be approached as possible trailblazer sector skills councils; and what discussions her Department has held with each organisation. [12619]

John Healey: The Department has not approached any organisations about becoming a trailblazer sector skills council. Officials discussed this and other aspects of the sector skills council policy informally with organisations that contacted the Department. These meetings were without commitment by either party. On 2 November I wrote to national training organisations and trade associations inviting them to consider whether they would be interested and able to meet the rigorous requirements for becoming a trailblazer.

Further Education (Lecturers)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to bring further education lecturers' pay into line with that of teachers; and if she will make a statement. [12964]

John Healey: It is for each college to agree annual pay rises and conditions of employment with its staff in the context of the overall resources available to them. We are, however, aware of the funding gap between schools and FE and have pledged to bring up levels of funding and allow upwards convergence over time.

This year alone, an additional £527 million is available for FE, a 12 per cent. real terms increase on last year. Funding will increase again next year by a further 3 per cent. This compares with the period between 1993–94 and 1996–97 when FE funding per FTE student fell by 12 per cent. in real terms.

As part of the planned increases, we are investing more than £300 million in the Teaching Pay Initiative during the next three years to allow colleges, including sixth form colleges, to reward high quality teaching. This is separate from any general pay rise a teacher may receive.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to discourage the practice of employing lecturers on a part-time basis in further education colleges; and if she will make a statement. [12965]

John Healey: None. The recruitment and terms and conditions of staff in general further education and sixth form colleges are matters for college corporations and management to determine in consultation with the relevant unions.

It is only right that colleges have the flexibility to determine the number of full-time and part-time staff they employ in line with local needs and circumstances.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research she has evaluated into the effects of part-time lecturers' employment on support offered to students at further education colleges; and if she will make a statement. [12963]

John Healey: Approximately two thirds of college lecturers work part-time. The Further Education National Training Organisation report "An analysis of the part-time lecturing staff in further education colleges in England and Wales (July 2000)" states that 25 per cent. of part-time staff offer extra-curricular assistance to students. In his last report, for 1999–2000, the Further Education Funding Council's Chief Inspector reported that 66 per cent. of colleges have good or outstanding support for students in place. He went on to say that "this aspect of cross-college provision continues to attract a higher proportion of grades 1 and 2 than any other". From the available evidence, colleges in general continue to provide effective student support while employing staff on both part-time and full-time contracts.

Advanced Skills Teachers

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many advanced skills teachers there are in each local education authority; and if she will make a statement. [12840]

Mr. Timms: Advanced Skills Teachers (AST) in post in each local authority in January 2001 and the number of teachers who have passed assessment for the AST grade since assessments resumed in May 2001 are as follows:

Local authority	*ASTs in post at January 2001*	*Teachers passing AST assessment (May-September 2001)*
Barking and Dagenham	3	0
Barnet	10	8
Barnsley	0	0
Bath and North East Somerset	3	0
Bedfordshire	2	12
Bexley	0	2
Birmingham	19	2
Blackburn with Darwen	0	0
Blackpool	0	1
Bolton	7	5
Bournemouth	6	1
Bracknell Forest	2	0
Bradford	2	0
Brent	0	0
Brighton and Hove	0	0
Bristol, City of	0	0
Bromley	24	0
Buckinghamshire	3	0
Bury	0	0
Calderdale	2	0
Cambridgeshire	4	2
Camden	0	1
Cheshire	0	0
City of London	0	0
Cornwall	7	2
Coventry	3	0
Croydon	6	2
Cumbria	11	9
Darlington	6	0
Derby	0	0
Derbyshire	7	2
Devon	3	2
Doncaster	2	0
Dorset	2	0
Dudley	0	0
Durham	4	0
Ealing	0	0
East Riding of Yorkshire	0	0
East Sussex	2	10
Enfield	2	0
Essex	49	16
Gateshead	0	0
Gloucestershire	14	17
Greenwich	2	4
Hackney	0	0
Halton	1	1
Hammersmith and Fulham	1	0
Hampshire	0	5
Haringey	0	0
Harrow	0	0
Hartlepool	0	1
Havering	0	0
Herefordshire	6	6
Hertfordshire	11	3
Hillingdon	3	9
Hounslow	0	0
Isle of Wight	1	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Islington	0	1
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0
Kent	30	16
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	4	1
Kingston upon Thames	0	0
Kirklees	1	1
Knowsley	0	0
Lambeth	3	4
Lancashire	13	1
Leeds	7	43
Leicester	0	0
Leicestershire	2	1
Lewisham	0	1
Lincolnshire	15	23
Liverpool	0	0
Luton	3	0
Manchester	4	1
Medway	2	0
Merton	0	1
Middlesbrough	2	0
Milton Keynes	1	2
Newcastle upon Tyne	0	1
Newham	13	4
Norfolk	3	3
North East Lincolnshire	1	4
North Lincolnshire	0	4
North Somerset	0	0
North Tyneside	0	0
North Yorkshire	7	6
Northamptonshire	18	3
Northumberland	1	0
Nottingham	0	0
Nottinghamshire	7	5
Oldham	0	0
Oxfordshire	21	1
Peterborough	13	2
Plymouth	7	6
Poole	0	0
Portsmouth	3	0
Reading	1	0
Redbridge	0	2
Redcar and Cleveland	3	1
Richmond upon Thames	3	2

Local authority	ASTs in post at January 2001	Teachers passing AST assessment (May-September 2001)
Rochdale	6	0
Rotherham	0	0
Rutland	0	0
Salford	0	0
Sandwell	0	2
Sefton	5	0
Sheffield	0	0
Shropshire	6	1
Slough	6	5
Solihull	3	0
Somerset	8	8
South Gloucestershire	0	0
South Tyneside	4	0
Southampton	0	0
Southend-on-Sea	6	5
Southwark	0	0
St. Helens	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0
Stockport	0	0
Stockton-on-Tees	4	0
Stoke-on-Trent	0	0
Suffolk	1	1
Sunderland	0	12
Surrey	0	0
Sutton	0	3
Swindon	1	0
Tameside	5	3
Telford and Wrekin	1	0
Thurrock	5	4
Torbay	5	1
Tower Hamlets	1	0
Trafford	0	1
Wakefield	0	0
Walsall	6	0
Waltham Forest	3	0
Wandsworth	7	5
Warrington	7	8
Warwickshire	0	0
West Berkshire	2	1
West Sussex	6	7
Westminster	13	2
Wigan	2	1
Wiltshire	3	0
Windsor and Maidenhead	1	1
Wirral	1	0
Wokingham	5	5
Wolverhampton	3	0
Worcestershire	7	2
York	12	21
Totals	563	362

The number of AST assessments between May and September 2001 is equal to 64 per cent. of the January figure of ASTs in post, reflecting the rapidly growing number of teachers interested in becoming ASTs. The Government are committed to the continuing expansion of the AST grade.

Schools

Ms Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if she will make a statement on her plans for further public investment in schools. [11358]

Mr. Timms: This Government are investing unprecedented sums to modernise schools. Since 1997, annual capital and recurrent investment in schools has increased by almost £5.5 billion in real terms, from £20.6 billion to over £26 billion. Our plans allow for a further real terms increase of £2.5 billion over the next two years.

Teacher Training

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which schools in Northamptonshire, have been granted funding for teacher training, indicating in each case their *(a)* phase and *(b)* location. [11281]

Mr. Timms: The following schools have been granted funding to act as recommending bodies for trainees on the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes (GRTP) in Northamptonshire since September 2000:

School name	Phase	Town
Magdalen School	Secondary	Brackley
Lodge Park Technical College	Secondary	Corby
Brooke Western CTC	Secondary	Corby
St. James Infant School	Primary	Daventry
Trinity School	Secondary	Northampton
Mereway Upper School	Secondary	Northampton
Northampton School for Boys	Secondary	Northampton
Headlands School	Primary	Northampton
Prince William School	Secondary	Oundle
Ferrer School	Secondary	Rushden
Rushden School	Secondary	Rushden
Wrenn School	Secondary	Wellingborough

In addition, the following organisations have received funding to train GRTP trainees in schools in Northamptonshire since September 2000.

Centre for British Teachers (CfBT)

Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT)

Northampton LEA

Northamptonshire Teacher Training Partnership SCITT.

There are two initial teacher training school-based consortia in Northamptonshire, based at:

Lead school	Phase	Location
Sponne School	Secondary	Towcester
Northampton School for Boys	Secondary	Northampton

University College Northampton also offers primary ITT in partnership with local primary schools. School involvement in teacher training changes from year to year and there is no central list of the schools involved.

As to in-service training, the flexibility within the Standards Funds arrangements should enable schools to meet the key priorities for professional development; it is for schools to decide how much money they spend from the Standards Funds on this area.

Further Education

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many individual courses have been *(a)* commenced and *(b)* completed in further education each year since 1997–98. [12566]

John Healey: The information requested is contained in the table:

Total number of qualifications: starts and completions for council-funded provision in FE sector colleges

	Number
1997–98	
Starts in the academic year	4,716,573
Completions in the academic year	3,932,800
1998–99	
Starts in the academic year	4,497,223
Completions in the academic year	3,599,593
1999–2000	
Starts in the academic year	4,463,154
Completions in the academic year	3,581,458

Notes:
1. The data are taken from the Individualised Student Record (ISR)
2. Starts and completions figures are based on a different student cohort—i.e. enrolments that start in a particular year do not necessarily end in the same year

The Learning and Skills Council recently published data on retention rates which are based on qualifications over the whole length of the course, which includes those courses that are longer than one year. Using this definition, the retention rates are as follows:

1997–98: 85 per cent.;

1998–99: 84 per cent.; and

1999–2000: 84 per cent.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the cost was of the Further Education Funding Council *(a)* for all purposes and *(b)* for administration in the last year of its operation; [12929]

(2) what grants were made to training and enterprise councils *(a)* for all purposes, *(b)* for further education and *(c)* for administration in the last year of their operation; [12928]

(3) what the budget is of the Learning and Skills Councils *(a)* at national level and *(b)* at local level for (i) all purposes and (ii) administration (A) in the current year and (B) in the coming year. [12930]

John Healey *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has taken on a range of functions previously carried out by a number of bodies, including the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), 72 Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), Government Offices, and the National Advisory Council on Education and Training Targets (NACETT), as well as new work. For the latest year for which we have robust estimates available (1999–2000), our assessment is that the total spent on administration by the predecessor bodies, in relation to the relevant functions, was between £270 and £280 million.

The LSC's resource budget nationally for the financial year 2001–2002 is £5.5 billion. Of this, local LSCs have so far been allocated £4.955 billion. The LSC anticipates that the majority of the currently unallocated total funds will be directed to local LSCs during the remainder of the financial year. The LSC has been allocated £188 million for administration, of which £144 million has been allocated to local LSCs.

These amounts increase in 2002–2003 to £7.4 billion in total (which includes programme funding of £1.35 billion funding for sixth forms) and £193 million for administration. It is not possible to disaggregate these figures to local level because the LSC has not yet allocated next year's budget to local LSCs.

We do not yet have final expenditure details for further education in 2000–01. Planned total funding for the FEFC for all purposes in 2000–01 was £3,530 million, excluding student support funds and employer contributions, of which £27 million was for administration.

In 2000–2001, the last year of TECs' contracts with Government, the DfES paid them a total of £1,270 million for all purposes in cash terms. There were no specific grants to them for further education. No specific amount was set aside for administration within this figure—it was up to individual TECs to allocate their overall budget according to need. However, we know from the most recent consolidated TEC accounts, that TECs spent over £260 million in total on staffing in 1999–2000.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 9 November 2001

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bribery and Corruption

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the incorporation into UK legislation of the OECD convention on bribery and corruption. [12909]

Mr. Blunkett: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom ratified the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) convention in December 1998 and a review of its legislation was published by the OECD in 2000. The Government's White Paper "Raising Standards and Upholding Integrity: the Prevention of Corruption", issued in June 2000 (Cm 4759), took account of that review and made two major proposals which reflect OECD recommendations:

to put beyond doubt that the law of bribery applies to acts involving foreign public officials, Ministers, MPs and judges; and

to take jurisdiction over crimes of bribery committed by United Kingdom nationals and United Kingdom companies overseas.

International corruption contributes to the conditions which breed terrorism. I am, therefore, with the support of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, including these measures in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, which will be introduced shortly.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside her Department. [13135]

Clare Short: There were no reported cases of either computer hacking or computer fraud in DFID during 2000 to 2001.

In 2000, four cases of laptop computers being stolen from DFID premises or personnel were reported, and in 2001 five laptop computers were reported stolen. The total value of the loss amounts to about £9,900.

DFID is not aware of any occasions during the last two years of computer systems being accessed illegally by hackers from either inside or outside of the organisation.

Departmental Expenditure

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total expenditure was on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* polling, *(c)* focus groups, *(d)* design consultants, *(e)* caterers, *(f)* production of departmental publications and *(g)* photographs/photographers by her Department for each year since 1995 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; what was (A) the annual percentage increase in spending on each category and (B) spending on each category as a percentage of the total departmental running costs; and if she will make a statement. [6930]

Clare Short: Expenditure in relation to publications, opinion polling and photography in the years in question is as follows:

£000

	Publications[1]	*Opinion polling*	*Photography*
1995–96	352	—	4
1996–97	318	—	4
1997–98	166	43	21
1998–99	347	—	23
1999–2000	570	45	10
2000–01	639	58	5

[1] Including design costs

We do not hold a separate advertising budget. However the bulk of our advertising is in relation to recruitment, on which we spend around £1 million to £1.2 million per year.

It would involve disproportionate effort to calculate the total cost of catering services in the years in question since these are not charged to a single budget.The majority of the expenditure set out in the table is charged to programme budgets, and so it is not possible to make a meaningful calculation of its share of our running cost budget.

TRIPS

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her policy on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights. [12903]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made on 7 November 2001, *Official Report,* columns 256–68, covering the UK's position on the fourth ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Doha, which covered our policy on trade-related aspectsof intellectual property.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of *(a)* military and *(b)* civilian casualties as a result of coalition forces bombing in Afghanistan. [11436]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* It is impossible to know for certain how many casualties, either military or civilian, there have been as a result of coalition action in Afghanistan. The Taliban's claims of casualties cannot be taken at face value.

Military action inevitably carries risks, but as I have made clear in the House, our targeting and weapons selection processes are rigorous. Every effort is made to avoid civilian casualties.

HMS Ocean

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason HMS Ocean has been recalled to the UK; if it is being sent to Devonport for repair; what the *(a)* nature and *(b)* cost is of the repair; and to what extent the repair is (i) planned maintenance and (ii) a consequence of failure while on its last operation. [13127]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Ocean is returning to the UK as part of the drawdown of forces following completion of Exercise Saif Sareea 2.

Due to current operational circumstances, the docking period planned for January next year has been deferred. HMS Ocean will, instead, return to Devonport for a shorter assisted maintenance period (AMP), during which some maintenance and defect rectification work will be carried out. The only repair work arising from failure during her last operation will be to some aviation fuel pumps. At this time it is estimated that the AMP will cost in the region of £0.8 million to £1 million.

Army Radios

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the failure rate was of Clansman radios on Challenger II main battle tanks during exercise Saif Sareea 2 in Oman; [13118]

(2) what the failure rate was of army radios during Exercise Saif Sareea 2 in Oman; and if he will make a statement. [13119]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The limitations of the Clansman radio are well known, hence the current action on procuring a replacement. Information on failure rates of individual radios employed during Exercise Saif Sareea 2 is not available. But indications are that Clansman performed somewhat better than we might have expected during Saif Sareea 2, despite the harsh environmental conditions experienced during the exercise.

Sea Harrier Ferry

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Sea Harrier ferry will leave Yeovilton; what discussions he has had with the RAF Association about the move; what the overall cost of the move will be; and how many Sea Harrier pilots resigned their commissions in *(a)* 2001, (b), 2000, (c) 1999, (d) 1998, (e), 1997 and (f) 1996. [13422]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* Following the strategic defence review, the Sea Harrier force is scheduled to relocate to RAF Cottesmore and RAF Wittering in the second half of 2003. The Ministry of Defence has had no discussions with the RAF Association about the move. The cost of the move is estimated to be approximately £21.5 million. The number of Sea Harrier pilots who have taken premature voluntary retirement (PVR) are set out in the table:

Year	*Premature Voluntary Retirement (PVR)*
1996	5
1997	2
1998	2
1999	6
2000	4
2001	4

NBC Defence

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what types of vehicles are used by the armed forces in connection with NBC defence; and of these, how many are operational. [13283]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* There are three types of vehicles currently in use by the armed forces that have a specific NBC defence role. The current vehicle holdings are as follows:

Vehicle type	*Vehicles held*
FUCHS NBC survey vehicle	11
Prototype biological detection system (PBDS)	9
Multi-purpose decontamination system (MPDS)	17

There are other, mainly armoured, vehicles that have a defensive NBC capability. Soldiers can operate within these vehicles in a "collective protection" environment thus avoiding exposure to external biological or chemical threats for a set period of time.

I am withholding the information relating to operational availability under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to government information.

Drug Testing

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 662W, on drug testing, if he will make a statement about the actions that follow when a service man or woman tests positive to a compulsory drugs test. [13123]

Mr. Ingram: Each compulsory drug test case is treated on its own merits and the individual concerned may make a representation about the circumstances surrounding the positive result. If it is concluded that the individual misused drugs knowingly, he or she would normally be discharged unless there were exceptional grounds for retention.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of compulsory drugs tests in the armed forces were positive in 2000. [13124]

Mr. Ingram: The percentage of compulsory drugs tests in the armed forces that were positive in 2000 were:

Service	*Percentage*
Royal Navy	0.36
Army	0.52
Royal Air Force	0.12

Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer on ballistic missiles on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 129W, if he will place a copy of his draft international code of conduct on ballistic missiles in the Library. [13698]

Mr. Hoon: Yes.

Military Maritime Graves

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what conclusions have been drawn on the consultation process into the protection of wrecked military vessels, with special reference to military maritime graves. [14305]

Dr. Moonie: The consultation process on the protection of military vessels, in particular, military maritime graves, ended in August. Following that consultation process it was decided that a small number of wrecks within UK jurisdiction, which are representative of all those lost, will be designated as controlled sites. This means that any activity within a controlled area will require a licence. All other military vessels which meet the criteria as set out in the consultation document, including those in international waters, will be designated as protected places. Those who contributed to the consultation process have been informed of this. A copy of the report will be placed in the Library of the House.

September 11 (Financial Consequences)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will itemise the additional direct current financial year costs arising from decisions in response to the events of 11 September; and if they will be met from the existing defence budget. [13472]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 114W, to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker).

Apache Helicopter

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what formations will be responsible for securing the logistical echelon for the Apache helicopter; and if he will make a statement regarding US studies of this matter in Kosovo. [9677]

Mr. Ingram: The Apache helicopter will be deployed as part of 16 Air Assault Brigade, the UK Army's Air Manoeuvre Formation. Responsibility for protecting units in support of Apache operations will fall to the operational commander. The composition of 16 Air Assault Brigade includes Infantry and Air Defence units, both of which may be used for this purpose.

We always maintain close liaison between US and UK forces. Lessons learned from operations are studied and refinements, where necessary, are made to the way our armed forces operate. Specific lessons learned from US Apache operations in Kosovo are being considered and, where appropriate, used to refine the British Army's doctrine and operating procedures for the training and deployment of Air Manoeuvre units.

Service Personnel (Sex Discrimination)

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 is applicable to service personnel serving on sovereign bases overseas. [12733]

Mr. Ingram: The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate on sex grounds against an employee in relation to employment at an establishment in Great Britain. In this context sovereign bases do not form part of the territory of Great Britain.

Sections 6 and 10 of the Sex Discrimination Act provide that employment will be regarded as being at an establishment in Great Britain unless the employee does his work wholly outside Great Britain.

Balkans

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what security is offered to UK forces in the Balkans to protect them from possible asymmetric assault. [13280]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* Appropriate measures are in place to protect all deployed UK forces. These measures are kept under constant review in order to respond to emerging situations on the ground, but are not made public for reasons of operational security.

Air Traffic Control (West Freugh)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* military and *(b)* civil air traffic control movements have been handled by the air traffic control centre at MOD West Freugh, Wigtownshire, in each of the last five years. [13686]

Mr. Ingram: The total air traffic control movements are set out in the table:

	Total movements
1997	11,640
1998	11,844
1999	8,388
2000	5,976
2001[1]	3,540

[1] To date

The split between military and civil movements over the last five years is not available as the information is not held in the form requested. It should be noted, however, that civilian flights make up only a small portion of the overall number of movements at the airfield each year.

No-fly Zones

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he has taken to provide for the enforcement of no-fly zones around nuclear power stations. [13834]

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are being taken to enforce no-fly zones around nuclear installations. [13476]

Mr. Ingram: Security of nuclear installations is a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry. The Royal Air Force has an established and well-practised air defence capability which is ready to detect, deter or destroy aircraft intending to attack any target within the UK, including nuclear installations. Adjustments have been made to our air defence posture since 11 September, but, for obvious reasons, I do not propose to go into detail on the nature of these changes.

Charm 3

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what stocks of the armour piercing Charm 3 round are held. [13763]

Mr. Ingram: Charm 3 is the armour piercing round fired by the Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank. Information relating to the stock levels of operational ammunition are withheld under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to Government information.

Exercise Saif Sareea 2

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if local overseas allowances were made available to all personnel in Exercise Saif Sareea 2; [13837]

(2) if concessions were offered in lieu of local allowances overseas in Exercise Saif Sareea 2; and what these concessions were; [13838]

(3) how many of the personnel in Exercise Saif Sareea 2 who were entitled to local overseas allowances or concessions in lieu received them; how many did not and to what units they belonged. [13839]

Mr. Ingram: Personnel deploying on Exercise Saif Sareea 2 were not entitled to Local Overseas Allowances (LOA) or to concessions in lieu of them. Although neither a concession nor a substitute for LOA, a comprehensive Operational Welfare package was made available to deployed personnel. This was in accordance with my predecessor's announcement on 19 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 12, which covered the welfare arrangements for exercises lasting for two months or more. The package included shower and laundry facilities, 20 minutes of free telephone calls a week, access to free electronic aerograms and free e-mail, television, videos, DVDs, newspapers, books, sports equipment and a Combined Service Entertainment show.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans the Government have to review the eligibility criteria for pensioners' cold weather payments. [13840]

Malcolm Wicks: Cold weather payments provide extra help towards heating costs for the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society in periods of exceptionally cold weather. Pensioners on low incomes are not the only people to benefit from the payments. They are also paid to people receiving income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance who have children under the age of five or who have a premium for disability or long-term sickness. We have no plans to change the eligibility conditions.

Christmas Bonus

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans the Government have to increase the pensioners' Christmas bonus. [13842]

Mr. McCartney: We have no plans to increase the level of the Christmas bonus.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans the Government have to review the eligibility criteria for pensioners' winter fuel payments. [13841]

Mr. McCartney: There are no plans to change the existing regulations.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what response he has sent to the RNID report "Can't Hear, Can't Benefit" in relation to take-up of disability living allowance by people who are deaf or have hearing difficulties. [11313]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* We have noted the issues and concerns raised by the RNID in this report. On 19 October, the president of the Appeals Service and a number of senior officials from the Department for Work and Pensions attended by invitation the RNID's "Breaking The Sound Barrier" Conference. They took part in a session on the "Can't Hear, Can't Benefit" report, and discussed many aspects of it with delegates, including the question of DLA take-up.

Benefits

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what his latest estimate is of expenditure during the financial year 2001–02 on working families tax credit; and what expenditure was on *(a)* family income supplement and *(b)* family credit during their final years of operation at (i) current prices and (ii) 2001 prices; [11674]

(2) how many households are in receipt of working families tax credit; what the take-up rate is; and what the take-up rate was of *(a)* family income supplement and *(b)* family credit, in their (i) first and (ii) final years of operation. [11673]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The number of families in receipt of working families tax credit (WFTC) is published in the WFTC Quarterly Enquiries, copies of which are in the Library.

Estimating the take-up rate for working families tax credit requires, among other things, detailed household survey data for 2000–01. These are not yet available for analysis.

Estimates of take up rates for income-related benefits for Great Britain are published in the annual statistical series "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up", which is available in the House of Commons Library. Family income supplement (FIS) was introduced in 1971. Estimates of its take-up rate for 1986 and 1987 are available in the 1987 publication, combined with selected earlier combined years back to 1974–75. FIS was replaced by family credit in 1988. Estimates of its take-up rate in 1988 and 1989 were published in the 1989 edition. Estimates for the final year of family credit were published in the 1998–99 edition.

Table C14 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report contains projections of expenditure on the working families tax credit (WFTC) and disabled person's tax credit made at the time of the Budget, including for 2001–02. Approximately 94 per cent. relates to expenditure on WFTC in Great Britain.

I understand from the Department for Work and Pensions that expenditure on family income supplement in 1987–88 and expenditure on family credit in 1998–99, both in Great Britain, can be found on their website, www.dss.gov.uk/asd/asd4/Expenditure.htm, tables 8 and 9. There are various ways of converting these amounts to constant prices, including adjusting for movements in the gross domestic product deflator, which is published by the Office for National Statistics.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Higher Education Lecturers

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average starting pay for higher education lecturers was in each year of the last 10 years. [10913]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not held centrally. Available figures from the Universities and Colleges Association for the minimum pay of lecturers, senior lecturers and principal lecturers in the pre-1992 universities and in the post-1992 universities and colleges are shown in the following table. However, starting salaries do not necessarily equate with minimum pay, and not all appointments are made to the Lecturer and Lecturer A scales.

Minimum pay for lecturers, senior lecturers and principal lecturers in pre and post-1992 universities and colleges

£ per annum

	Pre-1992			*Post-1992*		
	Lecturer A	*Lecturer B*	*Senior Lecturer*	*Lecturer*	*Senior Lecturer*	*Principal Lecturer*
1992	13,400	19,352	25,969	10,902	19,755	23,841
1993	13,601	19,642	26,359	11,067	20,052	24,189
1994	14,756	20,133	27,018	12,756	20,553	24,804
1995	15,154	20,677	27,747	13,100	20,381	25,474
1996	15,593	22,143	29,464	13,480	21,720	26,213
1997	16,045	21,894	30,318	13,871	22,350	26,973
1998	16,045	22,332	30,924	14,148	22,797	27,512
1999	18,185	23,521	31,563	14,398	23,199	27,998
2000	19,482	24,227	32,510	18,769	23,880	29,847
2001	20,066	24,954	33,485	19,191	24,417	30,519
2002	20,470	25,455	34,158	19,575	24,906	—

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of the impact of the local cost of living on teacher recruitment and retention. [11125]

Mr. Timms: These factors are under constant review as part of our on-going interest in teacher recruitment and retention. They are also kept under review by the School Teacher's Review Body, which makes recommendations to the Government on school teachers' pay and conditions. London area allowances increased by 30 per cent. in April this year, and schools have wide discretion to pay recruitment and retention allowances.

We are aware of the effect that high accommodation costs, especially in the south-east of England, has on the recruitment and retention of teachers. To help develop a solution, last year, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, in what was then the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, set out policies on home ownership, including proposals for a new initiative to help certain key public sector workers, including teachers, into low cost home ownership. The Government recently announced details of the starter home initiative, funded by £250 million over the years 2001–02 to 2003–04. This scheme will benefit over 10,000 key public sector workers, including 3,500 teachers, helping them to buy homes in urban and rural areas where high prices would otherwise prevent them from living in or near to the communities they serve. Registered landlords, local authorities and other interested parties were invited to bid for a share of this funding.

Teachers (Early Leavers)

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many qualified teachers left the profession, having completed between three and seven years of service in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [12687]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* About 6,200 qualified full and part-time regular teachers (headcount), who had completed at least three but less than seven years service, left the maintained schools sector in England in 1999–2000, the most recent year for which data are available. The figures exclude 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers not included on the Teacher Pension Scheme records. Some teachers who left service will return after a career break.

Parental Choice (Siblings)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance is given to education authorities on the rights *(a)* parents and *(b)* step-parents have to send their children to the same school as older siblings. [13653]

Mr. Timms: None. Local education authorities are responsible for setting and publishing the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools, following local consultation each year. These

arrangements must include the criteria for allocating places if a school is oversubscribed. There is no requirement for local authorities to use sibling links as an admission criterion, although many choose to do so, deciding their own definition of 'sibling'.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what work the social exclusion unit has carried out in relation to child homelessness. [13756]

Mrs. Roche: The Prime Minister has asked the social exclusion unit to make recommendations to reduce the number of young people running away and ensure that runaways' short and long term needs are met. Approximately 129,000 young people run away each year and one quarter sleep rough. Running away is also a strong predictor of later homelessness. The project will report its recommendations to the Ministerial Committee on Children and Young People at the end of the year.

The social exclusion unit report on rough sleeping published in 1998 found that there were very few rough sleepers aged under 18. None the less, it identified a range of measures specifically aimed at young people. Many of these have now been taken forward by the rough sleepers unit, set up in April 1999 as a result of the SEU report. Examples of this have been work on the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the setting up, in partnership with the Department of Health and funded by the National Children's Bureau, of a 'Care Leaving Support Service'.

In addition, part of the SEU report on the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal—the Policy Action Team 12 on Young People—looked at how Government could improve co-ordination of policies affecting children and young people and improve services, developing them to help prevent social exclusion. This led to the establishment of the children and young peoples unit in July 2000, based in the Department for Education and Skills. This unit supports cross-Government work on child poverty and youth disadvantage, looking across the full 0 to 19 age range, and is also responsible for implementing and managing the children's fund.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Code of Practice (Retailing)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what meetings her Department's officials and Ministers have had since March about drawing up the code of practice for retailers' behaviour in relation to their suppliers; what the dates of meetings with external organisations and companies were; and who attended the meetings; [12098]

(2) when the latest version of the draft code of practice for retailers' behaviour in relation to their suppliers will be circulated for consultation; to which organisations and companies it will be sent for comment; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [12097]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The Director General of Fair Trading consulted with the major supermarkets and over 100 representatives of suppliers on the drafting of the code of practice on supermarkets' relations with their suppliers earlier this year.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 31 October that she had accepted the Director General's advice on the code and had asked him to seek to obtain undertakings from the four leading supermarket chains to comply with the code. Copies of her announcement and the code have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Ministers and officials at the Department of Trade and Industry have had no meetings since March with interested parties about drawing up the code of practice on supermarkets' relations with their suppliers.

The Director General of Fair Trading was given responsibility for drawing up the code.

Stop Now Orders

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what guidance and training has been given to trading standards officers to enable them to implement Stop Now Orders; and if she will make a statement; [12989]

(2) how many Stop Now Orders have been issued since June; and if she will make a statement; [12987]

(3) what extra resources have been given to local authorities to enable trading standards departments to implement Stop Now Orders; and if she will make a statement. [12988]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Stop Now Orders require traders to cease conduct which is contrary to a wide range of consumer protection legislation and harms the collective interests of consumers. The Orders were introduced in June of this year.

Two local authorities have secured written undertakings under the regulations, and other cases are under consideration.

DTI has agreed with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales a transfer of resources to cover the additional costs associated with the enforcement of the Stop Now Order Regulations.

DTI has also funded a series of seminars to train trading standards officers in the legal and administrative requirements of the regulations. Six events were held across the country during September and October.

Legal Profession

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements have been made to consult on the OFT report on the legal profession; how many representations have been received *(a)* in support and *(b)* against the OFT recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [12621]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No final arrangements have yet been made to consult on the OFT report. The Government remain committed to ensure that the professions are properly subject to competition.

Patents (Genetically Engineered Animals)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what UK patents relating to genetically engineered animals and processes for creating such animals have been *(a)* applied for and published since 9 July 1999 and *(b)* granted since 28 July 2000. [12568]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since 9 July 2000, 17 UK patents relating to genetically engineered animals and processes for creating them have been applied for and published. These were GB 2358865 A, GB 2358400 A, GB 2357768 A, GB 2355718 A, GB 2355459 A, GB 2353282 A, GB 2351496 A, GB 2351494 A, GB 2351152 A, GB 2350613 A, GB 2349885 A, GB 2349150 A, GB 2348701 A, GB 2344344 A, GB 2344107 A, GB 2340493 A and GB 2337519 A.

Since 28 July 2000 there have been 10 UK patents granted relating to genetically engineered animals and processes for creating them. These were GB 2351496 B, GB 2351494 B, GB 2351152 B, GB 2349150 B, GB 2348701 B, GB 2344344 B, GB 2344107 B, GB 2335193 B, GB 2331752 B and GB 2331301 B.

This information does not include applications filed at the European Patent Office which may have the effect of UK patents if granted by that office.

Fireworks

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action her Department is taking to ensure that fireworks are not sold to those under the age of 18 years. [12374]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 prohibit the supply of most fireworks to persons under the age of 18 years. The exceptions to this prohibition are low hazard fireworks, that is caps, cracker snaps, novelty matches and party poppers, which, under the Explosives Act 1875 can be sold to persons over the age of 16 years. We provide information to consumers and retailers reminding them of these restrictions. We also work closely with local authority trading standards departments whose responsibility enforcement is.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to review the law on the sale of fireworks; and if she will make a statement. [13184]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 introduced new controls on the types and sizes of fireworks which can be sold to the public. The situation regarding firework safety continues to be carefully monitored.

South West Regional Development Agency

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much public money the South West Regional Development Agency has received in each of the last three years. [12298]

Alan Johnson: The South West Regional Development Agency received grant in aid of 344,514,000 in 1999–2000, £62,951,000 in 2000–01 and has a grant in aid allocation of £84,663,000 in 2001–02.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire dated 18 July and 20 September, concerning the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. [7971]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Environment replied to the hon. Member's letter on 18 October 2001.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of correspondence received by her Department from hon. Members did not receive a substantive response within *(a)* one month, *(b)* two months, *(c)* three months, *(d)* four months, *(e)* five months and *(f)* six months in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [9953]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* The specific information sought by the hon. Member in relation to DEFRA could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, since the creation of DEFRA in June 2001 to the end of October the average length of time taken for the Department to provide replies to letters from hon. Members was 29 working days. Although this is longer than the departmental target of 15 working days we are working hard to ensure that this record is improved and the target met. The Department has suffered severe disruption due to allocating top priority to defeating the foot and mouth epidemic. I accept this is not an excuse for not giving hon. Members good service, and now that normality is returning to the Department one of our urgent priorities is to rectify any weakness in our service delivery.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 6 August from the hon. Member for North Shropshire concerning the extension to the burning of cattle at Sleap, Shropshire. [12630]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* I replied to the letter from the hon. Member for North Shropshire on 7 November 2001.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to the letter of 26 June from the hon. Member for North Shropshire concerning his constituent Mr. Michael Hendry; [12634]

(2) when she will reply to the letter of 12 August from the hon. Member for North Shropshire regarding the access inquiries into foot and mouth will have to confidential documents; [12635]

(3) when she will reply to the letter of 6 August from the hon. Member for North Shropshire concerning his constituent, Piers Bratton. [12631]

Mr. Morley *[holding answers 6 November 2001]:* I replied to the letters from the hon. Member on 7 November 2001.

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 5 September from the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), on the creation of a large disposal site in Norfolk. [13238]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* I replied to the right hon. Member on 7 November 2001.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has taken to identify the source of foot and mouth imported into the United Kingdom. [9429]

Mr. Morley: A great deal of epidemiological research has been conducted into the origins of this outbreak. The current epidemic has been caused by a specific strain of the foot and mouth virus (PanAsian Strain O) which has occurred in a number of countries around the world. The precise means of introduction of the virus is unknown and subject to continuing investigations, but is most likely to have been introduced in illegally imported meat or meat products. It would not be appropriate to comment further on the specific question of the source or sources of the outbreak until all investigations are complete.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what basis she formulated her policy on implementing a public and independent inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak. [9268]

Mr. Morley: The Government have already announced the independent "Lessons Learned" inquiry chaired by Dr. Iain Anderson and the Royal Society Study chaired by Sir Brian Follett, along with the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food chaired by Sir Don Curry.

We are satisfied that these two inquiries and the Policy Commission will provide rigorous investigation of the issues in the foot and mouth outbreak and will allow us to identify the best wary forward, quickly and efficiently and that this approach is in the best interests of the public.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the contribution that livestock markets made to the spread of FMD infection. [12295]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Prior to 23 February 2001, infected sheep are known to have been traded through a number of markets in England and Wales resulting in the initial dissemination of disease to farms, dealers and slaughterhouses. Epidemiological investigations indicate that potentially infected sheep passed through six auction markets between 13 and 23 February. Investigations into the role of other markets have not been conclusive but are continuing.

Chemicals Charter

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress he has made on adopting the regulations based on the Copenhagen charter on safer chemicals. [8316]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* The Copenhagen charter is a set of principles that a group of European environment and consumer organisations believe should form part of a new European Union chemicals policy. The UK is working to ensure that the regulations which implement the EU Strategy achieve the improvements in protection of people and the environment that the Copenhagen charter seeks.

While the Government support the aims of the charter, we do have reservations about the practicality of some of its proposals. For example, we believe that a system which involved approving all uses of all chemicals should not delay action on the chemicals of most concern. The charter also does not take into account other issues that are important to the UK, such as the need to minimise the extra animal testing that will result from the EU Strategy.

The UK and other EU member states agreed a set of conclusions at the Environment Council in June which incorporated many of the elements of the Copenhagen charter. A copy of the Environment Council conclusions is available in the Library of the House.

River Management

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of arrangements made by British Waterways to manage flood control on its rivers; and if she will make a statement. [11554]

Mr. Meacher: Where appropriate the Environment Agency has agreements in place with British Waterways on the operation of the latter's navigation infrastructure for flood control purposes. I understand that these arrangements have operated satisfactorily.

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish data on volatility and volumetric flows on rivers managed by *(a)* British Waterways and *(b)* the Environment Agency. [11556]

Mr. Meacher: This information is not collected by this Department but comprehensive information on river flows is published by the centre for Ecology and Hydrology (formerly the Institute of Hydrology and British Geological Survey) in their publication "Hydrological Data UK: Hydrometric Register and Statistics 1991–95". Information covering the period 1996–2000 will be published next year.

Farm Plastics Waste

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has to introduce a compulsory system for dealing with the issue of waste non-packaging farm plastics. [11780]

Mr. Meacher: We will be addressing the question of how to deal with waste non-packaging farm plastics in the forthcoming consultation document on agricultural waste. We will consider whether a statutory scheme should be introduced in the light of responses to this consultation exercise.

Hunting

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment

she has made of damage to livestock by fox predation during the suspension of hunting with dogs due to foot and mouth disease; what account has been taken of this in the determination of the time scale for the publication of the Veterinary Risk Assessment report on hunting; and if she will make a statement. [12024]

Alun Michael: The Department has received no evidence of such consequences from the suspension of hunting. Consideration of the time scale for resumption of hunting is based entirely on the veterinary risk assessment and how best to help the countryside return to normal while doing all we can to eradicate foot and mouth disease.

Organic Farming

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial help she gives to farmers who wish to switch to organic production. [12078]

Mr. Morley: Aid is available under the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS), which is part of the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), to help farmers convert to organic farming. £140 million has been committed to funding the OFS over the life of the ERDP.

Aid under the OFS is paid over five years according to the category of land being converted. The rates of aid are as follows:

£ per hectare

	Land eligible for arable area payments and land in permanent crops	*Other improved land*	*Unimproved land*
Year 1	225	175	25
Year 2	135	105	10
Year 3	50	40	5
Year 4	20	15	5
Year 5	20	15	5
Total	450	350	50

In addition, each organic unit being converted under the OFS is eligible for payments totalling £600 towards the initial cost of advice and training.

As well as financial assistance for conversion, we also provide other support, for example, through the Department's R and D programme, which includes a large component dealing with research on organic farming, and through the provision of free advice to prospective organic farmers by the Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS).

EU Enlargement

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her counterparts in central and eastern Europe concerning the effect of enlargement of the European Union on agriculture in the United Kingdom. [12805]

Mr. Morley: So far this year, my ministerial colleagues and I have had meetings with our counterparts from Poland, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania. Over the next few months we hope to build on these, and to have dialogue with our counterparts in Hungary and Estonia.

Regional Office (Exeter)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the complement of staff working at her Department's regional office at Exeter was on *(a)* 1 November 2001 and *(b)* 1 August 2001. [12826]

Mr. Morley: Two parts of the Department operate from Clyst House, Exeter: namely the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and the Foot and Mouth Disease Office.

The RPA office at Exeter had 395 staff on 1 August 2001 and 429 staff on 1 November 2001. The staff numbers were increased over this period to deal with work that was transferred to Exeter from RPA offices at Bristol, Worcester and Reading.

Precise figures for the number of staff at the Foot and Mouth Disease Office at Exeter on the dates specified are unavailable. However, the number of staff was broadly unchanged over the period in question at around 300, approximately two thirds of whom were casual appointments.

Fishing Industry

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will provide aid for the English fishing industry in similar terms to that operated in Scotland. [12811]

Mr. Morley: Grant aid is available in England for similar schemes to those available in Scotland, under the terms of the EU Structural Fund for fisheries including grant for decommissioning fishing vessels.

Countryside Stewardship Schemes

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase the area of farmed land subject to Countryside Stewardship schemes. [12810]

Mr. Morley: Our plans for a major expansion of the Countryside Stewardship budget are well known. As part of the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), expenditure on agri-environment schemes is scheduled to increase from £119 million this year to £197 million in 2006–07. From the total ERDP budget of £1.6 billion, £500 million has been allocated to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme over the period. As a result, each year we will be accepting roughly double the number of applications compared to 1999 and we expect to add over half a million hectares of land to that already covered by the scheme (currently about a quarter of a million hectares) over the last 10 years.

BSE and Scrapie

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to publish scientific advice to Ministers relating to BSE and scrapie. [12798]

Mr. Morley: In all matters relating to BSE and scrapie, the Government have been open and transparent. We will continue to put scientific advice to Government in the public domain, encouraging a culture of openness, trusting the public and stimulating informed public debate. To this end the Government's advisory committee on BSE matters

(the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC)) publishes summaries of all its meetings. These aim to explain the reasoning behind SEAC advice.

Southern Water Supplies

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will conduct an inquiry into Southern Water Services Ltd. supplies to Fulston Manor and Higham grammar schools since November 1999. [12423]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Any customer who has a complaint against a water undertaker should refer it to the Ofwat Customer Services Committee for the appropriate region, although I understand that the problems at Fulston Manor and Higham grammar schools relate not to the supply of water to the premises by Southern Water, but to pipes within the premises, which are the responsibility of the customer.

Domestic Refrigerators

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to encourage environmentally friendly disposal of domestic refrigerators; and if she will make a statement. [11664]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The disposal of domestic refrigerators is subject to waste management controls, under Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which are designed to prevent harm to human health and the environment. From 1 January 2002, the EC Regulation on Ozone Depletion Substances will require "controlled substances" (including CFCs) in coolants and in insulating foam to be removed before recycling or reclamation of domestic refrigerator units. The Department will finalise shortly guidance on CFC extraction plant and guidance on the storage of waste refrigeration equipment, prior to CFC extraction.

Livestock Movements

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial assistance she makes available for livestock movements; and if she will make a statement. [12350]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The current foot and mouth disease movement controls require that all animals to be moved are inspected by a local veterinary inspector (LVI). These veterinary inspections are carried out at DEFRA's expense.

Movement Licences

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investigation she has made into the operation of the single occupancy movement licences scheme; and if she will make a statement. [12347]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Sole occupancy movement licences were introduced on 8 October to provide for the regular movement of livestock between premises in the same ownership and occupation within a maximum diameter of 20.0 kms. Licences are issued under the authority of the divisional veterinary manager only after an assessment by a local veterinary inspector. These arrangements were welcomed by the industry and demand for licences was high in the first month of operation. After some initial delays applications are being processed within four to five days and often more quickly.

Flooding

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much public money was spent on flood *(a)* defences and *(b)* prevention measures in the last 12 months, brokendown by (i) county, (ii) local authority and (iii) in London. [12886]

Mr. Morley: Information is not collected in the format requested and could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much public money has been spent on flood warning systems in the last 12 months. [12887]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency is responsible for flood forecasting and dissemination of warnings in England. I understand the Agency spent £23.4 million on this during the last 12 months.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the Environment Agency regarding flood *(a)* prevention and *(b)* defences. [12884]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency has asked the Government to recognise and commit to meeting the need for a significant further increase in funding on a planned basis to (a) improve flood warnings and (b) maintain and improve the overall standard and extent of flood defence. This will be considered alongside other evidence through the Spending Review 2002 process. Current plans are for this Department's spending on flood and coastal defences for all operating authorities to increase from last year's outturn of £66 million to £114 million in 2003–04.

The Agency has also asked the Government to consider alternative institutional arrangements for delivering the flood and coastal defence service. We are already doing so as part of the present review of funding arrangements.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much private money was spent in the last four years on flood defences and flood prevention. [13021]

Mr. Morley: The Government do not collect information on the work undertaken by private individuals to protect their properties against flooding. In some cases beneficiaries of flood defence works undertaken by the operating authorities will make a contribution to those works. Comprehensive information on such contributions is not available in respect of works undertaken by local authorities or internal drainage boards but contributions to the Environment Agency in England were as follows:

£ million

Year	
1997–98	0.2
1998–99	0.3
1999–2000	0.5
2001–01	0.3

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much public funds were spent, broken down by local authorities, agencies and other relevant organisations on flood defences and flood prevention in the last four years; how much public spending on flood defences/prevention is planned for the next two years; and how much additional money she promised in 2001 for flood defences and flood prevention on top of that pledged in the last spending review. [13102]

Mr. Morley: Flood defence is provided by the Environment Agency, local authorities and internal drainage boards. The following table shows expenditure, from all sources, by the different operation authorities.

£ million

Year	*Environment Agency*	*Local authorities*	*Internal drainage boards*[1]	*Total*
1997–98	255.2	13,0	40.0	308.2
1998–99	247.2	15.0	40.3	302.5
1999–2000	260.3	15.4	40.7	316.4
2000–01	270.4	[2]20.1	41.0	[2]331.5

[1] Estimated
[2] Provisional

The great majority of this expenditure is provided by Government in the form of DEFRA grant (for approved capital and other works) and by DTLR through revenue support grant (which is used by local authorities to fund levies to the Environment Agency, special levies to internal drainage boards and to finance their own spend on flood and coastal defence).The Spending Review 2000 provided for an increase in DEFRA grant of £10 million in 2002–03 and £20 million in 2003–04. It also provided for local authority Standard Spending Assessments for flood and coastal defence to increase by some 4.4 per cent. annually over the period.

A further £51 million of DEFRA support was announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 November 2000. This was allocated as follows: £2 million in 2000–01; £17 million in 2001–02; £17 million in 2002–03 and £15 million in 2003–04. A further £6.6 million to assist the Environment Agency to meet its emergency costs was announced in January 2001 and allocated in 2001–02.

The following table sets out total Government funding of flood and coastal defence for the last four years and forecast expenditure for the current and next two years:

Year	*£ million*
1997–98	312.4
1998–99	315.9
1999–2000	326.3
2000–01	331.7
2001–02	376.9
2002–03	393.5
2003–04	414.2

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has taken to streamline the agencies that have a responsibility for flooding matters, with particular reference to *(a)* the Environment Agency, *(b)* the internal drainage boards, *(c)* local authorities, *(d)* British Waterways and *(e)* other boards. [13415]

Mr. Morley: The Government are considering this issue as part of the current review of funding arrangements for flood and coastal defence.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to ensure that flood prevention is not paid for exclusively from council tax. [13385]

Mr. Morley: It is already the case that the great majority of expenditure on flood and coastal defence is currently met out of general taxation.

In the current year DEFRA expects to provide direct funding of some £92 million to the operating authorities while some £264 million is provided to local authorities through DTLR's standard spending assessments which are largely supported by central grant and non-domestic rate income. Local authorities use this to fund levies to the Environment Agency, special levies to internal drainage boards and their own spend on flood and coastal defence.

Warm Front Grants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received regarding the level of Warm Front grants in England; and what plans she has to change the level of the grant. [12438]

Mr. Meacher: *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, marketed as the Warm Front Team, is managed under contract by the Eaga Partnership Ltd. and TXU Warm Front Ltd. Both companies provide regular advice to the Department about the average cost of work under the scheme. This is then used to review the appropriate maximum level set for grant paid to individual householders.

Sovereign Harbour (Eastbourne)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations the Environment Agency has made with respect to the building of homes at Sovereign Harbour, Eastbourne. [12891]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

The Environment Agency has responded to consultations by Eastbourne borough council about planning applications for proposed residential development in the area between the sea defence and the inner harbour. The Agency's responses to such consultations can be viewed at Eastbourne borough council's offices.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

London Underground (SPADs)

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many signal passed at danger events there were on the London Underground lines in the past five years for which figures are available. [7448]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground take SPADs very seriously and are constantly working to reduce the number on their network. Information on the number of SPADs is regularly placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The most recent information, which includes data for SPADs since 1993, was placed in the Library on 7 November.

Departmental Promotions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [12259]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department's financial year starts 1 April and runs to 31 March. For each financial year from 1995 the advertising spend, broken down by category, is set out in the table.

£

	Advertising				
	Television	*Radio*	*Press*	*Other*[1]	*Total*
1995–96[2]	—	—	—	—	9,300,000
1996–97	3,836,887	461,937	1,741,197	1,178,979	7,219,000
1997–98	3,154,027	926,232	1,559,001	860,740	6,500,000
1998–99	3,449,938	1,048,951	861,097	640,014	6,000,000
1999–2000	7,457,172	661,303	1,059,974	2,821,551	12,000,000
2000–01	13,475,335	1,932,364	971,796	1,314,395	17,693,890

[1] e.g. posters, leaflets
[2] A breakdown into separate categories would only be possible at disproportionate cost

The increased expenditure on advertising in 1999–2000 resulted from:

(i) An increase of £3.6 million on the "Are you doing your bit" campaign to help people to take action to protect the environment; and

(ii) £2.9 million spent on a campaign to encourage voting in the Greater London Authority elections.

The increase in expenditure in 2000–01 resulted from:

(i) An additional increase of £2 million on the "Are you doing your bit" campaign; and

(ii) A £4 million increase on the campaign aimed at further reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

(iii) Advertising aimed at providing information to the general public on access to the countryside during the foot and mouth disease outbreak.

Train Operating Companies

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to ensure *(a)* Arriva in West Yorkshire and *(b)* other train operating companies recruit and retain sufficient drivers to fulfil their timetable commitments. [12533]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) expects all train operators to recruit sufficient staff, including drivers, to run a reliable train service and meet their timetable commitments.

The SRA has in place performance regimes under which train operators are penalised if they fail to meet certain standards. The SRA can also issue enforcement orders and penalties against operators for continuing poor performance, as it proposes with Arriva Trains Northern.

Kane *v.* New Forest DC

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the implications of the judgment in the case of Kane *v.* New Forest DC. [12968]

Ms Keeble: The case was an appeal against the summary dismissal of a claim for damages for personal injuries caused by negligence. The appeal succeeded, so that the substantive claim can now proceed. Pending its conclusion, the matter is sub judice and I cannot comment.

Light Rail Schemes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the investment outlined in the Government's 10-Year Plan is allocated to Light Rail schemes. [12750]

Mr. Jamieson: Light Rail schemes account for about 1.7 per cent. of total spending in our 10-Year Plan for Transport.

Suburban Train Lines (Waterloo)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on how and when the proposed extension of trains and platforms on suburban lines into Waterloo will be financed. [12749]

Mr. Jamieson: Investment in new trains for the Waterloo suburban lines is being made by Angel Trains under a £1 billion deal, announced on 24 April 2001, between the company, Stagecoach Holdings plc and Siemens. It will be recovered through leasing charges paid by the train operator, South West Trains, which will be in receipt of franchise payments from the Strategic Rail Authority. No agreement has yet been reached with Railtrack or with other private investors on the financing of station improvements, including platform extensions, but the investment is similarly likely to be recovered through access charges paid by the train operator.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant

to his answer of 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 395W, on Railtrack, if he will list the actions that will be required to secure investment grade ratings for the debt of the company limited by guarantee. [12986]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 671W.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his reply of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 94W, on Railtrack, when he met Mr. Alun Evans to discuss release of the document proposing changes to the Parsons Brinckerhoff report; and to what extent the propriety of the conduct of Ms Jo Moore in respect of the release of this document was discussed with Mr. Evans. [12993]

Mr. Byers: This information is exempted from disclosure under Part 2 of Section II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on the crossrail project of Railtrack being placed into administration. [12695]

Mr. Jamieson: Work on the development of a crossrail project will continue on the same basis as before Railtrack administration. It has always been expected that a special purpose vehicle would be created to take forward any scheme which might be developed as a result of the current project definition work.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on the rail services to and from the Beckenham constituency of the decision to place Railtrack into administration. [12670]

Mr. Jamieson: Rail services will not be affected by the process of administration. The Government will ensure that the administrator has the funds to maintain the full operation of the network.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the value of the railway stations within the ownership of Railtrack on 4 October was. [13214]

Mr. Spellar: The balance sheet valuation of all of Railtrack Group plc's tangible assets as at 31 March 2001 is shown in their 2000–01 annual report and accounts. Separate accounts for Railtrack plc are held at Companies House.

Railways Act

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the occasions since 1997 when section 54 of the Railways Act 1993 has been used. [12740]

Mr. Jamieson: Since 1997, section 54 has been used five times as follows:

March 2000 in respect of 120 vehicles for Connex South Central

March 2001 in respect of 818 vehicles for South West Trains

July 2001 in respect of 240 vehicles for South Central/GoVia

October 2001 in respect of eight new trailer cars and five new four-car units for Arriva Trains Northern

November 2001 in respect of five two-car vehicles for Arriva Trains Northern.

Light Rapid Transport Scheme

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contribution his Department is making to the light rapid transport scheme for Fareham-Gosport-Portsmouth; how the estimated cost of the scheme is to be financed; and if he will make a statement. [12664]

Ms Keeble: The agreement that the Government have reached with the authorities promoting the scheme provides for the public sector contribution to be shared between central Government and the authorities. This is in line with our general policy that about a quarter of the costs of a major public transport scheme of this kind should be met from local sources. The precise amounts involved will only be determined once the tendering process has been completed.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what checks are made to ensure that affordable housing building takes place by house builders on former English Partnership land. [13004]

Ms Keeble: Each provider of affordable housing on English Partnerships land is contractually obliged to provide an agreed number of units, the delivery of which is confirmed upon practical completion of a particular development site or project.

Special Advisers

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from civil service unions about the conduct of his special advisers since 7 June. [12992]

Mr. Byers: None.

Airlines (Security)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received on *(a)* the deferred payment of air passenger duty, *(b)* the extra costs of airline and airport security and *(c)* maintaining insurance cover to airlines, since 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [R] [12975]

Mr. Jamieson: We have received various representations from the air transport industry on all of these issues. The Government moved quickly to underwrite, on a temporary basis, third party war risk insurance for UK airlines and service providers to the airline industry. The initiative has subsequently been widely copied elsewhere and was recently extended until

23 November. The European Commission has set out guidelines on emergency aid measures which were endorsed at the meeting of European Transport Ministers on 16 October. We will take these guidelines into account in considering whether further aid should be provided to the British airline industry.

Flood Plains

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he is taking to ensure that house buyers are aware of the risks of purchasing a house built on a flood plain. [12889]

Ms Keeble: In September 1999 the Environment Agency published indicative floodplain maps using the best available current information. These were supplied to local authorities to inform the planning process and are updated annually. In December 2000 the Environment Agency placed these maps on the internet on their website www.environment-agency.gov.uk in the section entitled "What's in your backyard". Prospective home buyers can interrogate this site by postcode to see the area at flood risk. Further, more detailed information can be obtained by writing to the local Environment Agency area office.

Under the Government's proposals for sellers' packs, prospective buyers will be provided with key information about homes marketed for sale. Flood risk information is one of the items being considered for inclusion in the seller's pack. In the meantime, the Environment Agency is engaged in advanced discussions with the Law Society on making an 'Environment Agency Property Search Report', a standard part of the domestic and commercial conveyancing process in England and Wales. A pilot trial is running in North Wales and work is under way to extend this. Each Environment Agency report will include information on flood risk as well as other environmental data for which the agency has responsibility.

Local Government

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received about the effectiveness of local authority standards committees; and if he will make a statement. [12323]

Dr. Whitehead: I have not received any representations about the effectiveness of local authority standards committees.

Recycling (London)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which London-based organisations have received grants from *(a)* the single regeneration budget and *(b)* other sources to promote waste recycling in the past two years; and what the value was of grants in each case. [13277]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* Information on individual London-based organisations that received funding to promote waste recycling through the single regeneration budget is held by the SRB partnerships who distribute the funding. However, the London Development Agency, who are responsible for administering the SRB programme in London, have provided details of London SRB schemes that included waste management or recycling projects in their outputs in 1999–2000 and 2000–01. These are at table A. In addition, a SRB round 6 scheme "Re-engineering Secondary Materials for Thames Gateway" was awarded £5.4 million lifetime funding in summer 2000 but did not incur any project expenditure during 2000–01. This is run by London Remade, a strategic partnership between waste management companies, statutory authorities, London boroughs and community organisations, with the principal objective of promoting new markets and secondary industries based on reprocessing and reuse of London's recyclable materials.

The Environmental Action Fund, operated by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), is designed to help voluntary groups advance the Government's environmental policies to London-based organisations to promote recycling and raise awareness of waste management issues. Table B lists the grants that were issued during 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02.

The Spending Review 2000 established a fund of £140 million specifically for local authority waste management and recycling. DEFRA will be consulting shortly on proposals for the distribution and use of this fund.

Table A: Number of waste management or recycling schemes in London SRB schemes during 1999–2000 and 2000/01

£

Name of Scheme	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*SRB Lifetime Value*[1]
Connecting Communities	1	3	2,099,800
Forest Gate and Plaistow	0	1	21,769,208
Stratford and Temple Mills	—	1	7,834,664
Creekside Renewal	—	2	8,273,500
Canning Town	1	1	21,501,000
Time for Greenwich	—	107	26,969,300
Hackney Wick	1	1	19,234,999
Mile End Park	—	1	2,330,000
New Horizons for Harold Hill	—	1	3,819,378
Northern Wards	—	6	2,814,851
Releasing Local Potential	—	1	29,920,000
South Wandle Regeneration Partnership	—	26	6,397,010
King's Cross Partnership	—	1	37,173,806
West Euston Partnership	—	4	6,546,000
Aylesbury Plus	1	3	4,798,237
Developing Park Royal's Offer	—	17	26,721,833

Table A: Number of waste management or recycling schemes in London SRB schemes during 1999–2000 and 2000/01

£

Name of Scheme	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*SRB Lifetime Value*[1]
A New Future for Finsbury Park	—	1	25,000,000
New Opportunities for Walthamstow	—	1	13,997,990
Bridging the Divides	—	48	28,136,192
Cross River Partnership (SBEG)	—	1	7,589,237

[1] Total award of SRB funding is for all the activities within the scheme

Table B: Grants from the Environmental Action Fund

£

Organisation	*Project title*	*Amount*
1999–2000		
Hackney Community Recycling	Learning from Scrap	48,743
Safe Neighbourhoods Unit	Estate Recycling Support Project	13,534
Waste Watch	3Rs for the 3rd Sector	21,413
Waste Watch	National Waste Awareness Initiative	59,860
Waste Watch	Supporting action on 'Less Waste More Value'	99,000
2000–01		
Elephant Jobs	Community Composting	14,500
Elephant Jobs	Office Furniture Fittings	26,108
Hackney Community Recycling	Learning from Scrap	49,439
Safe Neighbourhoods Unit	Estate Recycling Support Project	13,529
Waste Watch	3Rs for the 3rd Sector	21,819
Waste Watch	National Waste Awareness Initiative	55,465
Waste Watch	Supporting action on 'Less Waste More Value'	110,000
2001–02		
BioRegional Development Group	An integrated Tree Station for London	59,860
Elephant Jobs	Community Composting	14,500
Elephant Jobs	Office Furniture Fittings	26,108
Hackney Community Recycling	Learning from Scrap	33,250
Waste Watch	National Waste Awareness Initiative	71,680
Waste Watch	Supporting action on 'Waste Strategy 2000'	198,000

Correspondence

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will reply to the questions of 22 October from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West. [13873]

Mr. Jamieson: I replied to the hon. Member's questions about the Working Time Directive on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 133W and on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 287–88W.

Empty Homes

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact of the Government's Flats over the Shop initiative. [13752]

Ms Keeble: The scheme for 100 per cent. capital allowances for flats over shops was introduced in the Budget. Spending on the renovation or conversion of vacant or under-used space above shops or other qualifying commercial premises, to provide flats for rent, can qualify under the scheme from 11 May 2001.

Information about the amount of spending qualifying under the measure will not be available until 2003, when property owners and occupiers who have incurred expenditure have sent in their tax returns for the first tax year in which the scheme has been in operation.

Homelessness

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many children were made homeless in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001 to date; and what proposals the Government have to counter this problem. [13754]

Ms Keeble: Summary information on activity under statutory homelessness provisions is reported to the Department by local authorities in England. This includes the number of households accepted under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, and identifies those households containing dependent children.

The latest information is as follows:

Homeless households accepted by local authorities in England

	1997	*2001*[1]
Total households accepted	102,410	59,530
of which containing dependent children	58,780	33,800
Estimated number[2] of dependent children	105,000	58,000

[1] January to June
[2] Rounded estimates—precise data are not collected
Source:
DTLR Quarterly P1(E) housing activity returns

Families with children who are accepted by a local housing authority as unintentionally homeless are provided with accommodation.

Under the Children Act 1989, social services have a duty to assist any child under 16 who is in need. Monitoring by the rough sleepers unit by outreach workers shows there are very few under 18-year-olds sleeping rough. Children under 16 found on the streets by agencies, including police or homelessness workers, are helped from the streets and referred to social services. The social exclusion unit is currently leading an exercise looking at improving services available to young runaways.

Homeless acceptances represent households in need who are helped by local authorities into accommodation. The provisions of the Homelessness Bill will require housing authorities to take a more strategic, multi-agency approach to the prevention of homelessness and the rehousing of homeless households; ensure that everyone accepted by housing authorities as unintentionally homeless and in priority need must be provided with suitable accommodation until they obtain a settled housing solution; and allow housing authorities greater flexibility to assist non-priority homeless households, principally through a new power for housing authorities to secure accommodation for such households where they have the scope to do so.

To support these provisions, investment in new affordable housing through the Housing Corporation will rise to over £1.2 billion by 2003–04—about double the current level.

The Government are currently developing a national strategic framework to help prevent and tackle homelessness throughout the country.

The Code on Guidance on Allocations and Homelessness will be strengthened to ensure that the health needs of children in temporary accommodation are met.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government will publish *(a)* a response to the homelessness consultation, *(b)* the Vulnerable Groups (Definition) Guidelines, *(c)* proposals to deal with rogue landlords in the social housing sector, *(d)* proposals to license houses in multiple occupation, *(e)* proposals on the future of the Rough Sleepers Unit and *(f)* new regulations to extend the right to priority temporary social housing to those with an institutionalised background. [13758]

Ms Keeble: The Government have recently consulted on proposals for a national strategy to tackle homelessness. A summary of responses will be placed on the DTLR internet site on 7 December. The consultation responses are being considered and the Government will announce their response in due course.

We have consulted on a draft order which would extend the groups of people who have a priority need for housing, under the homelessness legislation. This includes applicants who the local authority are satisfied are vulnerable as a result of an institutionalised background. We are considering the public consultation responses to the order, and will take decisions on implementation shortly. Guidance relating to the priority needs categories will be issued alongside the order.

I believe that the hon. Member has in mind our proposals on dealing with unsatisfactory private landlords, rather than landlords in the social sector. We published on 20 October a consultation paper on selective licensing of private landlords.

We aim to publish around the turn of the year details of our legislative proposals on houses in multiple occupation, taking account of the responses to consultation.

The rough sleepers unit has just completed a written consultation exercise on its future role. An announcement on the conclusions will be made in due course.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent research has been carried out by his Department on the causes of homelessness in relation to *(a)* violence in the home and *(b)* drug abuse. [13755]

Ms Keeble: This Department has carried out no research recently on the causes of homelessness in relation to violence in the home or drug use.

Planning

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many planning decisions the Secretary of State called in from local planning authorities, and in what categories, during the last year. [13751]

Ms Keeble: 127 planning applications were called in between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001.

Type of development	*Number of applications called-in*
Community, health and education	3
Recreation and leisure	14
Industry	1
Mineral extraction/exploration	1
Offices and studios	1
Residences	48
Retail	35
Transport, utilities and communication	12
Wholesale, storage and distribution	3
Others	9
Total	127

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* planning appeals before the Planning Inspectorate and *(b)* planning appeals being considered by the Secretary of State there were in (i) June 1997 and (ii) June 2001; and what was the average length of time taken to determine them in each case. [13750]

Ms Keeble: The figures for each are shown by financial year. Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Planning Inspectorate	*Appeals received*
1997–98	14,182
2000–01	15,336

Target 1997–98: issue 80 per cent. of appeals decisions within 20 weeks for written representations, 33 weeks for hearings, 44 weeks for inquiries. The Inspectorate's performance for each was 21, 40 and 52 weeks respectively.

Target 2000–01: issue 80 per cent. of decisions within 17 weeks for written representations, 23 weeks for hearings, 33 weeks for inquiries. The Inspectorate's performance against appeals targets for each was 17, 21 and 31 weeks respectively.

Secretary of State	*Appeals recovered*
1997–98	208
2000–01	163

Target 1997–98: issue 80 per cent. of decisions within eight weeks and 100 per cent. within 13 weeks from receipt of Inspector's report. Performance: 51 per cent. in eight weeks and 76 per cent. in 13 weeks.

Target: 2000–01: issue 80 per cent. of decisions within eight weeks and 100 per cent. within 13 weeks. Performance: 56.4 per cent. in eight weeks and 66.9 per cent. in 13 weeks.

We intend to make dramatic improvements in the time taken to decide recovered appeals.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many households living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation there were in the first quarter of *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001; what plans he has to reduce this number; and what steps he is taking to ensure that this accommodation is of a reasonable standard. [13761]

Ms Keeble: There were 4,100 households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation at the end of the first quarter of 1997 and 10,830 in 2001. Over the next two years the newly established bed-and-breakfast unit will work with partners to reduce the need to place families in B and B. The unit will be hosting a conference on 20 November to consult on targets and actions for reducing B and B use.

Local authorities are required by law to ensure that any accommodation secured for people accepted as statutorily homeless is suitable. In considering whether accommodation is suitable, local authorities will need, among other factors, to have regard to whether it is of a reasonable standard. Statutory guidance issued by my Department also makes it clear that if authorities do have to use bed-and-breakfast accommodation they should ensure that the accommodation meets statutory standards for houses in multiple occupation.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those local authorities that are *(a)* debt free and *(b)* in debt, indicating their level of debt in (i) June 1997 and (ii) June 2001. [13753]

Dr. Whitehead: The 106 English local authorities listed have reported that they had debt-free status as at 30 June 2001:

Barking and Dagenham
Basingstoke and Deane
Bath and North East Somerset
Bedford
Bracknell Forest UA
Breckland
Broadland
Bromley
Bromsgrove
Broxbourne
Chichester
Chiltern
Christchurch
City of London
Congleton
Corby
Cotswold
Crawley
Dacorum
Dartford
Daventry
Dorset
East Cambridgeshire
East Devon
East Dorset
East Hampshire
Eden
Elmbridge
Epsom and Ewell
Forest Heath
Fylde
Hambleton
Harlow
Hart
Havant
Hertsmere
Horsham
Huntingdonshire
Kennet
Lichfield
Malvern Hills
Mid Bedfordshire
Mid Sussex
Mole Valley
North Devon
North Dorset
North Wiltshire
Penwith
Redditch
Reigate and Banstead
Runnymede
Rushmoor
Ryedale
Salisbury
Sevenoaks
South Buckinghamshire

South Cambridgeshire
South Hampshire
South Northamptonshire
South Oxfordshire
South Ribble
South Shropshire
South Somerset
South Staffordshire
Spelthorne
St. Edmundsbury
Staffordshire Moorlands
Stevenage
Stratford-on-Avon
Suffolk Coastal
Surrey Heath
Swale
Tandridge
Tewkesbury
Three Rivers
Tonbridge and Malling
Tunbridge Wells
Tynedale
Uttlesford
Vale of White Horse
Watford
Waverley
Welwyn Hatfield
West Berkshire UA
West Wiltshire
Windsor and Maidenhead UA
Worthing
Wychavon
Wyre
Wyre Forest
Cambridgeshire Police Authority
Dorset Police Authority
Kent Police Authority
Merseyside Police Authority
Suffolk Police Authority
Sussex Police Authority
Wiltshire Police Authority
Dartmoor National Park Authority
Exmoor National Park Authority
Lake District National Park
North York Moors National Park Authority
Northumberland National Park Authority
Peak National Park
The Broads Authority
Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority
North London Waste Authority

Note:

An authority is debt-free if *(a)* at 30 June 2001, the authority's credit ceiling was nil or a negative amount and *(b)* at 1 July 2001, the authority had no money outstanding by way of external borrowing other than short-term borrowing or hard to redeem debt, as defined in Regulation 154 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) Regulations 1997.

Source:

Capital Payments and Receipts (CPR1) 2001–02.

I am placing in the Library of the House the relevant figures on levels of debt for each local authority in England reported as at 31 March 1997 and 31 March 2001.

Council Housing

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those housing authorities that have transferred all or part of their housing stock in a large scale voluntary transfer in the last five years, together with the number of units. [13759]

Ms Keeble: The information requested is as follows.

Authority	*Date of transfer*	*Number of dwellings*
Cotswold district council	28 February 1997	4,282
South Staffordshire district council	7 March 1997	5,273
Lichfield district council	19 March 1997	4,921
South Oxfordshire district council	7 July 1997	5,018
Eden district council	22 September 1997	1,510
London borough of Lambeth (Moorlands)	5 January 1998	515
London borough of Bexley (partial)	9 February 1998	4,118
London borough of Bexley (partial)	9 February 1998	4,097
Congleton borough council	2 March 1998	4,061
Oldham borough council (Limehurst)	9 March 1998	642
Liverpool city council (Windermere)	19 March 1998	493
London borough of Merton (Pollards Hill)	23 March 1998	1,018
London borough of Tower Hamlets (Poplar)	23 March 1998	1,852
Kerrier district council	23 March 1998	3,732
London borough of Hackney (Kingsmead)	30 March 1998	951
London borough of Brent (Fortunegate/Church End)	30 March 1998	1,481
Basildon district council (Vange)	30 March 1998	708
West Somerset district council	30 March 1998	1,869
Stoke-on-Trent city council (Bentilee)	31 March 1998	917
Tewkesbury borough council	27 April 1998	3,066
Rother district council	1 May 1998	3,058
London borough of Lambeth (Lansdowne Green)	20 July 1998	681
London borough of Tower Hamlets (Poplar II)	7 December 1998	2,431
Wirral metropolitan borough council (Leasowe)	25 January 1999	1,082
Tameside metropolitan borough council (West Ashton)	1 February 1999	901
West Devon borough council	22 February 1999	1,446
South Somerset district council	1 March 1999	8,883

Authority	*Date of transfer*	*Number of dwellings*
East Lindsey district council	1 March 1999	5,102
Liverpool city council (Pinehurst)	5 March 1999	646
Manchester city council (partial)	8 March 1999	1,030
London borough of Hackney (Morningside)	15 March 1999	1,084
South Hams district council	22 March 1999	3,096
London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (Old Oak)	17 March 1999	668
London borough of Hackney (Upper Clapton)	22 March 1999	1,000
Telford and Wrekin council	25 March 1999	13,081
London borough of Enfield (partial)	29 March 1999	1,194
Worthing borough council	29 March 1999	2,525
Bath and North East Somerset council	29 March 1999	9,887
Manchester city council (East Wythenshawe)	29 March 1999	6,667
London borough of Greenwich (Charlton Triangle)	29 March 1999	1,280
London borough of Hackney (Haggerston)	29 March 1999	661
Allerdale borough council (partial transfer)	31 March 1999	3,704
Allerdale borough council (Salterbeck)	31 March 1999	727
Preston borough council (Avenham)	4 June 1999	1,121
London borough of Lambeth (central Stockwell)	5 July 1999	2,358
Birmingham city council (central areas)	21 June 1999	2,813
London borough of Islington (Barnsbury)	26 September 1999	647
London borough of Islington (10 estates)	26 September 1999	739
Liverpool city council (Speke Garston)	4 October 1999	4,382
West Lindsey district council	18 October 1999	3,929
London borough of Lambeth (St. Martins)	25 October 1999	1,033
Boston borough council	29 November 1999	4,871
Tynedale district council	20 December 1999	3,564
Newcastle under lyme borough council	31 January 2000	9,887
Restormel borough council	7 February 2000	3,577
Manchester city council (Colshaw Farm)	14 February 2000	600
North Devon district council	21 February 2000	3,293
London borough of Hackney (Stamford Hill)	6 March 2000	1,095
London borough of Hackney (Pembury Estate)	6 March 2000	1,241
Burnley borough council	8 March 2000	5,330
Manchester city council (Sale estate)	20 March 2000	1,655
Weymouth and Portland council	20 March 2000	3,105
Huntingdon district council	20 March 2000	6,650
Elmbridge borough council	27 March 2000	4,894
Test Valley borough council	27 March 2000	5,495
Wyre Forest district council	27 March 2000	6,056
Manchester city council (Whitefield Estate)	27 March 2000	1,033
London Borough of Tower Hamlets (Tower Hamlets Community Housing)	27 March 2000	1,551
Tameside metropolitan borough council (north)	27 March 2000	8,532
Tameside metropolitan borough council (south)	27 March 2000	7,934
London borough of Richmond	17 July 2000	7,139
Coventry city council	22 September 2000	20,125
Fylde borough council	2 October 2000	1,905
Chester city council	27 November 2000	7,096
Horsham district council	11 December 2000	4,650
London borough of Tower Hamlets (partial)	12 February 2001	196
East Northamptonshire district council	19 February 2001	3,495
Torbay district council	19 February 2001	2,947
Staffordshire Moorlands district council	23 February 2001	3,132
Calderdale metropolitan borough council	6 March 2001	12,759
Chichester district council	13 March 2001	5,321
Mendip district council	19 March 2001	4,326
West Wiltshire district council	26 March 2001	3,284
West Oxfordshire district council	26 March 2001	3,643
East Staffordshire borough council	26 March 2001	5,637
Manchester city council (Handforth Estate)	26 March 2001	659
Sunderland city council	26 March 2001	36,356
Blackburn with Darwen borough council	28 March 2001	9,886
Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council	1 October 2001	5,500
Mid-Bedfordshire district council	5 November 2001	3,084
Total number transfers—90		
Total number dwellings transferred—359,883		

Runway Capacity

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to increase runway capacity at *(a)* Heathrow and *(b)* Gatwick. [13695]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 476W.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the commercial use by regional air services of private and military airports in the London area with runways of at least 1,800 metres. [13692]

Mr. Jamieson: In 1998 my Department commissioned a three-part study of business aviation in the south-east. Part 1 (Demand and Capacity studies) was published in 1998 and Part 2 (The Economic impact of Business Aviation) in 1999. These reports cover a number of airports with runway lengths of at least 1,800 metres. Copies of both are available in the House Libraries.

Work on the final part of the study, Future Capacity for Business Aviation, has been subsumed into the on-going South East and East of England Regional Air Services Study (SERAS). The study will include an assessment of the contribution that smaller airports might make to short haul and domestic services.

Airport Slots (London-Inverness Route)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with the Scottish Executive about the use of a public service obligation on the Gatwick to Inverness air route. [13694]

Mr. Jamieson: The DTLR has received a proposal from the Scottish Executive outlining the case for the imposition of a public service obligation on the Inverness to London route. This proposal is being analysed by the DTLR, while taking European Regulation 2408/92 into account. Informal discussions at ministerial level about protection for this route have taken place. In addition, DTLR and Scottish Executive officials recently met to discuss the proposal.

Terminal 5

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department will determine the application for terminal 5 at Heathrow. [13696]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State will make and announce his decision once he has completed his full and careful consideration of all the issues. The applicants for planning permission and other interested parties will all be told of the decision in the usual way, and an oral statement will be made to inform Parliament.

Air Movement Restrictions

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what restrictions on air movements in the vicinity of nuclear power stations are in force. [13475]

Mr. Jamieson: Restrictions on overflying are in place in the vicinity of all nuclear power stations.

HEALTH

Care Standards (Young Adults)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the national care standards for younger adults will be introduced. [9499]

Jacqui Smith: The standards for younger adults will be introduced on 1 April 2002, when the National Care Standards Commission starts work. Some of the more challenging standards will not be implemented until some time after that for existing providers to be given realistic timescales in which to meet new standards.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the report findings from the consultation on national care standards for younger adults will be published. [9496]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has received 500 responses to the younger adult and adult placement standards and is in the process of reviewing the standards in the light of the comments that have been received. A summary of these findings will be made available in due course.

Haemophilia

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the recent decision by the High Court to award damages under the Consumer Protection Act 1988 to 114 people infected with hepatitis C through blood transfusion; and what implications this will have for haemophiliacs who have been infected by hepatitis C after receiving blood transfusions. [9501]

Jacqui Smith: The recent decision by the High Court has no implications for anyone infected with hepatitis C before the Consumer Protection Act came into force in March 1988. This includes the vast majority of haemophiliacs who were probably infected before that date.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the Royal Prerogative for the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9374]

Ms Blears: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the Royal Prerogative are exercised nor could it be practicable to do so.

Cancer Services

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have been tested for cervical cancer in Leicestershire in the last 12 months. [10581]

Jacqui Smith: In 2000–01, 65,712 women underwent cervical screening in Leicestershire health authority.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many pilot areas there are in England for cervical screening; and what the time scale is for these pilots; [10582]

(2) if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the thin prep pap test; [10583]

(3) what representations he has received on increasing access to the thin prep pap test beyond the pilot areas. [10584]

Jacqui Smith: The pilot of liquid based cytology (LBC) and human papilloma virus testing as triage for women with mild or borderline abnormalities is taking place at three sites; Newcastle, Norfolk and Norwich, and North Bristol. The pilot began in April 2001. The LBC arm of the pilot is being evaluated from October 2001, and results of the evaluation are expected in 2002.

ThinPrep and AutoCyte Prep were the only liquid based slide preparation systems available at the time the pilot was developed. ThinPrep is being used at two of the sites, and AutoCyte prep at the third site. The evaluation of the pilot will gather data on the effectiveness of both systems.

The NHS cancer plan set out the commitment that if evaluation of the pilot is successful we will fund the introduction of LBC across the national health service.

We have had no representations on increasing ThinPrep beyond the pilot areas.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost of the treatment of a cervical cancer patient. [10585]

Jacqui Smith: The cost of treating different patients varies by the type of treatment they receive. The elements of the total cost incurred depend upon the individual components and treatments within the care pathway for that patient. For cervical cancer, a hysterectomy might be performed (£1,861 average cost for elective in-patient in 1999–2000) and/or a course of radiotherapy undertaken, which would vary dependent on the type and classification of the type of cancer involved.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the funds allocated to the treatment of *(a)* breast cancer, *(b)* cervical cancer and *(c)* prostate cancer. [11867]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect figures on the cost of national health service services in a way that enables an accurate figure to be calculated for the cost of or investment in a particular disease.

We made available an additional £280 million in 2001–02 for the development of cancer services. This will rise to £407 million in 2002–03 and £570 million in 2003–04. Local health authorities and primary care trusts, with cancer networks, are responsible for determining local priorities in implementing the NHS cancer plan.

Child Abuse

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pieces of Government-funded research there have been on the subject of abuse of disabled children in the last five years. [11414]

Jacqui Smith: There have not been any Government-funded studies which look specifically at the abuse of disabled children.

However, the Department has recently commissioned a study to consider the symptoms of abuse in people who have severe learning disabilities. The study will examine the nature of the psychological harm caused to people with learning disabilities who are subject to physical and/or sexual abuse. Its aim is to improve the ability of staff and carers to identify and act on abuse, to identify the needs of the victims and to assist them in obtaining access to the judicial process.

We have identified three other current or recent studies from the National Research Register, which are considering or have considered the abuse of children with learning disabilities. Further details of all these studies have been placed in the Library.

There are a number of other studies that look more broadly at all children who are the victims of abuse which also encompass children with disability.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much related training material has been funded by the Government since the publication of the ABCD Pack in 1992. [11412]

Jacqui Smith: The available United Kingdom evidence on the extent of abuse among disabled children suggests that disabled children are at increased risk of abuse, and that the presence of multiple disabilities appears to increase the risk of both abuse and neglect.

That is why the Department funded, in partnership with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, a second training resource pack entitled "Turning Points". It is also why in our "Working Together to Safeguard Children" child protection guidance and in the practice guidance and training pack underpinning the "Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families" we have been careful to refer to this evidence base and to the need for particular attention to be paid to promoting a high level of awareness of the risks to this group of children and to high standards of practice.

Residential Services (Special Needs)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish a consultation document on national standards for residential services for adults with disabilities and special needs. [11551]

Jacqui Smith: Draft national minimum standards for care homes for younger adults were issued for consultation on 29 June 2001. The Department is looking again at the national minimum standards for younger adults and adult placements in the light of the comments that have been received during the consultation process. The standards will be published in due course following completion of the review process.

Heart Disease

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was, from diagnosis to treatment for heart disease in each of the last four years. [11866]

Jacqui Smith: The diagnosis and treatment of heart disease may take place within primary, secondary or tertiary health care services. For those patients who require drug therapy to treat their condition, treatment will follow directly on from diagnosis. Patients requiring treatment in hospital who are not diagnosed as an emergency requiring immediate admission will go on a waiting list for in-patient treatment. The average median waiting times, from the date of a decision to admit a

patient for treatment for heart disease to the admission date, for the last four years for which data are available, are in the table.

Year	*Median waiting time in days*
1996–97	57
1997–98	55
1998–99	60
1999–2000	57

The figures are based on hospital in-patients admitted with an OPCS4 procedure code in the range K01 to K71 (heart procedures).

Pharmaceutical Expenditure

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expenditure per capita was on pharmaceuticals in each of the OECD countries for the most recent year for which figures are available. [11893]

Ms Blears: Expenditure per capita on pharmaceuticals and other medical non-durables in each of the OECD countries for the most recent year for which figures are available is shown in the table.

£

Country	*Last available year*	*Expenditure per capita*
Australia	1998	118
Austria	n/a	n/a
Belgium	1997	203
Canada	2000	212
Czech Republic	1999	64
Denmark	1999	155
Finland	1999	160
France	1999	323
Germany	1998	206
Greece	2000	108
Hungary	1999	56
Iceland	1999	258
Ireland	1999	105
Italy	1997	179
Japan	1998	226
Korea	1999	42
Luxembourg	1999	198
Mexico	n/a	n/a
Netherlands	1999	149
New Zealand	1997	115
Norway	1997	157
Poland	n/a	n/a
Portugal	1998	133
Slovakia	n/a	n/a
Spain	1997	126
Sweden	1997	172
Switzerland	1998	176
United Kingdom	1997	149
Turkey	1994	16
United States	1999	296

n/a = Not available

Notes:

1. The table displays figures for the "total expenditure on pharmaceuticals and other medical non-durables", comprising "pharmaceuticals such as medicinal preparations, branded and generic medicines, drugs, patent medicines, serums, vaccines, vitamins and minerals and oral contraceptives plus a wide range of medical non-durables such as bandages, elasticated stockings, incontinence articles, condoms and other mechanical contraceptive devices".

2. The data have been converted from US$ terms into UK£ terms using the exchange rate series published in the same OECD database.

Source:

Figures are taken from OECD Health Data 2001

Electromagnetic Fields

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the role of overhead powerlines in causing breast cancer. [12068]

Jacqui Smith: The Department obtains advice on the possible health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields, including those associated with power lines, from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). The board of NRPB has set up an independent advisory group on non-ionising radiation (AGNIR)

> "to review work on the biological effects of non-ionising radiation relevant to human health and to advise on research priorities".

In March this year, the NRPB's advisory group on non-ionising radiation (AGNIR) published a report on the potential risks of cancer from extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields. Overall AGNIR concluded that

> "Laboratory experiments have provided no good evidence that extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields are capable of producing cancer, nor do human epidemiological studies suggest that they cause cancer in general".

In June, the International Agency for Research in Cancer (IARC) based in Lyon, France brought together an international team of experts to review the evidence for the possible carcinogenic effects of exposure to static and extremely low frequency (ELF) electric and magnetic fields. The IARC working group evaluated ELF magnetic fields as "possibly carcinogenic to humans" based on the statistical association of higher level residential ELF magnetic fields with increased risk of childhood leukaemia. In contrast, there is no consistent evidence that residential or occupational exposures of adults to power frequency magnetic fields increase the risk for any kind of cancer.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the California Health Department report on the possible health risks associated with power frequency electric and magnetic fields published in April 2001. [12385]

Jacqui Smith: The Department obtains advice on the possible health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields, including those associated with power lines, from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). The NRPB's independent advisory group on non-ionising radiation was set up:

> "to review work on the biological effects of non-ionising radiation relevant to human health and to advise on research priorities".

In March this year the advisory group reported that there is some epidemiological evidence that prolonged exposure to higher levels of exposure to power frequency magnetic fields is associated with a small risk of leukaemia in children but this is, however, not conclusive. They also noted that laboratory studies and human adult studies do not suggest that they cause cancer in general.

This view has been supported by a similar opinion expressed in a recent review of extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields and cancer by the International Agency for Research in Cancer, which classified extremely low frequency magnetic fields as "possibly carcinogenic" on the basis of the statistical association noted for children.

The advisory group discussed the report from the California Department of Health Sciences on possible risks from exposure to power frequency electromagnetic fields at its meeting on 30 October 2001. The group has commented that they know of no further scientific evidence published since their most recent report that would alter their opinion regarding evidence concerning exposure to power frequency electromagnetic fields and the risks of cancer as set out in their published reviews. They noted, however, that the California report also examined the possible effects of power frequency electromagnetic fields on a number of other diseases. NRPB is shortly to publish a review by the advisory group on electromagnetic fields and neurodegenerative diseases.

Special Care Baby Units

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government initiatives there are to recruit and retain qualified nursing staff for special care baby units; whether there is funding available to recruit and train such staff; what his guidance is on the criteria for closing special care baby units; and if he will make a statement. [12010]

Jacqui Smith: In the first year of the NHS Plan period, the number of nurses employed in the national health service increased by 6,310. We are committed to increasing the number of nurses and are increasing training places, encouraging former staff to return, and increasing international recruitment. The NHS is also changing to become a modern flexible employer.

The staffing of all services should inform a trust's recruitment and retention strategy.

It is for local health communities to decide on the pattern of service provision, including services provided by special care baby units, taking into account the needs of local people, evidence of effectiveness and available resources. The maternity and neonatal work force working group that we set up earlier this year will make recommendations on work force issues and models for configuring maternity services. Its work will feed into the development of the forthcoming national service framework for children and maternity services.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the effect on NHS mental health services of restrictions imposed by councils on the number of placements to be made by social services in nursing or residential homes; and if he will make a statement. [12052]

Jacqui Smith: There has been no specific assessment of the effect on national health service mental health services of restrictions that any local authorities may have chosen to impose on the number of placements to be made by social services in nursing or residential homes. Most people with mental health problems are able to live in the community, and many of those people who are admitted to hospital with mental health problems are able to return to their own homes, or to families, on discharge.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* independent sector groups have been involved in the planning and implementation of the national service framework for mental health. [12053]

Jacqui Smith: Many representatives of charitable and voluntary organisations, including representatives of service user and carer groups, were involved in helping to develop the national service framework for mental health through the external reference group and many continue to be involved in implementation, either through project work led by the Department and/or the mental health taskforce.

Care of the Elderly (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on funding for the care of the elderly in Buckinghamshire. [12390]

Jacqui Smith: I recognise the importance of ensuring that appropriate health and social services are available for older people. Buckinghamshire health authority's spending on packages of care for older people has risen significantly year on year for the past three years. Spending on older people's services within Buckinghamshire social services department is slightly above the average spent on other client groups. The joint review of social services, carried out by the social services inspectorate and the Audit Commission, will be reviewing Buckinghamshire shortly.

On 9 October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced £300 million extra funding for local authorities to tackle bed blocking. Buckinghamshire was recognised as a local authority needing extra help and this year was given over £700,000 from that extra funding.

Dry Rot

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance he has given to local councils on the treatment of dry rot and on which chemicals are permitted for its treatment. [12893]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has issued no such guidance to local authorities. Pesticide approvals for the treatment of dry rot are the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive.

Consultation Documents

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultation documents were issued by his Department from *(a)* 15 October to 14 January, *(b)* 15 January to 14 April, *(c)* 15 April to 14 July and *(d)* 15 July to 14 October in each year from 1996. [12902]

Jacqui Smith: During the period 1996–2001, the following number of consultation documents were issued by the Department.

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
15 January to 14 April	0	3	2	0	11	12
15 April to 14 July	2	0	4	3	7	7
15 July to 14 October	2	0	3	4	7	25
15 October to 14 January	3	1	1	6	7	[1]4
Total	7	4	10	13	32	48

[1] For the period 15–31 October 2001 only

MMR Vaccine

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the levels of uptake among two-year olds of MMR were in each NHS region in each quarter of the last five years. [12728]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Data on measles, mumps and rubella uptake collected by the Public Health Laboratory service communicable disease surveillance centre are shown in the table.

Percentage

Year and Quarter	Eastern	London	North West	North and Yorkshire	South East	South West	Trent	West Midlands
1995-Q1	93.7	87.2	92.0	93.4	93.3	95.1	92.4	92.7
1995-Q2	93.6	86.5	91.0	92.08	92.9	94.5	93.1	92.1
1995-Q3	92.4	86.5	90.1	91.8	92.3	94.0	93.2	91.6
1995-Q4	92.7	86.7	90.6	90.8	91.9	93.7	92.0	92.5
1996-Q1	92.6	86.6	90.9	91.1	92.6	94.1	92.7	93.0
1996-Q2	92.8	86.2	91.1	91.3	92.4	93.8	93.1	92.8
1996-Q3	92.6	85.9	90.8	91.9	92.4	92.9	92.6	92.7
1996-Q4	93.3	85.8	91.4	92.4	92.0	93.2	93.4	92.2
1997-Q1	93.3	86.0	91.2	91.6	92.2	93.4	92.8	93.0
1997-Q2	92.8	85.0	90.2	91.5	91.4	92.8	89.5	91.8
1997-Q3	92.9	84.9	90.5	91.2	91.4	92.0	88.5	91.7
1997-Q4	92.4	84.4	90.5	91.5	90.8	92.2	87.7	92.2
1998-Q1	90.7	83.7	89.7	90.7	90.1	91.0	88.7	91.5
1998-Q2	89.3	82.2	88.3	89.8	88.6	90.1	88.4	90.1
1998-Q3	89.0	81.6	88.2	89.4	88.2	90.0	88.9	90.7
1998-Q4	88.1	79.8	87.6	88.8	87.9	89.5	90.8	89.5
1999-Q1	88.7	79.7	87.6	89.4	88.3	89.9	90.4	89.3
1999-Q2	88.4	80.0	87.3	88.5	87.8	89.0	91.0	89.4
1999-Q3	88.9	79.3	88.3	89.1	87.9	88.9	91.0	89.2
1999-Q4	89.0	81.6	88.9	90.0	87.5	88.3	90.7	89.4
2000-Q1	89.9	80.0	88.4	89.4	87.6	88.6	91.6	89.3
2000-Q2	89.4	79.2	88.9	89.8	87.3	89.1	91.1	89.3
2000-Q3	89.3	78.8	88.7	89.5	87.5	87.9	91.7	88.7
2000-Q4	87.4	76.4	86.5	88.5	85.9	86.6	90.4	87.8
2001-Q1	85.9	72.3	85.6	85.9	84.0	85.7	88.2	85.7

Note:
Data collected through the PHLS CDSC's cover programme. Data are presented by quarter of the financial year (that is, quarter one runs from 1 April to 30 June, quarter two from 1 July to 30 September and so on).

Consultants

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many more consultants, broken down by specialty, will be appointed by 2004, above the number in post in 2000. [13059]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* The NHS plan stated there would be 7,500 more consultants in post in 2004 than in 1999. By September 2000, the number of consultants in post had already increased by 1,100 to around 24,300. The national health service is currently drawing up plans by specialty to deliver the rest of the increase, a further 6,400 posts by 2004, which will be targeted towards the key specialties needed to deliver the commitments in the NHS plan. Information for the year to September 2001 will be available in February 2002.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from which sources extra consultants will come in accordance with targets for 2004 detailed in the NHS Plan. [13060]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* Around 6,500 of the 7,500 increase will come from doctors currently working in the national health service, not in consultant posts. The rest will come from international recruitment and improved retention of existing consultants.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects the assessments to be completed on those patients who were receiving nursing care on 1 October but had not yet been assessed for free nursing care; [13151]

(2) how many patients were estimated to qualify for free nursing care on 1 October; and how many had been assessed for free nursing care by 1 October; [13152]

(3) what reason he has placed *(a)* an upper fiscal restriction on free nursing care in care homes and *(b)* no fiscal restrictions where the NHS provides nursing care in other settings; [13155]

(4) what *(a)* measures he has taken and *(b)* guidance he has issued to minimise delays in making advance payments in respect of self-funded residents in nursing homes; [13156]

(5) he will make a statement on the processes and procedures that have been adopted to assess people for free nursing care; [13161]

(6) when he expects all of the patients who are expected to have qualified for free nursing care on 1 October to have been assessed for free nursing care; [13162]

(7) what estimates he has made of the number of patients who will have to contribute to the cost of their nursing care because it costs more to provide than the banding system permits. [13241]

Jacqui Smith: The guidance on free nursing care in nursing homes was published on 25 September. This, and the accompanying directions to the national health service, set out the arrangements for health authorities and primary care trusts to carry out determinations of registered nursing care contribution (RNCC) for those eligible for free nursing care from 1 October. They should use their best endeavours to ensure that these are completed by the end of December and should agree the arrangements for making payments to nursing homes in respect of self-funding residents with effect from 1 October. The guidance also emphasised the need to process invoices from nursing homes as promptly as possible.

A survey carried out over the summer by the Department revealed that there were over 42,000 people in nursing homes responsible for funding their own care. While a small number of determinations were planned to take place before 1 October, the vast majority will have taken place after then.

The guidance acknowledges that, in some cases, individuals will be identified through the assessment and RNCC process who have exceptional long term needs for nursing care, both in amount and type, that do not meet local criteria for NHS continuing health care. The national health service has a similar responsibility to arrange or fund the services that individuals in nursing homes need as they would if they were receiving treatment in any other setting.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the type of training being given to nurses responsible for carrying out assessments for free nursing care; and how long the training lasts; [13153]

(2) how many nurses will be required in England and Wales to assess patients' eligibility for free nursing care; [13157]

(3) who, other than a state registered nurse, will be *(a)* involved in and *(b)* responsible for determining whether a patient is eligible for free nursing care; [13159]

(4) how many nurses will be *(a)* involved in and *(b)* responsible for determining each patient's eligibility for free nursing care. [13160]

Jacqui Smith: A programme of nurse training began in every region of England at the beginning of September and, by the end of October, a total of approximately 800 nurses had received training in carrying out the registered nursing care contribution (RNCC). The training lasted a full day and was supported by a practitioner guide published by the Department.

Apart from these national health service nurses, the guidance on free nursing care in nursing homes sets out the roles of lead nurses and nursing home co-ordinators who will also be involved in the process for implementing free nursing care. In some cases, nurses employed by nursing homes may also be involved in the determination. A single nurse will usually carry out the RNCC unless the individual has specific and special needs. In certain cases, a separate continence assessment may need to be carried out by a continence adviser at a later date.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons those suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's are not eligible for free nursing care. [13242]

Jacqui Smith: Anyone currently in a nursing home with a need for care from a registered nurse and who is paying towards that care should have it paid for by the national health service following a determination carried out by an NHS nurse under the arrangements for free nursing care introduced on 1 October. This applies equally to those with Alzheimer's disease and dementia as it does to other conditions.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the definition of equal and free access to sexual and reproductive health care as included in the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's document, "Making a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland". [12313]

Mr. Browne: The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission consultation document refers to:

> "... the right to have equal and free access to sexual and reproductive health care and to information and education relating to sexual and reproductive matters at all levels, free from coercion, discrimination or violence".

Full consideration will be given to the final recommendations made by the Commission when they are presented to the Government next year. If any clarification is needed on any of those recommendations, the Government will seek such clarification at that time.

Abortion

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he will take to assist the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission reconcile different views on abortion in the proposed Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. [12314]

Mr. Browne: In the consultation document published by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on 4 September this year, the Commission specifically excluded the abortion issue from any potential Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Parades Commission

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who the line manager is for an authorised officer of the Parades Commission. [11934]

Jane Kennedy: Authorised officers are self employed individuals contracted to the Parades Commission. Co-ordination of the authorised officers is carried out at Deputy Principal level within the Secretariat.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many authorised officers have been remunerated over the past 12 months; how they are appointed; under what terms; and what has been their individual remuneration. [11932]

Jane Kennedy: Over the course of the past 12 months the Parades Commission has remunerated 15 authorised officers. Recruitment was carried out by the Mediation Network for Northern Ireland on behalf of the Parades Commission. Authorised officers are contracted for a minimum of 100 days per annum and their remit includes mediation, education and community development. Remuneration for authorised officers is currently £10,200 plus expenses per annum.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who decides the appointment of the Parades Commission commissioners, the length of contract and level of remuneration. [11930]

Jane Kennedy: The appointments process is carried out in accordance with the Peach principles, and includes an external scrutiny element.

The posts are publicly advertised in the press and a selection panel meets to consider the applications received and a decision is taken whether to shortlist the candidates or invite all candidates for an interview. Candidates are interviewed by a selection panel, and a suitability submission is prepared for the Secretary of State's final approval of prospective commissioners.

Under the terms of Schedule 1 of the Public Processions (NI) Act 1998 the Chairman and other members of the Commission shall be appointed for a term not exceeding three years subject to the provisions within the Act.

Also under the terms of Schedule 1 of the Public Processions (NI) Act 1998 the Secretary of State may pay to the Chairman and other members of the Commission such remuneration as the Secretary of State may determine.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the Parades Commission commissioners indicating their background prior to appointment, their other remunerated public or private posts and the time they are expected to commit to the Parades Commission over the period of one year. [11931]

Jane Kennedy: A list of the Parades Commission members and their backgrounds is available in the Parades Commission's Third Annual Report which was published in June, a copy of which is available in the Library of this House.

An update of Parades Commission members' backgrounds and interests is currently being compiled, and will be available at a later date.

Subject to provisions under paragraph 3, Schedule 1 of the Public Processions (NI) Act 1998, a person shall hold and vacate office as a member, or as chairman of the Commission, in accordance with the terms of his appointment. Remuneration as a member of the Parades Commission is for an average of two days per week.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the travel expenses of the Chairman of the Parades Commission have been since his appointment, broken down by *(a)* his first year in office, *(b)* the year to date, *(c)* travel to/from Northern Ireland and *(d)* internal travel in Northern Ireland. [11929]

Jane Kennedy: During his first year in office (February 2000-February 2001) £18,546 was incurred on travel. Up to and including 26 October 2001 the figure was £12,449. The amount spent on travel to and from Northern Ireland from the date of his appointment until 26 October 2001 was £21,398. The cost of internal travel in Northern Ireland for the same period was £9,597. These figures do not include travel in London which was unavailable in the format required and would incur disproportionate costs to compile.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the procedure for complaint with respect to the work of an authorised officer of the Parades Commission. [11933]

Jane Kennedy: Any complaints about the work of authorised officers should be made, if necessary in writing, to the Parades Commission.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many nights the Chairman of the Parades Commission has spent in Northern Ireland; and what the estimated cost of the provision of overnight accommodation is. [11928]

Jane Kennedy: Since his appointment the Chairman of the Parades Commission has spent 126 nights in Northern Ireland. Rented accommodation is provided at a cost of £8,340 per annum.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Chairman of the Parades Commission was appointed; what his *(a)* length of contract and *(b)* level of remuneration is; and what criteria will be used to assess whether his time in office has been successful. [11927]

Jane Kennedy: The Chairman of the Parades Commission was appointed on 19 February 2000 for a period of two years. Remuneration for the Chairman is £50,400 plus expenses per annum. The normal range of factors applying to public appointments will be taken into account in assessing the chairman's contribution.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people the Parades Commission employs, broken down by levels of remuneration. [11926]

Jane Kennedy: The Parades Commission consists of six members each earning £26,000 plus expenses per annum and a Chairman earning £50,400 plus expenses per annum. The Commission is assisted by a Secretariat currently staffed by a total of 11 seconded civil servants. The cost of the Secretariat salaries in 2000–01 was £285,000.

Paramilitary Violence

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* punishment beatings, *(b)* punishment shootings and *(c)* murders there were in Northern Ireland in each (i) week and (ii) month from 1 April to 30 September; and if he will indicate for each week and month how many of those crimes were committed by (A) republican, (B) loyalist and (C) other groups. [11992]

Jane Kennedy: Statistics on paramilitary style attacks and murders as a result of the security situation between 1 April 2001 and 30 September 2001 are given in the following tables.

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks and murders by attribution 1 April to 30 September 2001 (weekly)

	Paramilitary style shootings		*Paramilitary style assaults*		*Murders*	
Week	*Loyalist*	*Republican*	*Loyalist*	*Republican*	*Loyalist*	*Republican*
1 April	0	0	0	0	0	0
2–8 April	4	0	2	2	0	0
9–15 April	2	3	3	0	1	0
16–22 April	3	1	0	1	0	1
23–29 April	3	0	1	0	0	0
30 April-6 May	0	0	2	0	0	1
7–13 May	2	0	1	1	0	0
14–20 May	3	2	0	0	0	0
21–27 May	2	1	4	4	1	0
28 May-3 June	2	0	0	2	0	0
4–10 June	4	1	0	0	0	0
11–17 June	0	0	2	0	0	0
18–24 June	5	2	2	0	1	0
25 June-1 July	5	2	1	2	0	0
2–8 July	1	0	3	0	1	0
9–15 July	2	0	1	1	0	0
16–22 July	2	2	7	0	0	0
23–29 July	3	1	2	0	1	0
30 July-5 August	0	3	0	0	0	0
6–12 August	3	3	1	0	0	0
13–19 August	0	2	1	0	0	0
20–26 August	5	5	1	0	0	0
27 August-2 September	2	1	1	2	0	0
3–9 September	2	5	0	0	0	0
10–16 September	3	2	1	2	0	0
17–23 September	0	2	2	0	0	0
24–30 September	3	1	1	0	1	0

Note:
Statistics for the 2000–02 financial year are provisional at this stage and may be subject to minor amendment at a later date.

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks and murders by attribution 1 April to 30 September 2001 (monthly)

	Paramilitary style shootings		*Paramilitary style assaults*		*Murders*	
Month	*Loyalist*	*Republican*	*Loyalist*	*Republican*	*Loyalist*	*Republican*
April	12	4	6	3	1	1
May	8	3	7	7	1	1
June	15	5	5	2	1	0
July	8	5	13	1	2	0
August	10	11	3	1	0	0
September	8	11	5	3	1	0

Note:
Statistics for the 2001–02 financial year are provisional at this stage and may be subject to minor amendment at a later date.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by his Department; if he will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans he has to sell further such assets over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review; and if he will make a statement. [10841]

Dr. John Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the National Asset Register (Cm5221 July 2001), which gives full details of departmental asset holdings. A reference to the Northern Ireland Office's pure heritage assets may be found on page 808 of that report.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside his Department. [13131]

Dr. John Reid: There was one case of computer hacking in the Northern Ireland Office in 2000, and there have been two to date this year. Of these, two were perpetrated by insiders, and one was an attack by an outsider on one of the Department's web pages.

There were no cases of computer theft (including fraud) in 2000, and there have been two to date this year. Both of these were perpetrated by outsiders.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [12266]

Dr. John Reid: The advertising campaigns for each of the past six years incurred the following costs:

Year	*£*
1995–96	[1]—
1996–97	135,938.07
1997–98	477,726.16
1998–99	887,303.00
1999–2000	330,630.95
2000–01	85,827.00

[1] Not available

Royal Ulster Constabulary (Overtime)

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what overtime costs have been incurred each month during 2001 by the RUC dealing with public disorder. [11072]

Jane Kennedy: The table details the monthly overtime cost for the current year to 30 September (regular and full-time reserve). The Police Service of Northern Ireland cannot readily identify that part of the overtime costs which relates to police officers dealing with public disorder. It is intended to introduce activity analysis data collection but this will not be implemented until April 2002.

In the absence of a database, the task of ascertaining definitive figures would represent a major undertaking and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

£000

Month	*Overtime*
April	3,531
May	3,035
June	4,232
July	4,520
August	7,809
September	5,160
Total	28,287

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department has recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside his Department. [13134]

Mr. MacShane: The number of recorded cases is as follows:

	2000	*2001*
Hacking	2	3
Fraud	0	0
Theft	7	2

Of the five cases of computer hacking in 2000 and 2001, one was carried out by an insider and the remaining four by persons outside the Department.

Euro

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information is being provided to British travellers about the effect of the introduction of euro notes and coins. [14306]

Peter Hain: Euro notes and coins will be introduced on 1 January 2002. They will replace national notes and coins in the 12 countries that participate in the single currency. We estimate that in 2002 British citizens will make 40 million visits to those countries. So I am today launching a leaflet that provides basic factual information for UK travellers on the transition to euro notes and coins in the relevant countries. Copies of the leaflet have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The leaflet is a joint production with HMT and DTI. It will supplement the information already available on the FCO website www.fco.gov.uk.

San Francisco

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Ministers from his Department have visited San Francisco since May 1997; and how many have stayed at the consul general's house. [13526]

Mr. MacShane: Our records show that there have been no FCO ministerial visits to San Francisco since May 1997.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Permanent Under-Secretary of his Department has visited San Francisco since his appointment. [13532]

Mr. MacShane: Sir John Kerr has not visited San Francisco as Permanent Under-Secretary, but of course did so when Ambassador to the United States.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many serving Prime Ministers have visited San Francisco since 1979. [13527]

Mr. MacShane: Since 1979, there have been no prime ministerial visits to San Francisco.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has undertaken with *(a)* the local chamber of commerce and *(b)* other business organisations in San Francisco with respect to the impact of the sale of the consul general's house there. [13529]

Mr. MacShane: Issues relating to the sale of the current house have been covered in correspondence this year between FCO Ministers and officials with the British

American Chamber of Commerce, Northern California, which represent many British business organisations in the San Francisco area.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to sell the consul general's house in San Francisco. [13525]

Mr. MacShane: The consul general, in conjunction with Estates Strategy Unit at the FCO, is seeking alternative property opportunities that will not only provide better value for money than the present house, but will also fully support the wider, especially commercial, objectives of the consulate general.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has consulted the DTI on the forthcoming sale of the consul general's house in San Francisco. [13530]

Mr. MacShane: Yes.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by his Department; if he will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans he has to sell further such assets over the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review; and if he will make a statement. [10838]

Mr. Wills: The stocks of antiques, paintings and fine wines held by the Lord Chancellor's Department are as follows:

Antiques: 484 items valued at £1,405,062,65

Paintings: 78 items valued at £395,000

Fine wines: nil.

There have been no disposals in the last three years and no disposals are planned for the next three years. It is not the Department's policy to capitalise non-operational antiques such as paintings and works of art. Such items are not therefore included in our National Asset Register entry. The information given here is taken from a recent valuation exercise, undertaken both to assess the materiality of such items and for stewardship purposes.

Operational antiques are included in the register under furniture and fittings.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [12255]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not readily available. I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as the information has been collated.

Community Court Order Warrants

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which agency has responsibility for the enforcement of warrants following the breach of a community court order; and if he will make a statement. [13830]

Mr. Wills: According to the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority and other magistrates courts committees, the numbers of community penalty breach warrants issued between 1 April 2001 and 31 August 2001, which were not executed or withdrawn before 28 September 2001, are:

(a) London—907

(b) West Midlands—494

(c) Greater Manchester—613.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many warrants for breach of a community court order issued after 1 April remain unexecuted in *(a)* the London probation area, *(b)* the West Midlands probation area and *(c)* the Greater Manchester probation area; and if he will make a statement. [13833]

Mr. Wills: Warrants are usually addressed to both police constables and persons authorised by the court to deal with enforcement.

Lead responsibility for execution of community penalty breach warrants was transferred from the police to magistrates courts committees on 1 April 2001. Each magistrates courts committee decides its own enforcement strategy. Some committees have elected to employ civilian enforcement officers or approved enforcement agencies to execute warrants; others have contracted this work back to the local police force.

TREASURY

EU Prospectus Directive

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the Government's policy is on the proposed EC prospectus directive; and if he will make a statement; [12978]

(2) what representations he has received about the proposed EC Prospectus Directive; and if he will make a statement; [12977]

(3) what estimate he has made of the total cost to business of the proposed EC Prospectus Directive; and if he will make a statement; [12979]

(4) pursuant to the answer of 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 798W, on the EC Prospectus Directive, if he will quantify the likely increase in the disclosure costs of small and medium sized companies. [13218]

Ruth Kelly: An effective single passport for issuers was identified as a priority for completion of the single European market in financial services at the Lisbon Council in spring 2000. The UK Government's policy is that the prospectus directive should achieve this goal; and that it meets the aim of reducing the cost of raising capital for EU companies, especially SMEs.

The directive, as currently drafted, could lead to an increase in the disclosure costs of issuers, and an increase in the cost to UK businesses of accessing capital by issuing securities. However, negotiations are at an early stage, and there are a number of issues that are as yet unclear, such as the directive's relationship with other existing directives, and the way that its provisions will be used. As the negotiations continue, the likely impact of the directive will be kept under close review.

HM Treasury has actively sought the views of interested parties, has received a significant number of submissions from the UK financial services industry, and is engaging with industry practitioners on an ongoing basis through round-table consultation meetings.

Rating Appeals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps are being taken by the Valuation Office to reduce delays in rating appeals; [13233]

(2) what the average delay is in valuation officers considering rating appeals *(a)* in each Valuation Office area and *(b)* nationally; [13232]

(3) if he will make a statement on the time taken before rating appeals are considered by the Valuation Office. [13234]

Ruth Kelly: So far during the current financial year, a total of 132,847 appeals against the 2000 rating lists have been settled and they took an average of 314 days to settle. The average for each group valuation office area is not readily available.

Rating appeals received by the Valuation Office Agency are considered immediately and categorised accordingly. Where there is a question of hardship (including foot and mouth related appeals) they are given priority. Others are allocated to published programmes, whereby they are dealt with by category and chronology.

The position is continually under review to ensure that appeals are considered as quickly as possible.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what action he took in *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000 to assess whether the Financial Services Authority was in compliance with the service level agreement concluded on 18 December 1998; [12818]

(2) how many people in the Treasury are involved in supervising the service level agreement with the Financial Services Authority, dated 18 December 1998. [12819]

Ruth Kelly: Until the implementation of the provisions of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, interim arrangements have been in place. These are designed to create the benefits of the new regime as far as possible under existing legislation. Under these arrangements, the Treasury has contracted out to the FSA the prudential supervision of insurance companies.

Staff in both the financial regulation industry and corporate services directorates are involved in the service level agreement. Formal quarterly meetings are held to discuss insurance issues. In addition, Treasury and FSA officials meet frequently, either with other colleagues, or bilaterally, to discuss a wide range of issues about the stability and competitiveness of insurance and other markets, and relevant regulation and legislation.

Golden Jubilee

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if her Majesty's Government plan to issue a gold sovereign of new design in celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen. [14307]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Her Majesty the Queen has been graciously pleased to approve my recommendation that next year a design showing the Royal Arms within a wreath of laurel should appear on the reverse of the gold sovereign.

The design is inspired by that on sovereigns struck during the first 50 years of the reign of Queen Victoria and for numismatists there will accordingly be a pleasing link between Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee of 1887 and next year's Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen. The new design, whose use will be extended to half-sovereigns, double-sovereigns and five-pound pieces, will be adopted only for the Jubilee year, after which the regular design of St. George and the Dragon will be restored.

It is expected that coins with the new design will be available for sale from early next year.

Treasury Supervision (Money Outlets)

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to supervise the regulation of *(a)* bureaux de change, *(b)* cheque cashers and *(c)* money transmission agents. [14473]

Ruth Kelly: Regulations are today being laid before Parliament to implement a regulatory regime for bureaux de change, cheque cashers and money transmission agents as recommended in the June 2000 PIU report "Recovering the Proceeds of Crime". The regime will come into force on 12 November.

Job Vacancies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when, and for what reason, he suspended the publication of job vacancy statistics; and when he expects to resume publication of such statistics. [12656]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 9 November 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question relating to the publication of job vacancy statistics. (12656)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) issued a press release at 9.30am on 11 September 2001 announcing the deferral of Jobcentre vacancy statistics from 12 September 2001. This was due to discontinuities which arose from changes in the Employment Services's methods for recording job vacancies.

'Employer Direct' is being gradually introduced across Great Britain to modernise and enhance the way the Employment Service deals with vacancies to provide a more flexible and convenient service for employers. It involves transferring the vacancy taking

process from local Jobcentres to regional customer service centres. Research by the Employment Service shows that it has the following effects on the Jobcentre vacancy data from May 2001:

A temporary reduction in the recorded level of outflows and placings owing to some delays in following up vacancies with employers associated with the introduction of the new arrangements.

An increase in the recorded level of newly notified vacancies.

Both the above effects lead to an increase in the recorded stock of unfilled vacancies.

ONS and the Employment Service are continuing to monitor and review the data with the aim of resuming publication as soon as it is possible to produce consistent statistics.

Mr. Miliband: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many job vacancies there are in *(a)* South Shields, *(b)* Tyne and Wear and *(c)* the north-east; how many there were 12 months ago; and what is the national vacancy rate per 1,000 of population. [13263]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Miliband, dated 9 November 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking for the number of job vacancies in South Shields, Tyne and Wear and the North East 12 months ago; and the national vacancy rate per 1,000 of population. (13263)

Statistics on Jobcentre vacancies are available up to April 2001. Later statistics have been deferred due to discontinuities which arose from changes in the Employment Service's methods for recording job vacancies.

The table below shows the number of unfilled Jobcentre vacancies (not seasonally adjusted) for April 2000 and April 2001 in the South Shields and Tyne and Wear Jobcentre areas, the North East region and Great Britain.

Jobcentre vacancies represent only a proportion of all vacancies in the economy—just those vacancies notified to the Employment Service. The proportion is likely to vary over time, across geographical areas and between different skills and occupations. Expression of such figures as a rate per 1000 population is therefore not appropriate.

Unfilled Jobcentre vacancies

Jobcentres	*April 2000*	*April 2001*
South Shields	618	1,032
Tyne and Wear	8,153	11,662
North East Region	17,654	23,586
Great Britain	332,511	362,504

Equitable Life

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the future for Equitable Life Assurance of the society compromise due to be voted on; and if he will make a statement. [13255]

Ruth Kelly: This is a matter for the board of Equitable Life and the members of the society.

Student Loans

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future of student loans. [11347]

Mr. Andrew Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced on 4 October that she is leading a review of student funding. This will examine the appropriate balance between the contribution made by students, their families and the state to support our ambitions to widen access and participation in higher education.

Limited Companies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what circumstances he will provide security for the debt of a company limited by guarantee. [12739]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 195–97W, and to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 671W.

European Crime Convention

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect of the draft protocol to the 2000 convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters between the member states of the European Union (10076/01; Council) and UK banks; and for what reason Article 50 of the Schengen Convention is repealed thereby. [13001]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

This draft Protocol builds on the European Union (EU) Mutual Legal Assistance Convention 2000. It imposes obligations on member states to respond to requests from other member states for information on bank accounts in the context of criminal investigations. There is a further obligation to establish the ability to monitor transactions within a specified account or accounts. Consideration is taking place as to the practical implications of this draft instrument for the banks and others.

Article 50 of the convention implementing the Schengen Agreement of 14 June 1985 relates only to assistance in the investigation of fiscal and excise offences. It is therefore of narrower scope, and will be superseded by this instrument when it comes into force.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

International Sporting Events (Special Needs Funding)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what sources of funding are available to enable young people with special educational needs to participate in international sporting events. [10542]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* At present, the main source of funding to athletes with a disability is provided by UK Sport through its World Class Performance Programme (WCPP) for elite athletes. Young people with special educational needs may be eligible for world class funding, provided they are named members of a national governing body's world class performance plan.

Funding is available within each sport's WCPP award for athletes to compete in a programme of international sporting events. These events usually include World Championships, European Championships and any other international events considered to be an important competitive opportunity for the athlete.

The athletes nominated on the WCPP receive individual support through their athlete personal awards. There are learning disability athletes included in two world class performance programmes—swimming and athletics. At present there are five athletes in athletics and six in swimming with learning disabilities. These athletes receive APAs and have access to funding to cover the costs of attending major international competitions, agreed with the performance and technical directors of the sports, within an agreed programme of events for the individuals and the squad.

As part of the world class funding initiatives, Sport England provides the world class start and potential programmes. These are designed to identify and nurture young athletes so they can receive the best possible training and services to enable them to achieve future success. The programmes aim to assist athletes with genuine hopes of success in the future.

Both UK Sport and Sport England have prioritised paralympic competitors for world class funding. Therefore, funds for non-paralympic sports are limited and rely on the network of volunteers and charitable organisations that exist throughout the country.

The Sports Aid Foundation gives awards of £500 to individual athletes nominated by national disability sports organisations who are of international standard although not included on the world class performance programme. The award is intended for domestic training costs but may be used for international travel events if applicable.

Individual governing bodies of sport directly fund athletes and teams to take part in international events. For example, the Football Association funds the England learning disability team and covers costs associated with squad training and major competitions. UK Sport also provides core funding to UK National Disability Sport Organisations such as the UK Sports Association for People with Learning Disability.

National Lottery (Sales Licences)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many shops in England are licensed to sell lottery tickets; and how many of these have had a sales turnover in the last 12 months of less than £52,000; [12763]

(2) if she will prevent lottery licences having a minimum sales requirement included as a condition of those licences; [12761]

(3) if she will make it her policy to prevent retail lottery outlets being required to increase substantially their sales as a condition of renewal of their licences; and if she will make a statement. [12762]

Mr. Caborn: The terms of the contracts between national lottery retailer outlets and the National Lottery operator, Camelot Group plc, are a matter for Camelot.

I understand from Camelot that 24,751 retailers have on-line lottery terminals, and a further 10,439 sell national lottery scratchcards only. Of those retailers with on-line lottery terminals, 1,936 had lottery turnover of less than £52,000 over the last 12 months.

Culture and Audiovisual Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the outcome was of the Culture and Audiovisual Council held in Brussels on 5 November; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [13269]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State for the Arts represented the UK at the Culture and Audiovisual Council.

The Commission presented a communication on the legal aspects of film and audiovisual works which clarified the application of state aid rules in the film and audiovisual sector, and proposed further studies on the legal deposit of audiovisual works, registration of films and a rights-holders database. The Commission also presented a communication on the application of rules on state aids to public service broadcasting which clarified what the Commission expects of member states.

Resolutions were adopted on: encouraging the development of the EU audiovisual sector; the role of culture in a knowledge society, including the need to take advantage of new technologies to increase access to the EU's cultural heritage; a report on the exportation of cultural goods and the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from a member state; and the role of culture in the development of the European Union.

During a public debate on the role of culture in European development the UK emphasised the importance of culture in promoting social inclusion, cultural diversity and community cohesion, and reinforced the significant economic impact of the creative industries.

Public Sector Broadcasting

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Government will fulfil their obligations under the treaty of Amsterdam to define the role of public sector broadcasting. [13223]

Dr. Howells: The treaty of Amsterdam does not impose an obligation to define the remit of public service broadcasters and the interpretative protocol introduced by the treaty makes it clear that such a definition is a matter for member states. In its recent communication on the application of state aid rules to public service broadcasting, the European Commission considers that it is necessary to establish an official definition of the public service remit. The Government believe that the existing broadcasting legislation and licensing system and, in the case of the BBC, the Corporation's Charter and Agreement, clearly set out the remit for United Kingdom public service broadcasters.

British Films

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what European Union funds are available for *(a)* the production and *(b)* the distribution of British-made films. [13382]

Dr. Howells: The "i2i" Audiovisual Initiative will make funding of approximately 600 million euros available to the European audiovisual industry over the next few years. The initiative was launched by the European Commission, the European investment bank and the European investment fund in December 2000 and will support a wide range of activities, including production and distribution. Support will be in the form of loans for medium and long-term investments in infrastructure (such as studios); production of film packages and distribution; global loans to the banking sector specialising in audiovisual matters to fund small firms which create or use audiovisual technology and shareholdings in risk-capital funds specialising in the audiovisual sector.

The EU's Media Plus programme runs from 2001 to 2005 and will provide funding of 400 million euros to the European audiovisual industry. At the outset of the programme just over 200 million euros was earmarked for distribution. Media Plus does not provide support for production but is aimed at supporting training, development, promotion and pilot projects, as well as distribution. The "i2i" Audiovisual Initiative has, in part, been developed to complement the Media Plus programme in respect of production.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Money Laundering

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of how many convictions there have been for money laundering in total across the EU, and in each individual member state, in each of the last 10 years. [12393]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The term "money laundering" refers to a number of different offences. Information taken from the Home Office court proceedings database showing the number of persons convicted for money laundering offences during the period 1991 to 2000 in England and Wales is given in table 1.

Data for other European Union (EU) states are not collected regularly. The data in table 2 have been produced from a paper produced by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and was collected from the mutual evaluations of FATF members of which two rounds have occurred since 1991.

Table 1: Number of offenders convicted at all courts for money laundering offences, by type of offence, England and Wales, 1991–2000[1]

Code	*Offence*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Drug money laundering offences											
93/49	S49 Drug Trafficking Act 194 (previously S14 Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990)	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	1	[4]—	[4]—	4	[4]—	12	5
93/50	S50 Drug Trafficking Act 1994 (previously S24 Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986)[2] Assisting another person to retain the benefit of drug trafficking	[6]—	[6]—	4	4	3	2	11	9	9	16
93/51	S51 Drug Trafficking Act 1994 (previously S23A Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 as inserted by S16 Criminal Justice Act 1993) Acquisition, possession or use of other proceeds of drug trafficking	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[4]—	[4]—	3	13	7	9	5
93/52	S52 Drug Trafficking Act 1994. Failure to disclose knowledge or suspicion of money laundering	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
93/53	S53 Drug Trafficking Act 1994 Disclosure of information likely to prejudice an investigation ("tipping off")	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
	Total drug money laundering offences	[4]—	[4]—	4	5	3	5	28	16	30	26
Offence of laundering proceeds of other crime											
53/26	S93A Criminal Justice Act 1988[3] as inserted by S29 Criminal Justice Act 1993 Assisting another to retain the benefit of criminal conduct	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[4]—	[4]—	2	10	4	4	9
53/27	S93B Criminal Justice Act 1988[3] as inserted by S30 Criminal Justice Act 1993 Acquisition, possession or use of proceeds of criminal conduct	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[4]—	[4]—	6	4	2	5	6
53/28	S93C Criminal Justice Act 1988[3] as inserted by S31 Criminal Justice Act 1993 Concealing or transferring proceeds of criminal conduct	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	1	4	[4]—	9
53/29	S93D Criminal Justice Act 1988[3] as inserted by S32 Criminal Justice Act 1993 Disclose of information likely to prejudice an investigation ("tipping off")	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
	Total for offences of laundering proceeds of other crime	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	8	15	10	9	24
Total for all offences		[4]—	[4]—	4	5	3	13	43	26	39	50

[1] Excludes any convictions in Staffordshire

[2] Court Proceedings data prior to 1993 cannot separately identify offences under S24 Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 (since consolidated and replaced by S50 Drug Trafficking Act 1994) from other drug offences. For the years 1993, 1994 and 1995, a special exercise was undertaken to identify this specific offence. However as a 100 per cent. response from courts was not achieved 'estimates' for these three years were made.

[3] Sections 93A to 93D Criminal Justice Act 1988 came into force in February 1994.

[4] Nil return

[5] Not applicable

[6] Not available

Note:

All data are given on a principal offence basis

Table 2: Number of convictions for money laundering offences, in certain EU countries

Country	Year	Convictions
Belgium	1994–99	182
Denmark	1994–99	88
Germany	1994	16
	1995	15
	1996	30
Ireland	1995–99	11
Italy	1994	125
	1995	
	1996	

Source:
Financial Action Task Force

Overstayers

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were made under the regularisation scheme for overstayers; how many applicants have had their cases decided; and how many cases are *(a)* under consideration and *(b)* awaiting action. [12870]

Angela Eagle: A total of 17,120 applications were received for consideration under the regulations of overstayers scheme. Of these 858 applications have so far been decided. Work is under way to validate the status of cases currently under consideration, though early indications are that there are now 4,300 cases in action within the integrated casework directorate. The remaining 12,000 cases are awaiting action.

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many caseworkers in the integrated casework directorate are engaged in considering applications under the regularisation scheme for overstayers; and if he has set a target date for the completion of consideration of applications under the scheme. [12804]

Angela Eagle: A dedicated unit in integrated casework directorate (ICD) north, currently comprising a senior caseworker and seven caseworkers, has been trained to consider applications under the regularisation scheme for overstayers. The resources allocated will be monitored closely as details emerge of the complexity of these cases and the productivity of this team. A target date of April 2002 has been set for the identification and consideration of cases where leave to remain can be granted under existing policy concessions. During the next financial year (2002–03) more caseworkers and resources will be devoted to the consideration of the remaining cases. The target date for the consideration of all cases is April 2003.

Incitement to Religious Hatred

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have taken place *(a)* for acts intended or likely to stir up racial hatred under sections 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 of the Public Order Act 1986 and *(b)* under the Race Relations Act 1976; how many convictions resulted; and what were the (i) minimum and (ii) maximum sentences imposed. [12659]

Angela Eagle: The available information, provided by the Attorney-General's Office, relates to England and Wales for the years 1988 to date and is contained in the table. This relates to the number of applications for consent to prosecute for each year and the number of convictions resulting from the prosecutions. The whole of Part III of the Public Order Act 1986 is covered in the table, therefore including section 23 in addition to those sections requested.

The records relate to the year that the application for consent to prosecute was dealt with and so it is not possible to state with any certainty how many prosecutions resulted in convictions in any given year. Also, there are no centrally held records that can provide reliable information as to the minimum and maximum sentence imposed in any given year.

The Race Relations Act 1976 no longer includes provision for prosecuting offences of incitement to racial hatred, this having been transferred to Part III of the Public Order Act 1986.

Consent Applications and Prosecutions Since 1988 Under Part III of the Public Order Act 1986—England and Wales

Year	Number of Attorney-General consent applications (per defendant)	Withdrawn	Not granted	Prosecuted	Convicted (Not necessarily in the same year)
1988	3	—	1	2	2
1989	1	—	—	1	1
1990	2	—	—	2	2
1991	4	—	1	3	1
1992	5	—	2	3	2
1993	2	—	—	2	2
1994	2		—	2	2
1995	8	1	—	7	6
1996	13	1	—	12	9
1997	12		2	10	9
1998	2	1	—	1	1
1999	4		—	4	3
2000	5		—	5	[1]2
2001-to date	8		—	8	[2]—

[1] Two results outstanding

[2] Results awaited

Source:
Attorney-General's Office

Golden Jubilee Medal

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the conclusions of his review of his decision not to award the Golden Jubilee medal to the police; and if he will make a statement. [12667]

Mr. Caborn: I have been asked to reply.

The matter is under consideration and I hope to be in a position to make an announcement shortly.

Passports

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many newly issued passports were lost in the post in each of the last five years; how many were subsequently recovered; and how many duplicates were issued. [11959]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The United Kingdom Passport Service only has information available for 1999 onwards on issued passports lost in the post. The figures for passports lost in the post and total passports issued are as follows:

Year	*Lost passports*	*Passports issued*
1999	2,359	5,134,172
2000	3,851	5,495,704
2001	[1]1,474	[1]4,890,941

[1] To September 2001

Information on total recoveries of passports is currently not routinely collected.

The figures for passports lost in the post are derived from reports of losses from members of the public and therefore all of these passports should have been replaced. There is an upward trend in the number of passports reported lost and this is of some concern to us.

The new digital passport has enhanced security features. These features would make it extremely difficult for someone who is in possession of a stolen passport to alter the document for use in a false identity.

Correspondence

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters of 9 May and 12 July, from the hon. Member for Putney, with regard to his constituent Mr. Rachid Boujelouah (Ref. R349629). [12686]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 8 November 2001. I am sorry it has taken so long to reply.

Incitement to Religious Hatred

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the leaders of different faiths with whom he has consulted concerning the proposed law on incitement to religious hatred; and if he will place a copy of their responses in the Library. [13690]

Angela Eagle: I have had a number of discussions on this issue with leaders of different faith groups. However, the importance of acting rapidly in the context of the events of 11 September has meant that a formal consultation process could not take place.

The following Questions should have appeared in the Official Report for 16 October 2001, Volume 372

Police Vehicles

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to introduce central purchasing of police vehicles; [6080]

(2) what guidance he issues to police forces concerning the purchasing of UK-made police vehicles. [6081]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 648W.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 12 November 2001

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sport

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions were held with Sport England on the establishment of the new opportunities fund for sport. [14108]

Mr. Caborn: I and my officials have held a number of meetings and conducted detailed correspondence with Sport England about the new opportunities for PE and school sport initiative.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the *(a)* start up and *(b)* operating costs are of the new opportunities fund for sport. [14107]

Mr. Caborn: The new opportunities school sport initiative is one of 13 programmes operated by the fund in the areas of health, education and the environment. The estimated direct costs for this programme to 31 March 2002 are £767,600 of which £97,600 represents start-up costs. Over the lifetime of its programmes, the new opportunities fund aims to keep its running costs within 5 per cent. of its lottery income.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to merge the New Opportunities Fund for Sport organisation with Sport England; and if she will make a statement. [14106]

Mr. Caborn: The new opportunities fund is the body designated in the National Lottery Act 1998 to distribute lottery funds to initiatives concerned with health, education and the environment, one of which is the new opportunities for PE and school sport initiative. I have no plans to merge the new opportunities fund with Sport England.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 802W, on departmental assets, if he will estimate the value of the Government art collection; and if he will make a statement. [13125]

Dr. Howells: It is not possible to give an accurate estimate of the value of the Government art collection, which, as a non-operational heritage asset, has no current market valuation. The current monetary value of a work of art can be accurately assessed only at the time of its purchase or sale or by professional valuation. The collection is not actively traded, and it would not be a justifiable expenditure of public funds to have the whole collection valued professionally.

However, from 1 April 2000 additions to the collection have been included at cost in the asset register of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, on the grounds that the purchase price provides a reliable basis for capitalisation. This accounting policy will apply to national museums and galleries and other collections from 1 April 2001. The value of purchased additions to the Government art collection as at 31 March 2001 is £124,000.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Rough Sleepers Unit

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Rough Sleepers Unit will compile information about the number of hotel places in major centres of population. [10780]

Ms Keeble: The Rough Sleepers Unit already compiles information on the hostel bedspaces that it funds. In addition, local authorities around the country hold information on hostel bedspaces in their area.

The RSU required local authorities with significant numbers of rough sleepers to assess the provision of hostel accommodation in their areas in order to develop local rough sleeping strategies. This information is held and reviewed locally but has not been compiled centrally by the RSU.

However, the RSU is now considering its future beyond April 2002 and information on hostel provision will be an important feature of any future work. Therefore such information will be compiled in the new year.

Under the provisions of the Homelessness Bill, local housing authorities would be expected to review the resources available to the authority and its partners in their periodic homelessness reviews: this should include reviews of hostel and other accommodation available to homeless people.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on how many occasions in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 1999 services on the west coast main line have been disrupted owing to collapse or other failure of the overhead power cables; and what average length of delay has been caused to passenger services as a result. [11505]

Mr. Jamieson: The following table from Railtrack shows the disruption to passenger and freight trains on the west coast main line caused by incidents involving overhead lines in 1999, 2000 and 2001. I understand that data are not separately available for passenger services only.

Disruption to WCML caused by incidents involving overhead lines 1 April 1999 to mid-October 2001

	Total minutes delay	*Number of incidents*
1999	67,019	358
2000	64,965	365
2001	111,971	371

London Underground

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has asked the National Audit Office to evaluate the PPP bids for the London Underground once the final bids have been prepared; and if he will make a statement. [11614]

Mr. Jamieson: The National Audit Office produced a report into the financial analysis of the London Underground PPPs in December 2000. The NAO has examined the further work London Underground and its advisers are undertaking on the financial analysis of the PPPs, and found that London Underground intends to take the issues raised by the NAO in its earlier report on board. I understand that, while the NAO will continue to monitor the situation, it does not believe that a further report at this stage would be useful.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assumptions regarding the cost to the public sector of cost overruns he is planning to include in the guidance for the public sector comparator for assessing the public-private partnership bids for London Underground; [12387]

(2) what plans he has to make changes to the assumptions underlying the public sector comparator for assessing bids under the public-private partnership for London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [12388]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's plans for a publicly run, privately built tube will deliver around £13 billion of investment to improve the underground's infrastructure over the next 15 years. The Secretary of State has made clear that he will only be prepared for these plans to go ahead if he is content that they represent value for money.

London Underground is carrying out a thorough evaluation of the value for money of bids, guided by the results of a public sector comparator. The detailed assumptions made in this comparator, including those on cost overruns, have been developed by London Underground, assisted by its engineering advisers Ove Arup and its financial advisers PricewaterhouseCoopers. I understand that London Underground, again assisted by its advisers, is currently reviewing the comparator to ensure that it represents a level-playing-field test for evaluating final bids.

The value for money evaluation of the London Underground PPPs will be made publicly available, but not until London Underground has concluded its negotiations with bidders. To publish the value for money evaluation any earlier would reveal London Underground's negotiating position and so undermine its ability to achieve best value.

Mr. Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he collates on the incidence of crime in underground stations. [13265]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for the British Transport Police (BTP). The BTP collate all data in relation to incidences of crime on London Underground. They publish annual crime statistics for London Underground, using Home Office guidelines, within their annual report. A Crime and Disorder audit is carried out annually for underground stations and this is also provided to the Government, all boroughs in London and the Crime Director for London. The latest such report will be available very early in the new year.

Motorway Speed Limits

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations have been made by the police in the past five years in respect of raising the maximum speed limit on motorways in the UK to 80 mph. [12328]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Area Cost Adjustment

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what external validation *(a)* will be and *(b)* has been applied to the use of New Earnings Survey statistical data used for distribution of the area cost adjustment for 2002–03; [12998]

(2) what steps he *(a)* will take and *(b)* has taken to ensure that small sample sizes in the New Earnings Survey data used for distribution of the area cost adjustment for 2002–03 are within acceptable statistical confidence limits; [12997]

(3) what criteria he uses to assess the acceptability of statistical confidence limits for data used for distribution of the area cost adjustment for 2002–03; [12996]

(4) what discussions his Department has had with the Office for National Statistics about the use of the New Earnings Survey in the calculation of the area cost adjustment for 2002–03. [12995]

Dr. Whitehead: The use of New Earnings Survey (NES) data for the purposes of calculating the area cost adjustment have been the same in every local government finance settlement since 1993–94. Ministers at the time, after extensive discussion with local government, decided that the current methodology was the most appropriate use of the data for distributing grant to local government. When the methodology was developed, there was consideration of sample sizes and whether to base the area cost adjustment on one or two years of NES data.

We announced on 20 July that we do not intend to change this long established methodology for 2002–03, while we review the grant distribution formulae as a whole in time for 2003–04. We have made careful checks that we are using the NES data in the usual way for 2002–03. This includes confirming that the NES data supplied to us by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) are correct, and validating the area cost adjustment calculations by ensuring that at least two members of our grant distribution team independently derive the same results. External validation by those outside Government is not possible because of the need to ensure the confidentiality of those included in the survey.

We have also been party to discussions between the ONS and the Association of London Government (ALG), who asked the ONS for an explanation of the movements in the data since last year. The ONS reply to the ALG confirms that the data that underpin the area cost adjustment for 2002–03 are correct. The reply is also a helpful contribution to our formula grant review. For example, it has a bearing on whether we should address possible volatility around small samples by using an

average of two or three years of NES data for the area cost adjustment. Smoothing the area cost adjustment in this way is one of the options we are currently discussing with local government.

Dry Rot

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent guidance he has given to local councils on the treatment of dry rot and which chemicals are permitted for its treatment. [12892]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department does not provide local councils with guidance on the treatment of dry rot in timber but refers such inquiries to authoritative sources of information such as the Building Research Establishment and the British Wood Preserving and Damp Proofing Association.

Chemicals permitted for treatment of dry rot are approved under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. The labels of approved pesticidal products will state which of these can be used specifically against dry rot. A list of all approved products is published in "Pesticides 2001"; this annually updated publication can be found in the Research Section of the House of Commons' Library.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the operation of the working time directive in respect of HGV drivers. [10307]

Mr. Jamieson: *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* There are two working time proposals that will affect drivers of large goods vehicles. First, parts of the horizontal amending directive (EC2000/34)—due to be implemented by 1 August 2003—will introduce some changes. Drivers will be subject to the 48 hour average working week, four weeks paid annual leave, health checks for night workers and a provision for adequate rest. As with existing working time legislation, workers will be able to sign an individual opt-out if they want to work longer than the 48 hour average.

The second proposal concerns mobile workers in the road transport sector and is still subject to negotiation in Brussels. The directive will only apply to drivers of large vehicles who are currently subject to EC drivers' hours rules (EC3820/85). It is clear that there will be no individual opt-out from the 48 hour average working week, but other significant issues have still to be resolved with the European Parliament. Negotiations should be complete by the end of this year, and we expect the new directive will be adopted in early 2002. Implementation in the UK will be in a further two to three years.

Pedestrian Protection

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* proportion of seriously and fatally injured pedestrians received their injuries from being hit by the fronts of cars and *(b)* the main types of impacts for pedestrian deaths in serious injuries are. [13417]

Mr. Jamieson: It is estimated that, in 2000, 53 per cent. of all pedestrians fatally or seriously injured in road accidents received their injuries from being hit by the front of a car.

73 per cent. of pedestrians suffering fatal or serious injury in 2000 were hit by a car in a single vehicle accident; 19 per cent. were hit by other vehicles (i.e. not cars) in single vehicle accidents; and 8 per cent. were hit in accidents which involved more than one vehicle.

Noise Mitigation

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish the timetable for the implementation of the ring-fenced budget for noise mitigation measures. [13217]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's policy of reducing the effects of traffic noise is being implemented through two programmes.

The Government's "Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan" gives a commitment to surface at least 60 per cent. of the trunk roads, including all the concrete trunk roads, with quieter materials by 31 March 2011. We have a policy of using quieter surfaces as a matter of course whenever a road needs to be resurfaced and I recently announced the criteria to be used for prioritising the concrete trunk roads to be resurfaced with quieter materials.

The second programme, with an annual £5 million ring-fenced budget, is to provide noise mitigation measures in the most serious and pressing cases where practical and cost-effective measures can be provided.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which light rail projects have received support from the Strategic Rail Authority since it was established. [13146]

Mr. Jamieson: While it is not for the SRA to support particular light rail projects, they have co-operated with franchise operators and local authorities in furthering the development of light rail schemes for Tyne & Wear Metro, Manchester Metrolink, Nottingham Express Transit and the West Midlands Metro. The SRA are also working to facilitate development of the currently proposed project in Bristol.

Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on the number of US states which have banned the use of methyl tertiary butyl ether; and what discussions he has held with his US counterparts in the use of methyl tertiary butyl ether as a petrol additive. [13253]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department does not hold details on the use of MTBE in the United States. I understand that the US Federal Government is proposing to reduce significantly or eliminate MTBE in petrol due to public concern about MTBE in groundwater. MTBE is used significantly less in the UK and there is no evidence to indicate that contamination of groundwater presents a significant risk here.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the use of methyl tertiary butyl ether; what plans he has to review the policy; and if he will make a statement. [13227]

Mr. Jamieson: Directive 98/70/EU (enacted by Statutory Instrument 1999 No. 3107) sets a limit of 15 per cent. on ethers containing five or more carbon atoms per molecule—which includes MTBE. For the UK as a whole, usage typically averages less than 0.5 per cent., with most production having none.

The main risk identified with MTBE, particularly in the USA, is to groundwater. In the UK public consultation has recently finished on a draft groundwater protection code for petrol stations and underground storage tanks to be made under Regulation 21 of the Groundwater Regulations 1998. This will provide advice on what processes/precautions need to be in place at petrol stations and other underground fuel storage areas to ensure protection of groundwater and compliance with the Groundwater Regulations.

Translation Services

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what translation services he ensures are available to local authorities in *(a)* England and *(b)* Staffordshire. [13500]

Dr. Whitehead: No such services are made available centrally to local authorities. It is up to each local authority to provide such services as are necessary in the light of their local circumstances.

Seller's Pack

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to re-introduce legislation to make a seller's pack compulsory. [13807]

Ms Keeble: Legislation will be introduced when parliamentary time allows. In the meantime we are pressing ahead, in consultation with consumer representatives and the professional bodies, with developing the detailed contents of the seller's pack.

Aviation Industries

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the airline and aerospace industries. [11335]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), on 8 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 339W.

Central Trains

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of services provided by Central Trains in the last 12 months ran on time. [13460]

Mr. Jamieson: Over the last 12 months 72.5 per cent. of services provided by Central Trains ran on time. Services are deemed punctual if they arrive at their destination within five minutes of the timetable.

Council Housing

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many households in *(a)* council housing and *(b)* registered social landlord having in each local authority area in London will have target rents set as a consequence of the Government's rent restructuring proposals (i) less than £20 above current rents, (ii) £20 to £30 above current rents and (iii) £30 or more above current rents. [14072]

Ms Keeble: The information is not currently available. Social landlords will only have completed their property valuations and calculated their target rents under the reforms around the end of this calendar year.

Overcrowding (Trains)

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment his Department has made of the level of overcrowding on trains on routes between Blackpool and Birmingham; [13920]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of powers to ensure train operating companies take action to address overcrowding on trains. [13916]

Mr. Jamieson: No specific assessments have been made but all train operators have a general obligation in their franchise agreements to provide sufficient capacity to avoid excessive crowding. In the Metropolitan areas, Passenger Transport Executives specify overcrowding controls for the services they require. One of the aims of the new franchise policy announced by the Secretary of State in July was to instruct the Strategic Rail Authority to reduce overcrowding and negotiate new franchises or extensions to secure the necessary improvement in capacity.

Empty Homes

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the latest estimate is of *(a)* the number of empty homes and *(b)* the number of homeless; and what steps the Government are planning to improve these figures. [13760]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* From the latest available information it is estimated that there were 763,900 empty residential properties at the beginning of 2000–01. The majority of these are classified as transitional vacancies.

The number of households accepted by local authorities in England under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, in the first six months of 2001 was 59,530.

The Government have introduced a number of measures to reduce the number of empty homes including a reduction in VAT and changes to the way local authorities plan for housing. We will consult shortly on

proposals to allow local authorities discretion to remove or reduce the 50 per cent. council tax discount for long-term empty homes.

Homeless acceptances represent households in need who are helped by local authorities into accommodation. The provisions of the Homelessness Bill will:

require housing authorities to take a more strategic, multi-agency approach to the prevention of homelessness and the re-housing of homeless households;

ensure that everyone accepted by housing authorities as unintentionally homeless and in priority need must be provided with suitable accommodation until they obtain a settled housing solution; and

allow housing authorities greater flexibility to assist non-priority homeless households, principally through a new power for housing authorities to secure accommodation for such households where they have the scope to do so.

To support these provisions, investment in new affordable housing through the Housing Corporation will rise to over £1.2 billion by 2003–04—about double the current level.

The Government are currently developing a national strategic framework to help prevent and tackle homelessness throughout the country.

Airport Slots

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to submit proposals to the European Commission in relation to regulations 248/92 and 95/93 governing slot *(a)* allocation and *(b)* ring fencing at Heathrow and Gatwick. [13697]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* The Government are currently reviewing whether they should seek to ensure that slots are reserved at London airports for regional services. One possible means of achieving this could be the utilisation of Article 9.1.a of Regulation 95–93. The Government have received a PSO application for the Inverness-Gatwick route from the Scottish Executive and this is under consideration. If the Government decided to impose a PSO, they would need to inform the Commission in accordance with Regulation 2408–92.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on demand for slots at Heathrow and Gatwick over the next five years. [13693]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* The Department has commissioned the South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS), which is considering all aspects of airport capacity in the area, having regard to future forecasts of demand. The study is looking up to 30 years ahead. Consideration of demand for runway capacity at Heathrow and Gatwick forms part of the work.

We expect the study to be completed towards the end of this year. Public consultation on the shortlisted options is due in early 2002.

Health and Safety Laboratory

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the costs of the Health and Safety Laboratory's estates in Sheffield and Buxton in 2001–02. [13934]

Dr. Whitehead: The Health and Safety Laboratory's estates costs for the current year are estimated to be £3,693,000.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the annual costs of the Health and Safety Laboratory's estates under the proposed PFI scheme on the Buxton site. [13933]

Dr. Whitehead: Commercial negotiations for the Health and Safety Laboratory PFI collocation project have not been concluded with the preferred bidder. Any proposed costs relating to this project are therefore commercially confidential and cannot be made available.

Housing Association Schemes

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many do-it-yourself shared-ownership scheme purchases there were by each housing association in each of the last five years; [12463]

(2) which housing associations participated in the do-it-yourself shared ownership scheme; and how many *(a)* do-it-yourself shared ownership scheme purchases and *(b)* transactions by shared owners there were in respect of (i) additional shares and (ii) outright purchase in each of the last five years. [12464]

Ms Keeble: Assistance under the do-it-yourself shared ownership (DIYSO) scheme led to 6,712 purchases in the years 1996–97 to 2000–01. Tables showing these purchases by housing association in each year have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The number of transactions by DIYSO purchasers in respect of the purchase of additional shares and staircasing to outright ownership is not identified separately by housing associations.

Contingency Plans (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contingency plans he has made to improve transport services in the west midlands if a national stadium is placed there. [13533]

Ms Keeble: The capability of the transport system to deal with the potential demands of a national stadium in the west midlands are being considered by the project teams and the Government. There are a number of current projects which will improve the performance of the existing network, including the M6 Toll and Active Traffic Management on the M42. If implemented, the recommendations from the West Midlands Area Multi-Modal Study will also significantly improve the transport system. The Football Association have yet to decide whether or not they want a national stadium.

Health and Safety Inspections (Hotels)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many hotels in *(a)* London and *(b)* the UK have failed health and safety inspections in the last 12 months; and what mechanisms there are to ensure that health and safety guidelines are adhered to. [13535]

Dr. Whitehead: We do not have any information in respect of the number of hotels in London and the UK that have failed health and safety inspections. Local authorities (LAs) are responsible for the enforcement of health and safety law in hotels throughout GB and LA inspectors will take appropriate enforcement action to ensure that health and safety guidelines are adhered to.

Fire Services

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many vacancies there are for fire personnel in the UK; and what steps he has taken to encourage more people into the service in the last five years. [13536]

Dr. Whitehead: Based on annual returns to HM Fire Service Inspectorate, the provisional figures for the establishment and actual strength of the fire service in England and Wales as at 31 March 2001 were as follows:

	Establishment	*Strength*	*Variation*
Whole-time	33,640	33,376	−264
Retained	14,960	12,033	−2,927
Control	1,428	1,440	+12
Non-uniformed	6,474	6,071	−403
Totals	56,502	52,920	−3,582

Local fire authorities are responsible for the recruitment and selection of fire service staff. In general the fire service is a popular career choice and applications far exceed the number of vacancies available each year. However, in some areas fire authorities and brigades do experience difficulties in recruiting to the retained (volunteer) sections of the fire service. For more than 10 years the Home Office, which had responsibility for fire service matters prior to the transfer to DTLR in June this year, has helped to encourage people to join the fire service both in a full-time and voluntary capacity by providing recruitment literature and advertising posters for local use.Over the last two years the Home Office, and now DTLR, have been encouraging. Fire authorities to review their recruitment practices in order to ensure they reach groups that are currently under-represented in the service. To help authorities to do this DTLR has developed new national recruitment literature which will be launched shortly.

Train Toilets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what regulations exist to oblige train operating companies to make working toilets available to passengers on trains; and what plans his Department has to make the provision of toilets on trains an obligation in future train operating franchises. [14706]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no regulations requiring train operators to provide toilets on trains, nor are there any plans for such regulations to be introduced. Train operators will only make the most of their commercial opportunities if they provide the facilities that passengers demand. The Strategic Rail Authority do not think it is a priority for investment to specify the provision of facilities which train operating companies are likely to provide of their own accord. Where train operators provide toilet facilities they are subject to the same environmental health requirements as any other provider of these facilities.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers the Strategic Railway Authority has to oblige train operating companies to make working toilets available to passengers on trains. [14704]

Mr. Jamieson: The franchise agreements under which rail services are provided do not require toilets to be provided on trains. Any changes to a franchise agreement would have to be negotiated by the Strategic Rail Authority and the train operator concerned.

Airport Security

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessments he has made of security procedures as they apply to *(a)* general aviation and *(b)* regional airports within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [13484]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department lays down the security requirements for the operators of public transport aircraft, both passenger-carrying and all-cargo, and the managers of the aerodromes they operate from. Following the attacks of September 11th these requirements have been extended to general aviation. DTLR inspectors monitor compliance.

Rating Appeals (Hertfordshire)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the cost to industry in Hertfordshire of delays in the consideration of rating appeals in the last three years. [13243]

Dr. Whitehead: I have made no such assessment.

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA), an executive agency of Inland Revenue, is responsible for compiling and maintaining the non-domestic rating lists. Since 1 April 1998, the VOA has received some 1,400,000 appeals challenging the rateable values entered in the rating lists compiled since 1990, including some 800,000 appeals against the rateable values shown in the list that came into force on 1 April 2000. Consideration of this number of appeals inevitably takes time. The VOA publishes programmes setting out when all appeals will be considered; these are reviewed in consultation with ratepayers. If, when an appeal is considered, the VOA and the ratepayer do not reach agreement on the valuation, the appeal will be heard shortly afterwards by an independent Valuation Tribunal. Appeals may be considered earlier than is set out in the programme, if a ratepayer is suffering financial hardship.

When an appeal is made, the ratepayer must continue to comply with the payment schedule as set out in the original demand notice from the local authority. Payments may only be altered following the settlement of an appeal and following the issue of a revised bill by the local authority. In general, the effect of any appeal leading to a change in rateable value will be backdated either to the date that the change in value occurred, or the first day of the financial year in which the appeal was made, whichever is the later. Where an appeal leads to a reduction in the amount due to be paid, any previous overpayment is refunded to the ratepayer with interest.

Railtrack

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 135W, on Railtrack, what action he will take to ensure the administrators of Railtrack conclude the proposed sale of the Oswestry branch line from Gobowen to Llanymywech to the Cambrian Railways Trust. [13859]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that Railtrack have proposed a meeting for 16 November with the Cambrian Railways Trust to discuss the proposed sale. The Trust has yet to confirm its availability.

Road Traffic Accidents

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* fatal and *(b)* serious, road traffic accidents involving monocular commercial drivers there were in each of the last five years where the monocular vision of the driver was a contributory factor. [14267]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not available.

Rosyth Ferry Terminal

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the *(a)* short-term, *(b)* medium-term and *(c)* long-term plans for the proposed Rosyth ferry terminal. [13937]

Mr. Jamieson: The proposal for the Rosyth terminal that was considered for Freight Facilities Grant purposes was the expenditure on works that the port expects to be completed in a matter of months. The service that these works will serve is designed to go on for several years, but no further development at Rosyth has been notified.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the proposals for the ferry terminal at Rosyth including *(a)* the initial investment plans and *(b)* the (i) short, (ii) medium and (iii) long-term plans. [13936]

Mr. Jamieson: All correspondence between DTLR and the grant applicants is commercially confidential.

Homelessness

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people at or above state retirement were placed in *(a)* bed-and-breakfast accommodation and *(b)* temporary local authority accommodation in the last year; how many were (i) permanently rehoused, (ii) placed in long-term residential care and (iii) found intentionally homeless, broken down by (A) sex and (B) age; and what the average length of stay was, in each responsible local authority, grouped by county. [13511]

Ms Keeble: This information is not collected centrally. Information on supported placements in long-term residential care and nursing homes is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Abandoned Cars

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimates his Department has made of the number of abandoned cars dumped in England in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 1997. [12571]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

Although the Department currently holds no central records of the number of vehicles abandoned each year we estimate that some 350,000 cars were dumped in the United Kingdom in 2000. We do not have an estimate of how many were dumped in 1997.

More up to date information on the number of abandoned vehicles removed by local authorities is being collected in the Department's 2000–01 Municipal Waste Management Survey which should be published in July 2002.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Consultation Documents

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many consultation documents were issued by his Department from *(a)* 15 October to 14 January, *(b)* 15 January to 14 April, *(c)* 15 April to 14 July and *(d)* 15 July to 14 October in each year from 1996. [12896]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO has issued consultation documents as follows:

(a) None

(b) None

(c) One, 1999

(d) Two, 1998 and 2000.

India

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with representatives of the Indian Government since 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [13727]

Mr. Bradshaw: India plays an important role in the international campaign against terrorism. As such, we have had a number of meetings with the Indian Government. The Prime Minister visited India on 6 October and met Prime Minister Vajpayee. Mr. Vajpayee visited London on 12 November for talks with the Prime Minister. The Foreign Secretary and his Indian counterpart, Jaswant Singh, met in London on 3 October and expect to meet again at the UN General Assembly in New York this week.

Pakistan

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the change in the internal stability of Pakistan since 11 September; and if he will make a statement on the control of Pakistani nuclear weapons. [14244]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) on 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 258W. We expect all countries, including Pakistan, to implement stringent safety and security measures at their civil and military nuclear facilities.

Gibraltar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy not to alter the sovereignty of Gibraltar without the consent of the people of Gibraltar. [13900]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to my statement on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 88–92WH. The Government will continue to stand by their commitments to the people of Gibraltar as set out in the preamble to the Gibraltar Constitution.

Foreign Debt (Serbia)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to support the demands of the Serbian Government to write-off two thirds of the country's foreign debt. [13105]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The UK Government strongly support the impressive economic reform efforts of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). As a result the UK will be seeking an agreement in the forthcoming negotiations between the FRY and its Paris Club creditors beginning on 13 November that reduces FRY's debt to sustainable levels. On the basis of current IMF projects HMG will advocate debt reduction by official creditors of 75 per cent. Consistent with our policy towards other recipients of debt reduction, any deal should be designed to provide the incentives for continued economic reform in the medium term.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Violent Incidents

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the serious violent incidents attributed to *(a)* the IRA and proscribed Republican groups and *(b)* proscribed Loyalist terrorist groups over the past 30 years, indicating in each case the (i) date, (ii) location, (iii) number of casualties and (iv) estimated cost of the damage. [12622]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police Recruitment

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the most recent recruitment campaign for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. [11493]

Jane Kennedy: The second recruitment competition for the Police Service of Northern Ireland was launched on 12 October, and the closing date for applications is 16 November. By 5 November, Consensia had received 8,700 requests for application packs, and the response in terms of applications received to date has also been encouraging.

Francis Devlin

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures will be taken in response to the European Court of Human Rights decision in favour of Francis Devlin on 30 October; what compensation he will pay to Mr. Devlin; how many cases contesting procedures relating to national security exemption certificates are outstanding; and what steps will be taken to settle those cases prior to any court hearing in Strasbourg. [12991]

Jane Kennedy: The European Court of Human Rights delivered its judgment in the Devlin case on 30 October. The court found a breach of article 6(1) because Mr. Devlin had no effective way of challenging the certificate issued under section 42 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976 in relation to his discrimination proceedings. The court rejected the Government's argument that Mr. Devlin could not rely on article 6(1) rights in the circumstances of his case. In rejecting this argument the court found a breach in the same terms as those found in the Tinnelly and McElduff cases. Following those judgments in 1998, the Government established a Tribunal, under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, to which an individual can appeal against a section 42 certificate. The remedial action required, should a similar situation to Mr. Devlin's case arise now, is therefore already in place. The court awarded £10,000 to Mr. Devlin and the Government are considering the terms of the judgment and their next steps in relation to this. The Government are aware of only one outstanding case in Strasbourg contesting procedures relating to section 42 certificates and are considering what steps should be taken to seek to settle the dispute.

Criminal Justice Review

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish the Government's response to the criminal justice review. [14740]

Mr. Browne: A draft Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill and implementation plan were published today and copies have been placed in the Library. Copies of both documents are also available on the Northern Ireland Office website, along with the outcome of an equality screening exercise.

Many of the recommendations will be implemented through the legislation. The implementation plan sets out the programme of work required to implement the criminal justice review, the time scale for this and who

will be responsible for taking it forward. It also states that the Government's target is to devolve policing and justice after the Assembly elections scheduled for May 2003.

There will now be a period of consultation before the legislation is introduced in Parliament. Subject to the outcome of consultation, it is expected that the legislation will be introduced in this Session.

DEFENCE

Territorial Army

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment has been made of the capability of each of the territorial infantry battalions to be deployed on operations as formed units. [R] [9672]

Dr. Moonie: Under the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) the Territorial Army (TA) was restructured to make it more relevant and usable and more fully integrated into our armed forces and defence plans. As a result, more TA units are now held at a higher state of readiness than pre-SDR and we continue to assess that the TA infantry battalions have the capability to be deployed on operations as formed units. As such they are an essential part of the Army's order of battle.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment has been made of the capability of the TA to provide the framework for the rapid expansion of the forces; and if he will make a statement. [R] [9676]

Dr. Moonie: The national footprint of Territorial Army (TA) units, created following the Strategic Defence Review, continues to provide a sound basis for generating formed units and individuals as an essential part of the Army's order of battle. We are looking at ways of increasing the contribution the TA makes to our defence plans. In line with the strategy for the Army (a version of which was placed in the House Library in March) a range of options is being considered including how the TA may be used in providing assistance to the civil community in an emergency.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Territorial Army units he has available with anti-aircraft capability. [13835]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* Within the Territorial Army, there are two Air Defence Artillery Regiments equipped with the Javelin air defence missile system, and one Air Defence Artillery Regiment trained in the use of the Rapier air defence missile system and the high velocity missile system. These are available at extended readiness to deploy on operations.

Summer Recess

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* press notices and *(b)* consultation documents were issued by his Department during the summer recess. [9235]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* During the summer recess, the Ministry of Defence issued a total of 27 press releases (excluding operational notes). No consultation documents were issued during this period. Copies of press releases and consultation documents can be viewed on the MOD's website.

Communications

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment is being made of the impact of improved communications on the ability of subordinates to take the initiative; and if he will make a statement. [11498]

Dr. Moonie: Much work has been done, and more is under way, to ensure that the full potential of improved communications is realised. New technology, including the Personal Role Radio and Bowman, is being introduced in such a way as to enhance the effective exercise of command. Army doctrine will continue to empower subordinates at every level to take the initiative within the framework of their commanders' intent.

Departmental Promotions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [12274]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am therefore unable to provide a substantive answer under the terms of exemption 9 (voluminous and vexatious requests) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

However, a breakdown of the Ministry of Defence's public relations' expenditure is published in the annual departmental performance report, broken down into categories of Royal Navy, Army, Royal Air Force and civilian recruitment, PR, marketing and business support services, chief of PR, sales promotion, scholarships and national employers' liaison committee.

Medical Preparedness

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in full the Three Services Board of Inquiry report into medical preparedness prepared by the Surgeon General's Department; and if he will make a statement. [11621]

Dr. Moonie: *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I assume the hon. Member is referring to the reports of the three Service Boards of Inquiry into medical preparedness for Op. Palliser. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 1 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 262W and to the comprehensive information which has already been provided on the conclusions and recommendations of the three Service Boards of Inquiry. Board of Inquiry reports are internal documents and, given their confidential nature, it is not the practice of the Ministry of Defence to publish them in full.

Defence Diversification Agency

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list Scottish firms that have had negotiations with the Defence Diversification Agency since its inception. [12187]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Defence Diversification Agency contacts with Scottish firms are listed. The list includes companies and private sector organisations where discussions are active, assistance has been provided, or discussions have been held but assistance could not be provided. The list covers the period from January 2000 (the agency having been established in the previous year) to date.

Company	*Location*
Clariant	West Lothian
Gemini	Tayside
Ferranti Photonics	Tayside
ESL	Renfewshire
Kogg Caledonia	Tayside
MacTaggart Scott	Midlothian
Enfocast	London/Scotland
Reign of Sound	Livingston
NMT	Livingston
Motech	Livingston
Tannoy Ltd.	Lanarkshire
New Product Technologies	Lanarkshire
Meiklewall	Lanarkshire
Linn Products	Lanarkshire
REVIVO	Highlands and Islands
Weatherford	Grampian
Stenmar Sonavision	Grampian
Prosyst	Grampian
Leading Edge Advantage	Grampian
IES	Grampian
Westica	Glasgow
Realise	Glasgow
Q1 Biotech	Glasgow
Diagnostic Potentials	Glasgow
Buchanan International	Glasgow
Ascom IT	Glasgow
Adenco	Glasgow
Magnetic Mirror Energy	Fife
ZED Vu	Fife
Viscotest	Fife
Simclar International	Fife
Optima Enclosures Ltd.	Fife
Movi-mail	Fife
Mission Technology	Fife
Mine Ordance	Fife
Miller (Methil)	Fife
Milestone International	Fife
Logistic Systems Ltd.	Fife
IDS Ltd.	Fife
ICM Fortronic	Fife
HCS Fluid Power	Fife
Freeform Technologies	Fife
Forth Ports	Fife
Easy Park	Fife
DNA	Fife
Cyber Frontiers	Fife
Co-drive Technologies	Fife
Cipher Solutions	Fife
Calluna	Fife
Bonnybrae Ltd.	Fife
Babcock	Fife
Alcan	Fife
McGregor Traders	Edinburgh
Image Fusion	Edinburgh
Footle	Edinburgh
Dovetail	Edinburgh
Amey Vectra	Edinburgh
Acuid	Edinburgh
Biotrix	Borders
Vesion 7	Ayrshire
Provan Engineering	Ayrshire
Orcam	Ayrshire
Evolvon	Ayrshire
Chilton	Ayrshire
Alan West Wallacetown	Ayrshire

Consultation Documents

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many consultation documents were issued by his Department from *(a)* 15 October to 14 January, *(b)* 15 January to 14 April, *(c)* 15 April to 14 July and *(d)* 15 July to 14 October in each year from 1996. [12898]

Dr. Moonie: Since January 2001, the Ministry of Defence has co-ordinated its written public consultation in line with the Cabinet Office's "code of practice" issued in November 2000. The Ministry of Defence issued six consultation documents during the period January 15 to April 14 and one document between April 15 to July 14. No documents were issued between July 15 to October 14. Prior to January 2001 these statistics were not held centrally and to establish accurate figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Defence Medals

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the criteria for determining the award of a defence medal for service personnel. [13178]

Dr. Moonie: There are no plans to review the qualifying criteria for the defence medal which recognised non-operational service for armed forces personnel and certain specific categories of civilians during the Second World War.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will instruct the Adjutant General's Office to instigate a review of the rules covering the issue of the defence medal. [13543]

Dr. Moonie: I do not believe there is a requirement for a review of the regulations surrounding the defence medal. In 1946, the Committee on the Grants of Honours, Decorations and Medals discussed the awards, and their qualifying criteria, that should be instituted to reward service in the campaigns, operations and defence commitments during the Second World War. Members of the Committee included senior military and Government officers who had first hand experience and thorough knowledge of the events throughout the war. The regulations governing the qualification requirements for all Second World War medals were finalised in 1948, following approval from His Majesty King George VI, and were announced on 11 June 1948. These regulations have been strictly adhered to ever since.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will create an accessible Board of Appeal for the award of defence medals, in order that evidence that is acceptable to a Court of Law is not disregarded. [13544]

Dr. Moonie: I do not believe there is a requirement for a Board of Appeal. The authoritative source of an individual's medal entitlement is properly their service record. If an individual disputes the official record then the onus is on that individual to provide official contemporary documentary evidence as proof of entitlement.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he delegates to the Officer-in-Charge, Army Medal Office, full authority for the decision making process for medal applications. [13542]

Dr. Moonie: The proposed qualifying criteria for medals are submitted to the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals (HD Committee) for consideration, after which their recommendation is passed to the Sovereign for approval. Following Royal assent the Officer-in-Charge of the Army Medal Office is responsible for ensuring that all applications for Army and Home Guard medals fulfil the relevant qualifying criteria by checking eligibility against official service records. The Navy, Royal Air Force and Royal Marines have their own medal offices with the appropriate delegated authority.

Golden Jubilee Medals

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received to grant the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal to service men who were injured during World War Two; and if he will make a statement. [13225]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has not received any representations requesting an amendment to the qualifying criteria for the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal to include those service men who were injured during the Second World War.

War Pensions

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 132W, on war pensions, if he will state *(a)* how many expert caseworkers there are and *(b)* whether all the caseworkers are qualified medical doctors. [13745]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently five expert caseworkers employed by the War Pensions Agency. All are medically qualified and hold full registration with the General Medical Council.

Saif Sareea

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many missions or training packages involving UK armoured vehicles and tanks as part of Saif Sareea II were *(a)* cancelled and *(b)* reduced in package due to (i) serviceability shortfalls and (ii) technical malfunctions in the vehicles; what percentage of missions or training packages involving UK armoured vehicles or tanks this represents; and if he will make a statement. [11769]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* Inevitably on occasions minor technical or mechanical problems temporarily required individual Challenger 2 tanks and other vehicles to undergo short periods of maintenance, but overall the armoured vehicles deployed on Exercise Saif Sareea 2 successfully completed the tasks required of them.

The extent of the involvement of Challenger 2 was, however, adjusted during the exercise as further experience was gained in operating the tank in the harsh desert environment. Previous experience of operating other armoured vehicle types in desert conditions meant that maintenance could be more accurately programmed and no adjustment to their involvement was necessary.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason logistical aspects of Saif Sareea 2 were carried out in non-tactical settings. [11748]

Mr. Hoon: The extent to which logistic support to a major exercise is conducted tactically requires a very careful balance to be made between the effective conduct of the wider exercise, the training benefit to be gained and the costs both financial and on military manpower. In the case of Exercise Saif Sareea, the vast majority of logistic support was conducted tactically throughout the exercise play.

The sole major exception to this was third line logistic support to the deployed land forces: logistic support to land forces in the exercise area was conducted tactically, but was non-tactical along the 1,200 kilometre line of communication across Oman. To have deployed tactically at third line would have placed a major additional burden on army logistics staffs, with little or no gain in terms of training benefit.

Afghanistan

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of the munitions used in each week of the Afghanistan campaign. [13523]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 114W, to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker).

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of cluster bombs used in Afghanistan did not explode on impact. [14253]

Mr. Ingram: The cluster bombs used in Afghanistan have not been prohibited by any treaty or convention and they are employed only against legitimate terrorist and military objectives where they are the most effective weapon to attack the target concerned. All types of munitions can fail in various ways and cluster bombs are no exception. However, it is not for Her Majesty's Government to comment on the performance of US weapons.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications have taken place between his Department and operational commanders involved in military actions in Afghanistan in respect of the clear labelling of yellow cluster bombs and yellow food parcels; and what plans there are to halt the use of cluster bombs by the Allied coalition forces involved in operations in Afghanistan. [14265]

Mr. Ingram: We are in close touch with the US on all aspects of the response to the 11 September attacks, including at the military planning level. I understand that the US authorities have recognised that there is a problem with bomblets from cluster bombs and food parcels both being yellow. They have, therefore, dropped leaflets with diagrams of the two explaining which should be approached and which avoided.

Cluster bombs are legitimate weapons that have not been prohibited by any treaty or convention. There are no plans to halt their use against legitimate terrorist and military targets.

Depleted Uranium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 519W, which categories of nuclear weapons contain depleted uranium; and what the purpose is of including depleted uranium in these weapons. [14271]

Dr. Moonie: The UK Trident warheads for our nuclear deterrent contain depleted uranium. The purpose of this material is ultimately associated with the functioning of the warhead and the details are classified. For this reason I am withholding this information under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Procurement Contracts

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with how many small and medium enterprises his Department has signed procurement contracts. [14115]

Dr. Moonie: The information is not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Ministry of Defence places around 50,000 contracts annually with a total value of around £9 billion.

Smallpox Antidote

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what levels of smallpox antidote are held by his Department. [14120]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not hold a supply of smallpox vaccine.

Military Supplies

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by whom the review of military supplies will be conducted; and if he will make a statement. [14124]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has been conducting an extensive review of all its logistic stockholdings to ensure consistency with defence planning assumptions. This work started over 12 months ago. In light of September 11, and as a standard military practice, we have reviewed the validity of that original work.

Bowman

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date he expects the Bowman personal role radio to be in service. [14121]

Dr. Moonie: Following the successful employment of personal role radios by 45 Commando RM on Exercise Saif Sareea 2, we expect to meet the declared in-service date by the end of this year, some three months earlier than planned.

Nuclear Warfare Strategy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the UK's nuclear warfare strategy. [14117]

Mr. Hoon: The Government's nuclear weapon policy was set out in the Strategic Defence Review.

Indirect Fire Precision Attack

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Indirect Fire Precision Attack project. [14116]

Dr. Moonie: The Indirect Fire Precision Attack (IFPA) project will provide the Army with all-weather, 24-hour Indirect Fire System for the precision attack of targets at extended range. BAE Systems has been selected, after competition, as the preferred bidder to manage the Assessment Phase contract, which is expected to be placed in early 2002.

On current plans we expect to decide whether to proceed into the demonstration and manufacturing stage in 2005. If so the first IFPA capability would be delivered in 2010 and full IFPA capability would then enter service after 2015, incrementally under Smart Acquisition.

UK Airports (Military Protection)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military protection is being offered to UK airports; and if he will make a statement. [14125]

Mr. Ingram: Responsibility for airport security rests with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), who are currently working on this issue in consultation with other Departments, including the Ministry of Defence. There are long-standing arrangements for the armed forces to provide support to the DTLR, should a specific threat arise.

Civil National Infrastructure

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to deploy *(a)* armed forces personnel and *(b)* reservists to protect critical elements of the civil national infrastructure, other than nuclear power installations. [14118]

Mr. Ingram: Security of the critical elements of the civil national infrastructure rests with a number of Government Departments. The police may request the support of the armed forces to guard key installations should other resources prove insufficient. While we maintain close contact with the police, there have been no recent requests for this support.

The possible deployment of the Territorial Army and reservists in this role will be considered during the development of the new chapter of the Strategic Defence Review, announced in the House on 4 October. This work will consider the requirement for additional resources, should this and/or other roles be identified, and the cost-effectiveness of the armed forces playing a greater part in this work.

Forces Review

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which divisions of his Department are contributing to the Forces Review; and if he will make a statement. [14119]

Mr. Hoon: As I have made clear, the work we are conducting is not a new Strategic Defence Review. It is more the adding of a further chapter to the existing SDR to ensure that we have the right concepts, forces and

capabilities in place to meet the additional challenges posed by asymmetric threats of the kind that we saw on 11 September.

A wide range of individuals are taking part in the work from many areas of the Ministry of Defence, because of their current responsibilities and/or their wider knowledge and expertise. We are also involving other Government Departments and other experts. At this stage, the work is being led by the policy area within the MOD.

Desert Combat Suits

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many desert combat suits are held at command ordnance depots. [14031]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently 53,647 pairs of desert trousers (across 27 sizes) and 118,490 desert jackets (across 13 sizes) held in UK ordnance depots. The Ministry of Defence does not hold information on the number of desert combat suits held in the Commonwealth depots.

Army Foundation College

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which MOD sites are under consideration for the siting of a new Army Foundation College. [13932]

Mr. Ingram: The Army is currently examining options for improving its system of initial training, including the establishment of a second Army Foundation College, together with the provision of improved facilities that are appropriate for the future and for a range of abilities and age groups, to build in the success of the existing college at Harrogate. These options include the provision of a college through partnership with the private sector. As part of this process, the Army is considering options that include existing Ministry of Defence sites, to select a Public Sector Comparator for the project. I am withholding the details of the MOD sites in question in accordance with exemption 7 (Effective Management and Operations of the Public Service) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. If it were decided to pursue the partnership option, this would be announced in the normal way through the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. It would then be open for any proposals for the college, including its location, to be put forward for consideration as part of the competitive process. We anticipate a variety of sites, including existing MOD and other locations, to be proposed.

A decision on the way forward is unlikely before next year.

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procurement spending commitments implicit in the Strategic Defence Review he will meet. [14123]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave on 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 513–14W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann).

Defence Imports (Israel)

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what stage is the proposed purchase from Israel of the Gill-Spike anti-tank missile; what the results are of the tests of the missile by his Department in the UK and Canada; and if he will make a statement. [13667]

Dr. Moonie: Gill-Spike is already in service with the Israeli Ministry of Defence. The UK is currently evaluating Spike along with the US Javelin weapon to assess the most appropriate system to meet our requirement for medium range anti-tank guided weapons. The results of the trials will be considered, along with all other relevant factors including cost and time scales, before reaching a final decision. We expect to do so late next year.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the *(a)* quantity and *(b)* category of defence equipment purchased from Israel for each year from 1997. [13671]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1997, five contracts have been placed with prime contractors based in Israel:

Year	*Category of equipment*	*Quantity*
1997	Spares: grenade sight caps	Information not held centrally
	Small arms ammunition	In the order of 25 million rounds of ammunition
1998	Manual loader for air-to-ground missile	60
1999	No contracts placed	
2000	Concept Study	Not applicable
2001	Anti-tank missile hardware for assessment trials	14 missiles and associated equipment

Overseas Entertainment

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* acts and *(b)* costs of artists performing for UK forces overseas, in the past five years. [14122]

Mr. Ingram: Information in the precise format requested is not held by the Ministry of Defence. Officials are, however, establishing with the Services Sound and Vision Corporation who organise "Combined Services Entertainment" details of the number of shows performed in each of the past five years, the overall cost for each show and examples of artists who have performed. I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House. I am withholding costs of the artists performing for reasons of commercial confidentiality in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

RAF Coltishall, Norfolk

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the security of personal items of service men at RAF Coltishall, Norfolk; and if he will make a statement. [14325]

Mr. Ingram: No assessment has been made of the security of personal items of serving personnel at RAF Coltishall, Norfolk. Service personnel are routinely briefed on how to ensure the security of their personal items.

Challenger 2

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if halt drills for Challenger 2 require filters to be cleaned. [13764]

Dr. Moonie: The halt drills for the Challenger 2 main battle tank do not require filters to be cleaned. There is, however, a requirement to check the warning light for the filter indicators and replace filters as required.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes in halt drills have taken place since the introduction of Challenger 2. [13765]

Dr. Moonie: There have been some very minor changes to the halt drills since the introduction of the Challenger 2 main battle tank. These relate to checking the light source for the muzzle reference system and inspection of the main armament at periodic intervals.

TREASURY

Pensioners (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people of pensionable age there are in the Buckingham constituency. [14210]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the national statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated 12 November 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning how many people of pensionable age there are in the Buckingham constituency. (14210)

ONS does not produce population estimates on parliamentary constituency boundaries. The smallest area level for which we produce population estimates is for local authorities.

Mid 2000 estimates of the number of people of pensionable age in local authority areas area available in table 8 on the National Statistics website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme population/PENo3/PENo3 v3.pdf

Unemployment (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the level of unemployment was in the Buckingham constituency in *(a)* September 2000 and *(b)* September 2001. [14204]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the national statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated 12 November 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question concerning the level of unemployment in the Buckingham constituency in September 2000 and September 2001. (14202)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles statistics for unemployment from surveys following the internationally standard International Labour Organisation definition. However, for the Buckingham parliamentary constituency the survey sample size is too small to provide estimates. ONS also compiles statistics of claimants of unemployment-related benefits. The claimant count consists of all people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or National Insurance credits at Employment Service local offices. They must declare that they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work during the week in which the claim is made.

Between September 2000 and September 2001 the claimant count level in the Buckingham parliamentary constituency rose by 25 from 354 to 379.

NIRS2

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the NIRS2 computer system to be fully operational. [11686]

Dawn Primarolo: The NIRS2 computer system is fully operational.

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much additional VAT revenue was secured by shadow economy teams in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date. [12206]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The information is as follows:

Additional VAT revenue

	£ million
1999–2000	43.6
2000–01	[1]—
2001–02	[1]—

[1] Data not yet available

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average case value was of cases of VAT fraud investigated by HM Customs and Excise under the civil penalty procedure in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 to date; and if he will express the figures both in actual cash terms and in constant prices. [12211]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The average values for VAT civil evasion cases are as follows:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Actual average value (£)*	*At constant 2000–01 prices (£)*
1997–98	898	28,000	30,000
1998–99	902	32,000	33,000
1999–2000	861	35,000	37,000
2000–01	729	49,000	49,000

These figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Budget Allocations

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what additional budget allocations have been made since 11 September to *(a)* the UK security services, *(b)* the

Ministry of Defence, *(c)* the Department for International Development and *(d)* other Departments; and if he will make a statement; [9952]

(2) what allocations have so far been approved out of the reserves for the financial years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [8931]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer, 25 October 2001]:* The Chancellor has made it clear that the Government will meet the costs of measures related to our response to international terrorism, while continuing to deliver our spending plans within the fiscal rules. Any additions to departmental expenditure limits will continue to be reported to Parliament through the supplementary estimates process in the normal way.

Tax Deduction

Derek Conway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the basis is for the policy of allowing tax deducted from bank and building society deposits to be reclaimed, but not from dividends paid on shares and unit trusts; and if he will make a statement. [14085]

Ruth Kelly: Income tax is deducted at source from bank and building society interest, and the tax deducted can be reclaimed where a saver is not liable to pay it. There is no tax deduction at source from dividends, and so no tax to reclaim. Dividends carry a tax credit which satisfies the tax liability of investors with income up to the basic rate limit, but non-taxpayers cannot claim payment of this tax credit.

Fuel Duties (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received as to the effect of fuel duties on businesses in the Greater London area in the last 12 months. [13441]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor receives many representations covering a wide range of issues including the impact of fuel duties upon the economy. These are given due consideration in the context of the Budget judgment.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if part-time employees or ex-employees who have been awarded backdated access to their occupational pension schemes, will be permitted to take the relevant tax relief for the year in which the contribution applied; and if he will relax sections 592 and 594 of the Taxes Act 1988 to permit such persons to make a one-off tax-free contribution of greater than the annual permitted amount. [13652]

Ruth Kelly: Part-time employees have always been able to join and contribute to tax approved pensions schemes on the same basis as other employees. Any restriction on the participation of part-time employees in an occupational pension scheme is as a result of scheme rules.

It is up to employers and employees to settle how to give part-timers' rights to retrospective membership in occupational pension schemes, or agree equivalent compensation. In such cases there are no limits on the amounts of contributions which employers and employees may make to defined benefit occupational pension schemes. Employee contributions of up to 15 per cent. of the pay of the year of payment of contributions qualify for tax relief, as do all employer contributions.

Customs and Excise (Officer Suspensions)

Mr. Singh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs and Excise officers are suspended over allegations relating to a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice; and in which areas of the country they were based. [13715]

Mr. Boateng: Eight officers are suspended: at Leeds (six), Brighton (one) and London (one).

Heroin Seizures

Mr. Singh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much heroin seized in the last year in the United Kingdom was supplied from Pakistan; and whether this includes controlled deliveries by Customs and Excise from Pakistan to the United Kingdom. [13714]

Mr. Boateng: The complexity of smuggling routes means that Customs does not know the country of origin of all drug seizures. Of the heroin seized in the UK by Customs during the financial year 2000–01, 83 kg is recorded as having Pakistan as the known country of origin. It is not policy to give details of investigative techniques as that could prejudice the investigation and detection of crime.

Customs and Excise (Controlled Deliveries)

Mr. Singh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many operations conducted by HM Customs and Excise in relation to controlled deliveries are under legal review by independent counsel. [13716]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise has asked independent counsel to advise on five controlled delivery cases.

Debt Write-off

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to write off debts owed by the poorest countries; and if he will make a statement. [13459]

Mr. Boateng: The UK has consistently been at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief for developing countries. The UK pushed for the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative to be speeded up, and as a result 23 countries were receiving debt relief at the end of October. Those countries will receive $54 billion in debt relief, which will reduce their debts to below the developing country average.

The UK's 100 per cent. bilateral policy on debt relief means that it stands ready to write off £1.9 billion of debt to all 42 HIPCs, and is one of the highest contributors to the HIPC trust fund.

In addition, the Chancellor also announced last December that the UK would hold in trust any payments from those HIPCs yet to receive debt relief, and we continue to call on other creditor countries to follow our lead.

Cigarette Imports

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the interpretation of the phrase, for own consumption, when applied to the import of cigarettes from the EU into the United Kingdom. [13193]

Mr. Boateng: The definition of "own use" and the circumstances whereby people travelling to the UK from other EU countries are entitled to bring into the UK without charge cigarettes which they have purchased tax-paid elsewhere in the EU are set out in the Excise Duties (Personal Reliefs) Order 1992.

Equitable Life

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimate is of the cost of the Penrose inquiry in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [12842]

Ruth Kelly: No firm estimate has been made of the cost of the Penrose inquiry. Whatever resources are required by Lord Penrose will be made available to him.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff are employed on the Penrose inquiry *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time. [12841]

Ruth Kelly: The Penrose inquiry is an independent inquiry and the number of staff employed on it will be determined by the requirements of Lord Penrose. I understand that currently there are seven full-time and two part-time staff employed on the inquiry.

Manufacturing

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures are being taken to help improve manufacturing employment and the share of GDP produced by the manufacturing sector. [13002]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are committed to creating and maintaining the right climate for businesses of all kinds to flourish, invest and grow. Since 1997, the Government's central economic objective has been to achieve high and stable levels of growth and employment. To this end, they have pursued macro-economic and enterprise policies which promote business activity, and which should contribute to higher productivity. The Government have been determined that we will not return to the damaging cycle of boom and bust, which created so much uncertainty and trapped businesses in a cycle of low investment and low productivity.

Specific measures of benefit to manufacturing, in support of this objective, have been detailed in successive Budgets, pre-Budget reports and various White Papers, including "Opportunity for All in a World of Change" (Cm 5052) and "Excellence and Opportunity—A Science and Innovation Policy for the 21st Century" (Cm 4814).

Tax Burdens

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* discussions he has had with and *(b)* representations he has received from the social exclusion unit regarding the tax burden on families in the lowest income quintile. [12801]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government are committed to helping all families with children through the tax and benefit system, targeting the most support on those who need it most. The Treasury works closely with other Departments, including with the social exclusion unit, to help achieve this aim.

As a result of personal tax and benefit measures since 1997, families with children in the lowest income quintile are on average £1,700 a year better off.

Post Office Closures

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on financial exclusion among persons in the lowest income quintile resulting from sub-post office closures in *(a)* inner-city and *(b)* rural areas in the past four years. [12803]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government have made no such assessment.

Consultation Documents

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many consultation documents were issued by his Department from *(a)* 15 October to 14 January, *(b)* 15 January to 14 April, *(c)* 15 April to 14 July and *(d)* 15 July to 14 October in each year from 1996. [12894]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 258–59W, and to the response to the question by the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 377W. Consultation documents from May 1997 are listed on the Treasury public website (www.hm-treasury.gov.uk). Providing information in the format requested and for dates before 1997 would incur disproportionate costs.

Economic Growth

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact on *(a)* Government expenditure and *(b)* tax revenues of a 0.1 per cent. change in the economy's rate of growth (i) in the year in which that change is experienced and (ii) in subsequent years. [12868]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury's estimates of the impact of the economic cycle on the public finances are set out in the publication, "Fiscal policy: public finances and the cycle", HM Treasury, March 1999.

Privy Council Silver

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much Bonham and Brooks charged by way of *(a)* cancellation and *(b)* otherwise in respect of the withdrawal from their auction of 30 November of certain items of Privy Council silver. [12867]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has engaged Bonham and Brooks to perform a programme of services relating to the valuation of assets as well as their sale. That engagement will continue. The fees payable will reflect the eventual overall outcome of the programme. No cancellation or other fee will be payable as a result of the recent withdrawals from auction.

Graduate Incomes

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 888W, to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), on graduate incomes, if he will give estimate of the average gross weekly earnings of full time employees by age, broken down into *(a)* graduates and *(b)* non-graduates and (i) male and (ii) female in each category for spring 2000. [14275]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Lynne Jones, dated 12 November 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the average gross weekly earnings of graduates and non-graduates (14275).

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of average gross weekly earnings for graduates and non-graduates. However, it only collects information about qualifications from respondents of working age (men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59). Therefore, it does not provide estimates for female graduates and non-graduates aged 60 years or over.

Estimates for male and female graduates and non graduates for spring (March to May) 2000 are given in the attached table.

Average gross weekly earnings of full-time[1] employees by age, gender and whether a graduate or non-graduate; United Kingdom; spring (March to May 2000); not seasonally adjusted

£

	All full-time employees of working age[2,3]	*Graduates*	*Non-graduates*
Male full-time employees aged:			
16–64 years	426	628	370
18 years	152	[5]—	152
22 years	266	300	258
30 years	399	480	372
40 years	490	813	426
50 years	506	746	442
60 years	431	[5]—	382
Female full-time employees aged:			
16–59 years	313	455	276
18 years	160	[5]—	160
22 years	229	250	221
30 years	351	450	308
40 years	354	[5]—	313
50 years	322	[5]—	295
60 years[4]	—	—	—

[1] The definition of full-time/part-time is based on respondents' self-assessment
[2] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59
[3] Includes people who did not state their qualifications
[4] Estimates for women aged 60 years are not available because the questions about qualifications only apply to people of working age
[5] Sample size too small for reliable estimate

Source:
ONS Labour Force Survey

Breast Cancer

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the survival rates are for victims of breast cancer in *(a)* North Yorkshire, *(b)* Nottinghamshire, *(c)* Cumbria and *(d)* the United Kingdom at the latest date for which figures are available. [13381]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Miss Anne McIntosh, dated 12 November 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the survival rates for victims of breast cancer in North Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Cumbria and the United Kingdom at the latest available date (13381).

Figures on survival rates from cancer are not generally available for local authority areas, such as Nottinghamshire and Cumbria. However, the following five-year survival rates for women aged 15–99 diagnosed with breast cancer are available for health authority areas in England:

figures for women diagnosed in the period 1991–1993 can be obtained from the Department of Health website at: www.doh.gov.uk/nhsperformanceindicators/hlpi2000/h1143t.html; and

figures for women diagnosed in the period 1992–1994 are being made available at health authority level on the National Statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk) from Monday 12th November.

Information on five-year survival from breast cancer in the United Kingdom as a whole is not available. Separate figures are available for England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, based on women diagnosed during 1992–94, 1985–89, 1991–95, and 1993–96, respectively, and followed up to the end of 1999, 1994, 1998, and 1999, respectively. These are given in the following table. Because of differences in coverage and end of follow-up, and for other reasons, figures for the separate countries are not directly comparable and cannot be made so.

Breast cancer in men is rare. Survival rates for men diagnosed 1986–90 and followed up to the end of 1995 have been published for NHS regions in England, and Wales, in Coleman MP *et al., Cancer survival trends in England and Wales 1971–1995: deprivation and NHS Region.* Series SMPS No. 61. London: The Stationery Office, 1999.

Survival from breast cancer for women aged 15–99 in the United Kingdom

Percentage

Country	*5 year relative survival*
England	75
Wales[1]	65
Scotland	75
Northern Ireland	78

[1] Females aged 0–84

Sources:
Office for National Statistics. *Cancer survival 1992–1999, England.* London: ONS, 31st January 2001
Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit. *Cancer Registration and Survival in Wales 1985–1994.* Cardiff: WCISU, 1999
Scottish Cancer Intelligence Unit. *Trends in Cancer Survival in Scotland 1971–1995.* Edinburgh: Information & Statistics Division NHS in Scotland, 2000
Fitzpatrick DA, Gavin AT. *Survival of Cancer Patients in Northern Ireland 1993–1996.* Belfast: Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, 2001

Reserves

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much money remains in the reserves; and what plans he has to increase the funds available in the reserves over the course of the current financial year; [10259]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of how, and in what quantities, money available in the reserves has been spent so far in the current financial year. [10251]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Any additions to departmental expenditure limits will continue to be reported to Parliament through the supplementary estimates process in the normal way. The forthcoming pre-Budget report will set out the latest position on the public finances.

Business Payroll Costs

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish the Carter review of payroll costs to business; and if he will make a statement. [13699]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said to him at Question Time on 8 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 363.

Bank Disclosures

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 204W, on bank disclosures, what information he has received on the lending patterns in under-invested communities of *(a)* Lloyds TSB, *(b)* HSBC, *(c)* Nat West and *(d)* Barclays. [12447]

Ruth Kelly: Information on the lending patterns of banks to under-invested communities is available in the Bank of England's report "Finance for Small Businesses in Deprived Communities" (November 2000). It is a matter for individual banks to decide whether to disclose further information. I am aware that, of the banks mentioned in my hon. Friend's question, Barclays published some data in their "Social and Environmental Report 2000".

Construction and Refurbishment Contracts

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the top 10 companies to which his Department contracted out their construction and refurbishment work in the last 12 months. [6417]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

HM Treasury

No such contracts were let in the period concerned.

Office of Government Commerce

Balfour Beatty Refurb. Ltd.
DTZ
Turner & Townsend Proj. Management
Withey Building Services
Cheetham Hill Construction Ltd.
Interior Plc.
VHE Construction Ltd.
Kilby & Gayford Construction
Paragon Interior Group Plc.
Lambert Smith Hampton

OGC Buying Solutions

Spraybake Limited
Hodge Clemco Ltd.

HM Customs and Excise

Interior Design Management
Courtenay Building Cont.
Spectrum Projects Ltd.
Wates Interiors Ltd.
Turner & Townsend Ltd.
Connaught Interiors Ltd.
Rosser & Russell
John Laing Construction
Simpson Ltd.
British Airports Authority

Inland Revenue

HBG Management Ltd.
Semple & Cochrane Ltd.
George S. Hall Ltd.
Instyle Construction Ltd.
Interserve
Drake & Scull Technical Services
Malla Rail
Taylor Woodrow Management Ltd.
Trillium
Bailey Maintenance Services.

Motor Fuel Producers (Tax Income)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was raised in tax on motor fuel producers in each year since 1997. [14015]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of tax receipts from motor fuel producers are not available.

Business Rates

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the method for calculating business rates for small rural public houses. [14007]

Dawn Primarolo: None. Small rural public houses, along with other business properties, are assessed for non-domestic rating purposes by Valuation Officers, appointed by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue, in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (as amended). The method of valuation for such properties is a matter for those involved in the assessment process; i.e. Valuation Officers, ratepayers and their professional advisers, and is subject to a right of appeal to an independent tribunal in the event of disagreement.

Mr. James Sharp

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will refer the case of Mr. James Sharp, a constituent, to the Treasury Solicitor. [14005]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue Solicitor, not the Treasury Solicitor, advises the Valuation Office Agency on rating litigation and he has been instructed in this case.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the decision of the East Wales Valuation Tribunal in the case of Sharp *v.* Valuation Office. [14006]

Dawn Primarolo: The Treasury does not assess decisions of the Valuation Tribunal. Valuation Tribunals are independent bodies set up to deal with disputes in connection with, inter alia, non-domestic rating matters. Appeals against their decisions lie to the Lands Tribunal. It would be inappropriate for the Treasury to intervene with these independent bodies.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 6 November; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [13437]

Dawn Primarolo: I attended the ECOFIN Council.

The Commission presented its communication on company taxation. I made it clear that while the Government might support some action to tackle barriers to cross-border business, they do not support the Commission's proposal for a consolidated company tax base in the EU. The specific proposals contained within the study will be considered in due course.

The Commission presented its progress report on the Risk Capital Action Plan, highlighting the need for the EU to remove barriers to a single EU risk capital market. I stressed the UK's support for the objectives of the action plan, but expressed concern that the proposed prospectuses directive, as currently drafted, would have the effect of reducing the supply, and increasing the cost, of risk capital. The Council agreed that rapid progress on the Risk Capital Action Plan was necessary, in line with the timetable agreed at the Lisbon European Council.

The Council noted Economic Policy Committee reports on the budgetary impact of aging populations and on the measurement of output gaps. It also noted a report from the Economic and Financial Committee on measures to improve the quality and timeliness of Eurozone statistics.

The Council also adopted conclusions with respect to Ireland's compliance with the Council Recommendation of 12 February 2001, which recommended measures to bring the 2001 Irish budget in line with the 2000 Broad Economic Policy Guidelines. The Council agreed that the earlier Recommendation had lost part of its force, mainly due to exogenous shocks that have reduced inflationary pressures in the Irish economy.

ECOFIN agreed that taxation of audiovisual and musical products should be examined by the Commission in the context of its wider review of VAT reduced rates, and not by the Culture Council, as taxation matters are for ECOFIN.

No votes were taken at the meeting.

IR35

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the 5 per cent. ceiling for tax exempt expenses under IR35. [13496]

Dawn Primarolo: Service company workers affected by the service company legislation are entitled to all the same expenses as conventional employees. In addition to these expenses, service company workers are also entitled to a 5 per cent. flat rate reduction in recognition of the fact that there are costs associated with running a service company. We have no plans to review the level of this deduction.

Business Compliance Costs

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Inland Revenue will measure compliance costs to business as referred to in Cm 407; and if he will make a statement. [10972]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 746W.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many checks on national insurance numbers will have been completed by the end of 2001. [14130]

Dawn Primarolo: During the 1999–2000 tax year, 626,641 payroll items were checked. Of these 288,924 errors were found and 6,223 cases were referred for potential fraud investigation.

During the 2000–01 tax year, 1,035,796 payroll items were checked of which 770,308 were found to contain errors and 22,777 were referred for potential fraud investigation.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the role *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the not-for-profit sector can play in the running of (i) English schools and (ii) English local education authorities; and if she will make a statement. [11485]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Local authorities and schools can already contract with the private and voluntary sector to support schools. The White Paper "Schools: achieving success" proposes partnerships between schools, local authorities and partners who might in some cases be from the private or voluntary sector. But schools will continue to be managed by the governing body and headteacher, even where they are supported by expertise from other sources. Local education authorities should secure high quality services from the most cost-effective source available, in accordance with best value principles. Sources include the education authority itself, or partnerships with other public, voluntary or private sector bodies, both profit making and not for profit. Individual local education authorities remain responsible and accountable for the services concerned, however they are provided.

Music Standards Fund

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many local authorities are receiving grants from the Music Standards Fund to provide instrumental tuition for pupils. [10045]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* All 150 local education authorities in England are receiving grants from the music standards fund. LEAs may spend

their music standards fund grants in any way which enhances opportunities for pupils to access high quality musical education. This includes instrumental tuition.

Early Years Excellence

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will announce the result of the bid by Somerford Infant School and the Grange Neighbourhood Nursery Partnership for an early years excellence centre. [13029]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 6 November]:* 49 early excellence centres are now developing practice in integrated care, education and family services. Working closely with sure start and neighbourhood nurseries, we will create up to 100 centres across the country by 2004. On 27 February we announced an expansion of the programme and invited expressions of interest in joining it. On 1 October we announced 14 new centres—the first in a series of designations resulting from those expressions of interest. The proposal for a centre at Somerford Infant School as part of the Grange neighbourhood nursery scheme was, at this stage, considered not yet ready to join the programme. Along with other proposals in need of further work Somerford Infant School was invited to develop its plans further. We are now considering proposals as part of a next batch of EEC designations and expect to make further announcements in the new year.

GCSE Grades

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of children achieved five or more GCSEs at A* to C grades in *(a)* schools with sixth forms and *(b)* schools without sixth forms, in 2001. [11538]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The proportion of 15-year-olds that achieved five or more GCSEs at A* to C was *(a)* 52.2 per cent. in schools with sixth forms and *(b)* 42.2 per cent. in schools without sixth forms in England in 2001.

Lone Parents

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will give a breakdown of the number of lone parents leaving the New Deal for Lone Parents for employment who have *(a)* at least one child below the age of five years three months and *(b)* all children aged over five years three months, for each month since the inception of the New Deal. [9679]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

The information is in the table.

Numbers leaving the new deal for lone parents into employment Great Britain up to July 2001

Month	Age of youngest child[1] Under 5 years and 3 months	5 years 3 months and over
December 1998	33	34
January 1999	75	73
February 1999	98	98
March 1999	143	138
April 1999	198	227
May 1999	217	247
June 1999	255	312
July 1999	434	559
August 1999	411	524
September 1999	410	507
October 1999	682	919
November 1999	859	1,061
December 1999	1,302	1,643
January 2000	883	1,099
February 2000	707	928
March 2000	1,109	1,368
April 2000	869	983
May 2000	926	1,147
June 2000	1,163	1,319
July 2000	965	1,188
August 2000	907	1,065
September 2000	989	1,131
October 2000	1,148	1,345
November 2000	1,396	1,637
December 2000	1,414	1,689
January 2001	967	1,124
February 2001	815	974
March 2001	1,186	1,359
April 2001	903	1,011
May 2001	1,028	1,123
June 2001	1,192	1,275
July 2001	955	1,052
Total	24,639	29,159

[1] Age of youngest child when attended initial interview

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil Service

Chris Grayling: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many full-time employees work in the civil service. [14331]

Mr. Leslie: The most recent data were published on 8 November 2001. This showed that in April 2001 there were 436,400 full-time permanent staff in the civil service. There were also 11,400 full-time staff employed on a casual basis, bringing the total to 447,800.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside his Department. [13133]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 692–93W.

Sellafield

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to extend the no-fly zone at Sellafield. [13229]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* There are no plans to extend the flying restrictions applying to Sellafield at the present time. Flying restrictions over Sellafield prohibit aircraft from flying over the nuclear installation below a height of 2,200 feet above mean sea level in a two nautical mile radius. The regulations currently applying are the Air Navigation (Restriction of Flying) (Nuclear Installations) Regulations 2001 which came into force on 11 May 2001. The regulations do not prohibit flights for the purpose of landing at or taking off from the helicopter landing area at the installation. Such flights are made with the permission of the person in charge of the installation and in accordance with any conditions to which that permission is subject.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the B215 building at the Sellafield site has been designed to resist a plane crash. [13231]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* All nuclear licensees are required by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the safety regulator, to ensure that they maintain valid safety cases for operations on each of their sites. Safety cases need to take due account of external hazards such as plane crashes at nuclear installations. HSE is satisfied that the safety case applying to the Sellafield site, including building 215, took appropriate account of the risks of an accidental air crash.

The UK's civil nuclear sites apply stringent security measures regulated by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS), the security regulator. The security regulator works closely with the Health and Safety Executive, the safety regulator, which provides advice on the safety implications of events, including external hazards such as plane crashes, at nuclear installations. Security and safety precautions at nuclear sites are kept under regular review. Both regulators are reviewing all relevant precautions in the light of the recent terrorist attacks in the USA. It is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken at civil nuclear sites.

Employment Agencies

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received on the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2001; what assessment she has made of the effect of such regulations on employment agencies and businesses; and if she will make a statement. [14223]

Alan Johnson: We received representations from workers' organisations, employers' bodies, trade associations, agencies, employment businesses, individuals and other interested parties. The regulatory impact assessment for the draft conduct regulations found that they should reduce recruitment costs for employers across the economy, and make the labour market more efficient and flexible. In addition, clarifying the contractual position of temporary workers will help ensure they get the employment rights to which they are entitled.

Our objective in overhauling the existing regulations, which date from 1976, is simpler, clearer, regulations, which are relevant to the market of today and of the future. The proposed new regulations are in many cases updated versions of existing requirements. They are designed to benefit recruitment agencies, those employed through them and hirers. They will remove unnecessary restrictions on agencies' operations and the services they offer, while protecting the interests of work-seekers and vulnerable groups.

Paternity Leave

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement about the provision of paternity leave for fathers of multiple births. [13654]

Alan Johnson: The Employment Bill introduced on 7 November includes a new right to two weeks' paid paternity leave for fathers following the birth of their child. The Bill includes provisions for regulations to be made to address cases where more than one child is born as a result of the same pregnancy. Future regulations will cover these special circumstances.

Royal Ordnance (Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what priority the Royal Ordnance site has been given in order to promote the use of a brownfield site. [13749]

Alan Johnson: A very high priority has been given to the Royal Ordnance site, which is identified as one of 11 strategic sites in the North West Development Agency's regional strategy. A large part of the site has already been acquired by a development consortium, and Chorley Borough Council are currently in negotiations with the present owner to acquire 50 hectares of the site for re-use as a major inward investment site. This will see the return of one of the largest brownfield sites in Lancashire to productive use.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment the North West Regional Development Agency has made of the benefits involved with the use of the Royal Ordnance site in Chorley. [13748]

Alan Johnson: Chorley borough council, with the backing of the North West Development Agency, are currently negotiating the purchase of part of the Royal Ordnance site. Officers of the North West Development Agency are working closely with the Council to assess the likely costs and benefits of converting the site to make it suitable for inward investment.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for the future use of the site at Bradwell power station. [13378]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* None. The site belongs to BNFL, which has announced publicly its planned lifetime limits for Magnox power stations. The power station at Bradwell is due to stop generating electricity next year.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received proposing the building of new nuclear power stations; and what plans she has for the construction of new nuclear power stations. [13271]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* My Department has no plans to build nuclear power stations nor has it received any proposals from electricity generating companies to do so.

Universal Bank

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if all those in receipt of benefit pension and tax credit payments will be automatically eligible for a Post Office card account after the introduction of the Universal Bank. [12684]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* It is the Government's policy to encourage people to use the type of account which is most appropriate for their needs. The Post Office card account is intended primarily for people who are unable or unwilling to open even a basic bank account, and it is the Government's intention to promote the take up and use of basic and other bank accounts. As a consequence, this matter is being considered within the context of an overall migration and marketing strategy on which a great deal of work is currently under way.

Post Offices

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices there are in each parliamentary constituency; and how many of them derive more than 40 per cent. of their income from the Benefits Agency. [10740]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* I have been advised by Consignia that they do not hold figures on post office numbers by parliamentary constituency. The latest information available remains a special exercise undertaken by the Post Office in 1999 to determine the numbers of post offices in each parliamentary constituency and how many of them derived more than 40 per cent. of their income from the Benefits Agency.

Consignia have not repeated his exercise but the answer was set out in the reply given to the then hon. Member for Birmingham Erdington on 29 November 1999, *Official Report,* column 22W.

Ilisu Dam

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Prime Minister in relation to export credit guarantee to underwrite the Ilisu Dam project; and when the last discussion took place. [13464]

Ms Hewitt: I have had no discussions with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in relation to export credit guarantee to underwrite the Ilisu Dam project.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the human rights impact of the Ilisu Dam project in Turkey; [13465]

(2) what assessment she has made of the progress made in providing relocation packages for people who would need to be resettled as a result of the Ilisu Dam project in Turkey; [13467]

(3) if she will make a statement on how the Ilisu Dam project in Turkey meets each of the four conditions that the Government have set for export credit guarantees; [13466]

(4) what assessment she has made of the progress made in ensuring that the Ilisu Dam in Turkey will not cut off water supplies to Syria and Iraq in times of drought. [13468]

Ms Hewitt: I have commissioned reports from independent consultants on the environmental impact assessment report and the resettlement action plan prepared in respect of the Ilisu Dam project. These reports, together with comments received from the public, are being considered and discussed with other Government Departments with an interest in the project, in particular the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. When our consideration is complete, I will make a statement. No date has been set for a decision regarding ECGD support for the project.

Flexible Working Hours

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to give employees the right to request flexible working hours; and if she will make a statement. [11696]

Alan Johnson: In my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's reply to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 28 June 2001, *Official Report,* column 149W, she announced the formation of the Work and Parents Taskforce to look at how parents and employers can be encouraged to consider flexible working patterns that suit them both. The Taskforce is due to report this month. The Government hope to respond to the Taskforce's recommendations soon after.

Correspondence

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to ensure that all letters sent by Ministers in her Department to hon. Members are signed by the Minister replying or by one of his or her private secretaries and that the use of facsimile signatures inserted by computer is abandoned. [13259]

Ms Hewitt: I can confirm that I have asked that all letters sent by Ministers in my Department to hon. Members, other than letters which are going to all or a large number of MPs and communications sent by e-mail, are approved and signed in person by the Minister, or approved by the Minister and signed by their private secretary.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to the letters dated 21 July and 25 September from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding Whitelink Seafoods, Fraserburgh. [9983]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* I understand that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade replied to the hon. Gentleman's letters of 21 July and 25 September on 7 November.

She will write further to explain why there was such an exceptional delay in this correspondence.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the funding of sub-post offices. [13061]

Mr. Alexander: To start the implementation of all the recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit, the Government have committed £270 million of support over three years for modernisation of the post office network. That ring fenced funding is being allocated in accordance with an agreed robust business case from Post Office Ltd.

£15 million has been earmarked for the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions to help sustain and improve post offices in deprived urban areas. Up to £25 million has been allocated this financial year for the Government General Practitioner ("Your Guide") trial in Leicestershire which began in July.

The Government are committed to providing transitional financial assistance to rural post offices and decisions on this will be taken following advice from the Postal Services Commission which is expected in the weeks to come. In addition we have made available a £2 million fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas where traditional services would otherwise close.

Royal Mail

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list those parts of the country in which the Royal Mail has withdrawn a morning collection in the last 12 months. [12590]

Mr. Alexander: Under the terms of the licence issued by the independent regulator, the Postal Services Commission, to Consignia to provide postal services, the company is required to make at least one collection of relevant postal packets every working day from each access point. Subject to this requirement the timing and number of collections is an operational issue for Consignia.

I am advised that changes to the frequency of mail collections are being assessed on an area by area basis and that therefore no national data are available in the format requested.

Nuclear Security

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure the security of nuclear power stations. [13473]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* The UK's civil nuclear sites apply stringent security measures regulated by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS), the security regulator. The security regulator works closely with the Health and Safety Executive, the safety regulator, which provides advice on the safety implications of events, including external hazards such as plane crashes, at nuclear installations. Security and safety precautions at nuclear sites are kept under regular review. Both regulators are reviewing all relevant precautions in the light of the recent terrorist attacks in the USA. It is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken at civil nuclear sites.

Greenhouse Gases

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in setting up a greenhouse gases emissions trading scheme. [12816]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

In August 2001, DEFRA published the Framework for the UK Emissions Trading Scheme, which sets out the structure of the scheme and what firms need to do to participate. The UK scheme will be the first economy-wide emissions trading scheme in the world.

Currently, we are in the pre-registration period. Firms are registering their interest in the scheme and approaching the Department about their eligibility for joining. For those firms taking on voluntary absolute emissions caps, there is also the opportunity to prepare to bid for a share of the up to £43 million per annum incentive offered by Government. The incentive will be allocated via an auction early next year. Emissions trading will go-live in April 2002. Several forward trades have already taken place.

PRIME MINISTER

Renewable Energy

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations he has received from the Performance and Information Unit regarding progress towards meeting the Government's targets for renewable energy supply; and if he will make a statement. [13273]

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Prime Minister when the Cabinet Office report on UK energy needs will be published; and if he will make a statement. [13881]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* The Performance and Innovation Unit has published its analysis of how to allocate the extra £100 million support to boost the development of the UK renewable energy industry. This money will help us reach our target that 10 per cent. of electricity sales by licensed suppliers will come from renewable sources eligible for the renewables obligation by 2010.

The unit is conducting a wide ranging analysis of the UK's energy needs. It will be presenting its findings to me by the end of the year.

Public Policy

Mr. Maples: To ask the Prime Minister what the *(a)* names and *(b)* functions are of the units dealing with the formulation and the delivery of public policy which are answerable to (i) the Prime Minister, (ii) the Deputy Prime Minister and (iii) Ministers in the Cabinet Office. [13181]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* For information on my office, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 19 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1361W.

For details about the Deputy Prime Minister and Ministers in the Cabinet Office, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Deputy

Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on 11 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 573W.

On Friday 9 November I announced that Baroness Morgan would join my office as the new Head of Political and Government Relations in Downing Street. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) will take over the Ministerial responsibilities within the Cabinet Office for equal opportunities and the Women's Unit, reporting to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry as the Cabinet Minister with responsibility for this area. My hon. Friend will continue to report to the Deputy Prime Minister on her existing responsibilities.

Policy Co-ordination

Mr. Maples: To ask the Prime Minister how many civil servants working directly for *(a)* the Prime Minister, *(b)* the Deputy Prime Minister and *(c)* Ministers in the Cabinet Office are responsible for the central co-ordination and progress of policy. [13180]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* As at 1 September 2001, there were 27 civil servants and special advisers working in the Policy Directorate, European Adviser's Office and Foreign Adviser's Office in No. 10. In the Cabinet Office, there were 244 in the Cabinet Secretariats; 12 in the Delivery Unit; 20.5 in the Deputy Prime Minister's Central Policy Group; 62 in the Regional Co-ordination Unit; 39 in the Social Exclusion Unit, and 40 in the Women and Equality Unit and the Equality Secretariat.

Departmental Changes

Mr. Maples: To ask the Prime Minister in respect of each Government Department which has been renamed or had its responsibilities altered since the last general election, what the purpose of the changes was; and if he will make a statement. [13182]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 31W.

European Leaders

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his meeting with European leaders at No. 10 Downing street on 4 November. [13637]

The Prime Minister: This was a useful and productive discussion, and an important part of our effort to keep in close touch with partners in the campaign against terrorism.

Fishery Harbours

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on departmental responsibility for fishery harbours. [14741]

The Prime Minister: The Transfer of Functions (Fishery Harbours) Order 2001 was laid before Parliament today. It transfers legislative responsibility for English fishery harbours from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

The transfer follows a recommendation of the 1998 Review of Trust Ports, and will improve the efficiency of the Government's involvement in harbour legislation. A consultation exercise showed wide support for the transfer.

Work Force Development

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Prime Minister when he will publish the Performance and Innovation Unit report on work force development. [14240]

The Prime Minister: The PIU report on work force development is expected to be published by the end of the year.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Performance and Innovation Unit's review of the legal and regulatory framework for voluntary organisations. [13897]

The Prime Minister: I announced details of the review in the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) on 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 93W.

As part of the consultation process, public events have been held in London, Manchester, Llandrindod Wells, Edinburgh and Belfast. There have also been a number of seminars with experts in the field. To encourage wider participation the review team is also posting working papers on the Performance and Innovation Unit's website for comment (http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/2001/charity/main.shtml).

HEALTH

Care Standards (Young Adults)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the financial impact will be on individual homes and local authorities of implementing national care standards for younger adults. [9498]

Jacqui Smith: It is not possible to quantify the effect on individual homes of implementing the national minimum standards for younger adults. For some there will be none, for some others the effects will be minimal.

The resources provided for personal social services are increasing by, on average, 3.4 per cent. per annum in real terms over the next three years. We expect home owners will cover the costs of meeting the standards through the fees they charge. Local authorities are funded to meet these additional costs.

GPs

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new GPs were recruited in 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [9092]

Mr. Hutton: The latest data available are for September 2000. Data for September 2001 will be available at the end of January 2002. The information is shown in the table. The number of general practitioners

registrars (GPs in training) increased from 1,520 in September 1999 to 1,659 in September 2000, an increase of 9.1 per cent.

Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[1] analysis of workforce and flows, 1999–2000

England *Numbers*

		1999–2000	
UPEs	27,591[2]		27,704[2]
joiners		1,203	
of which:			
new joiners		958	
re-joiners		245	
leavers		1,090	
Change in UPEs		113	

[1] UPEs includes GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs

[2] Number of UPEs are numbers at 1 October 1999 and 30 September 2000

Other rows relate to changes between successive October/ September censuses

Source:

Department of Health General Medical and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Student Nurses

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the timetable of his review of funding for student nurses. [10935]

Mr. Hutton: The Department completed its review last year and following this Ministers considered options for amendment of the current support arrangements. Following the announcement in the March 2001 Budget of additional funding for the National Health Service, the decision was made to direct extra money to all NHS funded students, using an across the board increase in basic bursary rates, rather than targeting specific groups. With effect from September this year bursary rates were increased by 10.4 per cent., the biggest increase since bursaries were introduced in the late 1980s.

Head Injury

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to commission research into the incidence and prevalence of head injury. [11667]

Ms Blears: The Department has supported, and continues to support, research into head injury through the national health service research programmes. The Department welcomes high quality research applications in response to nationally advertised calls for proposals.

In 1999–2000 the Medical Research Council spent almost £2 million on research related to the area of head injury. Priorities for research are kept under review and reflect analysis of the burden of disease, potential benefits and Government priorities.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what stocks of *(a)* antiques, *(b)* paintings and *(c)* fine wines are held by his Department; if he will list such assets sold over the last three years together with the sale proceeds from such transactions; what plans he has to sell further such assets over the period of the current comprehensive spending review; and if he will make a statement. [10832]

Ms Blears: The Department does not held any stocks of antiques, paintings and fine wines and no such assets have been sold over the last three years.

Eye Tests

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve access to NHS eye tests. [12377]

Jacqui Smith: Since we extended eligibility to free national health service sight tests to people aged 60 or over, with effect from April 1999, nearly 3 million more people are receiving NHS sight tests each year. We have no plans to extend the eligibility criteria further, but we wish to publicise the benefits to eye health of having a regular sight test and eye examination.

Strategic Health Authorities

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health within which statutory format the proposed strategic health authorities will operate from April 2002. [12367]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* We plan to bring forward a bill in the current Session to provide the necessary powers to introduce strategic health authorities and to reallocate current health authority functions to primary care trusts. Subject to parliamentary approval strategic health authorities will be introduced as soon as possible after Royal Assent.

The reduction in the number of health authorities from April 2002 will be achieved using existing powers under section 8 of the National Health Service Act 1977.

MRI Scanners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the sources of expenditure were on new linear accelerators and MRI scanners in each of the last two years. [12714]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Some £43 million has been made available for linear accelerators and some £26 million for MRI scanners from the New Opportunities Fund cancer initiative from September 1999 to date. These sums have purchased 57 linear accelerators and 36 MRI scanners. In parallel, the £100 million national health service central fund initiative for cancer diagnostic equipment which began in April 2000 is supporting investment in CT scanners.

These sums are in addition to equipment purchased locally by NHS trusts. Full information is not held centrally, but at least eight linear accelerators and 26 MRI scanners supported by trust funding have been installed over the same period.

Future NHS funding for 45 linear accelerators and 50 MRI scanners is also planned as announced in the NHS Cancer Plan.

NHS Patients

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with which EU nations his Department has had discussions over the treatment of NHS patients. [12704]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The Department has had discussions with all other member states on the financial consequences of treatments provided under Regulation (EEC) 1408/71, including referrals of individual patients for treatment using the E112 arrangements.

Following recent rulings of the European Court of Justice, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State notified both the Commission and other member states of his decision to amend domestic legislation to clarify that health authorities and trusts may commission treatment from other member states of the European Economic Area. Officials have since met or corresponded with representatives of hospital providers from Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Norway.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons *(a)* the consultation process on free nursing care arrangements ran for four weeks and *(b)* the consultations on care standard regulations ran for 10 weeks. [13154]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* Consultation on the care standards regulations lasted for a period of 12 weeks and this is the usual amount of time for carrying out a consultation. However, on free nursing care, it was necessary, exceptionally, to reduce the period of formal consultation to four weeks in order to ensure that individuals could benefit financially from these arrangements from 1 October. In recognition of this, extra efforts were made to ensure that those most interested were aware of the consultation. Many organisations were sent copies of the guidance and invited to comment. Requests to extend the deadline from individuals and organisation were viewed sympathetically.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities, primary care groups and primary care trusts had not appointed *(a)* a nursing home co-ordinator and *(b)* a lead nurse by 1 November. [13158]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* As far as we are aware, all the relevant English health authorities and primary care trusts have people in place to fill these roles.

NHS Trusts (Franchises)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria he will use to determine when an NHS trust might be made subject of a franchise arrangement. [13510]

Mr. Hutton: If a national health service body is not performing one of its functions adequately or at all, or there are significant failings in the way the trust is being run my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has the powers, under section 13 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, to intervene.

In the case of NHS trusts that have recently received a zero star performance rating they are required to provide an action plan, agreed with the Department, to address the particular areas of performance which they need to improve. Franchise arrangements will only be considered if these trusts fail to make progress against their action plan.

GP Partnerships

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applicants there were on average for a general practitioner's partnership in 1985; how many there were on average in the last 12 months; what representations he has had from general practitioner about difficulties filling vacancies in their practices; and what is the average time taken to fill such vacancies. [14241]

Mr. Hutton: There were an average of 6.9 applicants per general practitioner vacancy outstanding at some stage during the period 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001 in England and Wales.

The average time to fill each GP vacancy was 4.8 months.

There is no information available on the average number of applicants in 1985.

The Department regularly meets the General Practitioner Committee of the British Medical Association to discuss issues affecting recruitment and retention.

Nurses

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many low cost housing units for nurses in London have been found by the Department's housing tsar. [14112]

Mr. Hutton: 802 units have been provided so far with agreements signed for a further 120 units due for occupation next year. We are well on target to deliver the additional 2000 units of affordable housing units for national health service staff in London which is the target set in the NHS Plan. We expect to exceed this target.

In addition London NHS trusts are refurbishing 2,500 units in London, and 2,300 units of accommodation will be provided in London as part of the starter home initiative which will benefit some 5,000 NHS key workers. Overall we will have helped 7,500 individual staff in the NHS by mid-2003.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing posts there are *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in London; and how many unfilled vacancies there are. [14111]

Mr. Hutton: As at 31 March 2001 there were 9,000 (3.4 per cent.) qualified nursing and midwifery posts in England which had been vacant for three months or more. The equivalent figure for the London area was 2,960 (6.4 per cent.).

Information on vacancies for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland is a matter for the devolved Assemblies.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the NHS budget was spent on mental health in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* the current year to date. [13855]

Jacqui Smith: Spend on mental health services as a percentage of total national health service spend was 12.3 per cent. in 1997–98, 12.1 per cent. in 1998–99 and 12.5 per cent. in 1999–2000. Information from health authorities and NHS trusts for subsequent years is not yet available.

The figure given for 1999–2000 is not directly comparable to previous years or future years, 1999–2000 represents the first year that primary care group expenditure was included in the calculation and the formula used to apportion the expenditure was based on estimated data. In future years the data for primary care groups will be more detailed and the resultant figure for percentage spend will be more accurate.

MRSA

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the incidence of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus in hospitals was in each of the last five years. [13504]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 341–42W.

Health Spending

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the UK is spending on health as a percentage of GDP in the current financial year; and what the comparable figures are for *(a)* Spain, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany and *(d)* Italy. [13479]

Mr. Hutton: For the year 2001–02, total health spending in the United Kingdom is estimated to be 7.3 per cent. of gross domestic product.

The best available comparable data for other countries comes from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The latest data for Spain, France, Germany and Italy are for 1998, and in calendar years rather than financial years. The spend as a percentage of gross domestic product of these countries and the United Kingdom can be seen in the table.

	Percentage
Country	*1998*
Spain	7.0
France	9.3
Germany	10.3
Italy	7.7
United Kingdom	6.8

Source:
OECD Health Data 2001

NHS Trusts (Franchises)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what performance measures will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a franchise arrangement. [13509]

Mr. Hutton: If a national health service body is required to enter into a franchise arrangement under Section 13 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, it will be expected to agree an action plan with the Department that addresses its particular areas of weakness. Successful implementation of the action plan will be the key criterion in evaluating the effectiveness of franchise arrangements.

National Blood Service

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the National Blood Service's appropriate use of blood and blood components group contingency plans for prolonged periods of blood shortages will be published for consultation. [13507]

Mr. Hutton: Consultation is currently taking place with health professionals who use blood to establish what measures are practicable to introduce into the national health service.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the National Blood Service's appropriate use of blood and blood components group plans to minimize the risk of transfusion-transmitted vCJD. [13506]

Mr. Hutton: The National Blood Service appropriate use of blood group aims to minimise the theoretical risk of transfusion-transmitted vCJD by ensuring that blood and blood components are only ever transfused when clinically indicated. This is in addition to measures introduced by the Government to reduce the theoretical risk of transmitting vCJD through blood—leucodepletion of blood for transfusion and the importation from the United States of America of plasma for fractionation.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what kind of blood substitute therapies and alternatives to blood transfusions the National Blood Service's appropriate use of blood and blood components group is examining; and who it is consulting on these matters. [13505]

Mr. Hutton: The National Blood Service appropriate use of blood group is looking at simple pre-operative measures to avoid the need for transfusion, including assessment of haemoglobin levels to determine whether transfusion is necessary; correcting anaemia with appropriate vitamin and iron supplements; volume replacement with solutions other than blood components and autologous blood transfusion in all its forms.

The group is carrying out wide consultation with experts in the field both inside and outside the National Blood Service including the Jehovah's Witnesses Hospital Liaison branch.

The four United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers held a "Better Blood Transfusion" conference on 29 October 2001. The main aim of the conference was to help set the priorities for blood transfusion in the national health service for the coming three to five years. One of the important issues discussed was how to avoid the unnecessary use of blood in clinical practice in the face of decreasing supplies and numbers of blood donors. We will be taking work forward on this and other issues considered at the conference and further guidance will be issued to the NHS in 2002. Information about the conference is available on www.doh.gov.uk/bbt2

HOME DEPARTMENT

DNA Databases

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the creation, maintenance and retention of DNA databases in combating terrorism in the United Kingdom. [13409]

Mr. Denham: Our policy on DNA is the same for combating all crime. The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 included an amendment modifying the restriction on the use of DNA taken under the provisions of the Terrorism Act in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, to allow their use additionally for the prevention and detection of any crime, the investigation of any offence or the conduct of any investigation.

The fingerprint and DNA databases are registered with the Data Protection Registrar and information stored on them is covered by data protection legislation. Additional safeguards ensure that this information can only be used for the prevention and detection of a crime, the investigation of an offence and the conduct of a prosecution.

Strangeways

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the handcuffing of a prisoner at Strangeways during his chemotherapy treatment for cancer at North Manchester General Hospital. [13406]

Beverley Hughes: Following a risk assessment, a prisoner receiving treatment at the North Manchester General Hospital was released on temporary licence so that he could receive treatment without escort and without the application of any restraints. However, he breached the conditions of his licence by disappearing from the permitted area of the hospital, and his licence was revoked pending a full reassessment of risk to the public. During this period, lasting six days, he was handcuffed and escorted by prison staff. On completion of the risk assessment, the Governor was satisfied that the prisoner had not deliberately breached his licence conditions. He was therefore again released on licence and all security measures have been withdrawn. It is Prison Service policy that restraints should normally be removed at the request of medical staff. No such requests were made in this case.

Imitation Firearms

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to restrict the availability of imitation firearms. [13261]

Mr. Denham: There are already serious penalties for threatening someone with an imitation firearm, or for using one to resist arrest or with criminal intent. In view of the considerable legal and practical issues involved the Government are not persuaded that fresh legislative measures are warranted. We will, however, continue to look at what further measures might usefully be taken to tackle misuse.

Anthrax Attacks

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hoax anthrax attacks have been reported since 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [13026]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The Metropolitan Police started recording the number of hoax anthrax attacks on 9 October, with the rest of the United Kingdom's police forces following suit on 19 October.

Since then, there have been 2,700 false alarms, scares, threats and hoaxes relating to suspicious packages and mail items.

With the exception of Halloween, these incidents have dropped significantly since 23 October.

Passport Fees

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on passport fees. [14334]

Angela Eagle: The Privy Council has made an Order in Council, the Consular Fees (Amendment) Order 2001, which gives authority for an increase in passport fees in the United Kingdom. The increase will take effect on 14 January 2002. The fee for a standard 32 page passport will increase from £28 to £30 and for a 48 page passport from £38 to £40. The fee for amending an existing passport will increase from £17 to £18. The cost of a passport for a child will increase from £14.80 to £16. The additional charge for those making applications in person in the United Kingdom will increase from £12 to £15. The fee for a collective passport, for organised trips for schools and youth groups, will increase from £40 to £42.

Two new services will be introduced for 14 January 2002 at passport office public counters. A one week guaranteed service will cost an additional £15. A same day premium service will cost an additional £30.

This is the first increase in passport fees for two years. In relation to the cost of travel abroad, a fee of £30 for a standard 10 year passport still represents very good value for money.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many publications were issued by his Department in each of the last four years. [11834]

Mr. Blunkett: The number of publications issued each year by the Home Office Communication Directorate (CD) and the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) since 1999 are as follows:

Financial year	*Total number of publications issued by CD and RDS*
1 April 1999–31 March 2000	443
1 April 2000–31 March 2001	439
1 April 2001-to date[1]	373

[1] 31 October 2001

Figures are provided for the period from 1 April 1999. Before this date production was not centralised and it is therefore not possible to provide a complete list of publications prior to this date.

The publications produced reflect the full range of Home Office responsibilities, including for example, police recruitment and crime prevention materials, research reports, publications issued to victims of crime and advice on fire safety issues.

Youth Offender Panels

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase

the use of youth offender panels; what steps he has taken to increase participation in the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [13482]

Mr. Denham: Referral orders and their associated youth offender panels have been piloted in seven areas in England and Wales since summer 2000. They are due to be implemented throughout England and Wales on 1 April 2002. The Government and the Youth Justice Board are supporting youth offending teams' preparations, with finance, training and guidance. From 1 April youth courts will refer all young offenders aged 10–17 who plead guilty and are convicted for the first time to a youth offender panel unless the offending is so serious as to warrant custody or the court orders an absolute discharge or makes a hospital order.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for which offences teenagers may be referred to a youth offender panel. [13480]

Mr. Denham: Under the referral order legislation, the youth court will refer all young offenders aged 10–17 who plead guilty and are convicted for the first time to a youth offender panel, unless the offending is so serious as to warrant custody or the court orders an absolute discharge or makes a hospital order.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the extent is of the powers of youth offender panels; and how binding their judgments are. [13481]

Mr. Denham: Youth offender panels meet young offenders sentenced to referral orders, their parents or guardians and, where appropriate, victims. They agree contracts with the young offenders, including interventions aimed at preventing re-offending and reparation to individual victims or the wider community. The contracts last between three and 12 months, the term of the referral order as set by the court. Offenders who do not agree to contracts or fail to carry out contracts they have agreed may be referred back to the court and an alternative sentence may be given.

Residency

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for residency on behalf of sponsors of British citizens were granted in 2000; how many such applications were received in 2000; how many such applications have so far been received in 2001; how many have so far been granted; and what is the average length of time between such an application being received by the Home Office and its granting; [14242]

(2) how many applications for spouses of British citizens for residency are pending; and how long on average it took between applications being received, and their being opened in the last 12 months. [14243]

Angela Eagle: The latest published information relates to decisions on applications for indefinite leave to remain on the basis of marriage to a British citizen in 2000. Some 34,840 applications were granted on this basis.

Information on the number of applications lodged, average decision time and corresponding data for 2001 is not available. We are also not able to provide information on pending applications for spouse applications and average time between receipt and opening.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his officials received an application on behalf of Mrs. Melissa Gryspeerdt of Chippenham, Wiltshire; when they expect to process it; and if he will make a statement. [14246]

Angela Eagle: On the information provided by the hon. Member, I cannot at present confirm the receipt of any application on behalf of Mrs. Melissa Gryspeerdt. If the hon. Member or his constituent is able to provide more detailed information, including Mrs. Gryspeerdt's maiden name, the date of posting and the recorded delivery details, we will make every effort to trace the application as a matter of priority.

Sex Offences

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans in relation to reforming the law on sex offences and the recommendations of the report, "Setting the boundaries: Reforming the law on sex offences". [13892]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We received more than 700 responses to the consultation paper "Setting the Boundaries: Reforming the law on sex offences". We are currently analysing the responses to each chapter and will be making an announcement of our conclusions as soon as this is completed.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in 2000 and 2001; and on how many occasions in 2000 and 2001 computer systems in his Department have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (i) within and (ii) outside his Department. [11002]

Mr. Denham: Official records compiled under the Government scheme for reporting Information Technology (IT) security incidents, the Unified Incident Reporting and Alert Scheme (UNIRAS), show the following figures.

The number of cases of computer hacking detected was 0 in 2000 and 0 in 2001.

The number of cases of fraud detected was 0 in 2000 and 0 in 2001.

Asylum

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of racial harassment were reported to the National Asylum Support Service's Investigations Team by asylum seekers in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 broken down by (i) month and (ii) region; and if he will make a statement. [13044]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The number of allegations of racial harassment reported to the National Asylum Support Services (NASS) Investigations Team in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 is as follows.

Year	Number
2000	
May	[1]4
June	[1]19
July	[1]38
August	[1]46
September	[1]36
October	36
November	40
December	32
2001	
January	47
February	71
March	66
April	64
May	78
June	74
July	71
August	103
September	72
October	122

[1] The performance Monitoring Investigations Section (PMI) became fully operational in October 2000. Figures prior to October 2000 represent those cases reported to the Investigations Sections. Further allegations may have been investigated within the wider Operations Section within NASS but there are no statistics for this

The figures are not broken down by region. The figures represent the reports which NASS's Investigations Section received and information on who reported the incident is not recorded.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Sri Lankans have sought political asylum in the UK in each of the last three years. [13446]

Angela Eagle: The information is provided in the table.

Applications for asylum to the UK, excluding dependents, from nationals of Sri Lanka, 1998–2000[1]

Year	Applications
1998	3,505
1999	5,130
2000[2]	6,395
2001[2,3]	3,060

[1] All data rounded to nearest five
[2] Provisional
[3] January to July

The information is published regularly in the annual statistical bulletin Asylum Statistics United Kingdom, a copy of which is available in the Library, and from the RDS website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum were made in each of the last 12 months by *(a)* Afghans, *(b)* Sri Lankans, *(c)* Somalians and *(d)* Iraqi Kurds; what proportion were (i) granted and (ii) refused; what proportion were granted exceptional leave to remain; and what proportion have been removed. [14022]

Angela Eagle: The latest available information is provided in the table and relates to the number of applications and initial decisions made under normal procedures for principal applicants. Data on initial decisions are independent of applications data, and do not necessarily relate to applications lodged in the same period. Information on Iraqi Kurds is not available.

Following the initial decision, applicants have a right of appeal to the Immigration Appellate Authority.

Reliable information on the proportion of those refused asylum or exceptional leave to remain in the latest 12 months who were subsequently removed is not available. Information on the nationality of persons removed is not available due to data recording problems.

Information on asylum applications and initial decisions is published regularly in the annual statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library, and from the RDS website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1/html

Applications for asylum to the UK and initial decisions[1] *for nationals of Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Iraq, excluding dependents, August 2000 to July 2001*[2]

Month	Applications	Initial decisions	Grants of asylum	Percentage of initial decisions	Grant of ELR	Percentage of initial decisions	Refusals	Percentage ofinitial decisions
Afghanistan								
August 2000	495	180	15	9	40	23	120	68
September 2000	535	175	10	6	30	16	135	77
October 2000	560	410	45	11	30	7	340	82
November 2000	550	515	115	23	110	22	285	56
December 2000	535	545	130	24	255	47	160	29
January 2001	510	1,020	175	17	555	55	290	28
February 2001	615	1,320	225	17	785	59	310	24
March 2001	680	2,045	375	18	1,215	59	450	22
April 2001	700	930	195	21	550	59	185	20
May 2001	900	1,025	220	22	615	60	190	19
June 2001	910	985	220	22	600	61	165	17
July 2001	810	875	220	25	485	55	165	19
Total	7,790	10,020	1,955	19	5,265	53	2,800	28
Sri Lanka								
August 2000	445	470	45	10	25	6	365	78
September 2000	470	405	40	10	15	4	320	79
October 2000	565	675	105	15	10	1	565	83
November 2000	675	895	110	12	10	1	775	87
December 2000	610	770	90	12	20	3	655	85
January 2001	570	1,240	140	11	40	3	1,065	86

Applications for asylum to the UK and initial decisions[1] for nationals of Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Iraq, excluding dependents, August 2000 to July 2001[2]

Month	Applications	Initial decisions	Grants of asylum	Percentage of initial decisions	Grant of ELR	Percentage of initial decisions	Refusals	Percentage ofinitial decisions
February 2001	435	1,495	205	14	40	3	1,245	83
March 2001	410	1,950	260	13	90	5	1,600	82
April 2001	445	865	125	15	60	7	675	78
May 2001	425	805	105	13	40	5	660	82
June 2001	415	695	85	12	30	4	585	84
July 2001	355	565	85	15	30	5	450	80
Total	5,815	10,835	1,395	13	415	4	8,965	83
Somalia								
August 2000	615	680	210	31	125	19	325	48
September 2000	545	540	95	18	60	11	360	67
October 2000	485	445	105	23	30	6	315	70
November 2000	435	615	185	30	70	11	360	58
December 2000	420	525	160	30	80	16	285	54
January 2001	500	705	260	37	155	22	295	41
February 2001	380	805	345	43	165	20	300	37
March 2001	470	1,135	390	34	265	24	480	42
April 2001	420	565	240	42	140	25	185	33
May 2001	495	700	290	42	175	25	235	33
June 2001	505	460	180	39	135	29	145	32
July 2001	710	520	185	36	170	33	165	32
Total	5,980	7,690	2,645	34	1,570	20	3,440	45
Iraq								
August 2000	870	510	80	15	220	43	210	41
September 2000	1,035	345	45	14	105	30	200	58
October 2000	1,185	490	30	7	15	3	445	91
November 2000	1,205	580	60	10	25	5	495	85
December 2000	695	530	35	7	40	7	455	86
January 2001	755	1,180	65	6	90	7	1,030	87
February 2001	710	890	90	10	110	12	690	78
March 2001	425	1,280	105	8	190	15	985	77
April 2001	295	630	60	10	120	19	445	71
May 2001	340	780	65	8	135	17	580	74
June 2001	440	580	65	11	110	19	405	70
July 2001	580	580	45	8	125	22	410	71
Total	8,535	8,380	740	9	1,285	15	6,360	76

[1] Cases decided under normal criteria. Excludes cases decided under pragmatic measures aimed at reducing the pre-1996 asylum application backlog.
[2] Provisional data.
Notes:
All data except percentages are rounded to nearest five.
Columns may not sum to totals due to rounding.
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Nick Tucker

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the investigation by the Criminal Cases Review Commission into the case of Mr. Nick Tucker to report. [13440]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission commenced its review of Nicholas Tucker's conviction on 31 May 2001. It has made progress with the case but is unable to say when it will complete its consideration.

Badger Baiting

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make badger baiting a recordable crime. [13891]

Mr. Denham: Convictions, cautions, reprimands and warnings under sections 1(1) and (3), 2 and 3 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 are recordable by police forces on the Police National Computer. These include offences of wilfully killing, injuring or taking a badger, cruelly ill-treating a badger, and intentionally or recklessly interfering with a badger sett, including damaging or destroying a sett or causing a dog to enter a sett.

Paramilitary Training

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will put in place measures to ensure that children and young people are prevented from participating in paramilitary style training organised by political parties. [13426]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* I am aware of the allegations of paramilitary type training for young people being provided and the particular concerns

of the honourable member in relation to 'Camp Excalibur' in North Wales. I understand that North Wales Police have conducted a full investigation into such activities. They have assured me that no criminal offences have been committed. It is of course an offence under Section 54 (1) and (2) of the Terrorism Act 2000 to provide instruction or training or to receive instruction or training in the making or use of firearms, explosives, or chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. In addition, under subsection (3) (b) a person commits an offence if he invites another to receive instruction or training and the receipt would constitute an offence under subsection (2) but for the fact that it is to take place outside the United Kingdom. Any concrete and verifiable evidence of such activities will be dealt with immediately.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the impact on the criminal injuries compensation scheme of the decision in R *v.* CICAP ex parte August and ex parte Brown; and if he will make a statement. [12969]

Mr. Denham: The handling of individual cases, or groups of case, is entirely a matter for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and the independent appellate body, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel. Ministers do not get involved in or comment on those bodies' handling of individual applications or their interpretation of the scheme rules.

However, I understand that in the light of the outcome of this judicial review, the claims officers of the Compensation Authority and the Adjudicators of the Appeals Panel will continue to determine whether an applicant was a non-consenting victim of a sexual offence by considering each case on its facts and circumstances.

Corporate Manslaughter

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress in bringing forward proposals for a new offence of *(a)* corporate manslaughter and *(b)* corporate killing. [12736]

Mr. Denham: In May 2000 we published a consultation paper "Reforming the Law on Involuntary Manslaughter". This included proposals for a new offence of corporate manslaughter or corporate killing.

The consultation period closed in September 2000 and an interdepartmental working group has been set up to consider the issues raised. We intend to bring forward legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

National Black Police Association

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will update the information given in his answer to the hon. Member for Worthing, West of 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 345W, concerning the National Black Police Association. [13708]

Mr. Denham: As you will be aware, an article appeared in the *Evening Standard* on 8 August which suggested that the written answers which I gave on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 345W, about the case of Superintendent Dizaei was not correct. As a result, I asked Home Office officials to examine further with the Metropolitan police the information which was provided. As a result, I am satisfied that the information given in the answers, which was based on information provided by the Metropolitan police, gave a misleading impression, for which I apologise. I am satisfied that there was no intention to mislead and that the errors arose because of misunderstanding between officials and the Metropolitan police about the information which the police had provided in order to answer the questions.

I am advised by the Metropolitan police that the full and accurate picture is as indicated in my letter to the hon. Member of 9 November, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. This clarifies the position regarding the telephone calls that Superintendent Dizaei made in connection with his National Black Police Association business.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Jurors

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what measures there are to protect the identity of jurors in court; [12426]

(2) what rules restrict the names of jurors being read out in court. [12425]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answers 6 November 2001]:* In cases where a judge is satisfied that there is a danger that there will be an attempt to intimidate or interfere with a jury, he may order that the names of jurors should be withheld and that they should only be balloted by number.

Libra Project

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 752W, on the Libra project, how many of the magistrates courts committees with Office Automation will keep their existing dedicated terminals to access the legacy systems until the new Libra software is available; and if he will make a statement. [13197]

Mr. Wills: In all of the Magistrates Court Committees in receipt of the Libra Office Automation service, access to the main legacy system is achieved, for almost all staff, via the Libra terminal on their desks. Access to some other legacy systems used in discrete areas is achieved by a communication link to the legacy network, again using the Libra terminal. Only a minority of staff require this facility. In some cases separate stand-alone terminals have been retained to provide this access, in addition to access for specific local systems where that access was not available on the legacy network, and is not currently available on the Libra service. This mixture of access is replicated in all MCCs.

Money Claims

Harry Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Lord Chancellor will introduce legislation to change the law so that if a claim is made against a first defendant and a second defendant

for the same sum of money the case against the latter is not decided upon until the case against the former is resolved; and if she will make a statement. [13145]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor has no current plans to change the law on joint or joint and several liability. However, under the general case management powers of the court, the trial judge may consolidate proceedings or direct a separate trial of any issue for the purpose of managing the case and furthering the overriding objective of the Civil Procedure Rules of enabling the courts to deal with cases justly.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Jobcentres (Assaults)

18. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department plans to take to deal with violent assaults on Jobcentre staff. [11699]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Violent assaults on Jobcentre staff in our 1,000 plus Jobcentres are extremely rare. In the year to 30 June 2001 out of 137 incidents involving assaults on staff only three were reported as requiring treatment for more than cuts and bruises.

In order to reduce the risk of assaults of any kind to an absolute minimum every Jobcentre is subject to a risk assessment, as a result of which a range of security measures are in force in each office. These can include, security guards, CCTV and panic alarms.

We will take determined action against customers who in any way threaten, attack or abuse our staff.

Learning Disabilities

19. **Mr. Mahmood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what support his Department is giving to help those with learning disabilities to get back into work. [11700]

Maria Eagle: People with learning disabilities have access to the full range of specialist disability employment programmes and support from specialist advisers.

Child Support Agency

22. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on progress with preparation for the changes to the Child Support Agency which will come into effect in April 2002. [11703]

Malcolm Wicks: Preparations for the introduction of the new child support scheme are progressing in accordance with the planned timetable.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the qualifications of the Auditor General to the 2000–01 accounts of the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement. [7269]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Mark Todd, dated 9 November 2001.

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions asking what assessment has been made of the qualifications of the Auditor General to the 2000/2001 accounts of the Child Support Agency.

I very much regret that the Agency's accounts have again been qualified by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Some of the concern expressed by the Comptroller and Auditor General will be remedied as we implement the new Child Support arrangements from 2002.

Others we can address now and I am doing so through a standard approach to corporate governance, to risk management and to the improvement in the accuracy of work undertaken.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much is owed to the Child Support Agency in outstanding child maintenance payments; how much of this is deemed uncollectable; and if he will make a statement. [11060]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Laurence Robertson, dated 9 November 2001:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the Child Support Agency.

You asked what amount is owed to the Child Support Agency in outstanding child maintenance payments; what amount of this is deemed uncollectable; and if he will make a statement.

The amount of debt that was reported in the Child Support Agency's Annual Accounts for the year ending March 2001 is £527.80 million, of which £286.58 million is deemed collectable, £208.72 million is deemed possibly uncollectable and £32.50 million is deferred debt.

In the year 2000/2001 our target was to reduce the amount of outstanding debt by 25%. We realised that target and have set ourselves the same challenge for 2001/2002.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the annual budget of the Child Support Agency has been in each year since 1993; [7584]

(2) how many cases the Child Support Agency has handled in the last 12 months; and what the average cost per case over that period was. [7585]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Doug Smith to Dr. Howard Stoate, dated 9 November 2001:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the Child Support Agency.

You asked what the annual budget of the Child Support Agency has been in each year since 1993. Also how many cases the Child Support Agency handled in the last 12 months; and what the average cost per case over that period was?

The table at Annex 1 shows the Annual Budget of the Agency for each year since 1993.

During the last 12 months the Agency handled 1,555,550 cases.

The average cost per case is £132.17 and is based on the Agency's running costs (excluding the costs associated with the Child Support Reforms) between October 2000 and September 2001 of £205.590 million.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex 1: Annual Budget since 1993

£ million

Year	*Budget*
1993–94	114
1994–95	184
1995–96	194
1996–97	206
1997–98	207
1998–99	204
1999–2000	207
2000–01	203

Workers (Rehabilitation)

24. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with private sector insurers about the rehabilitation of workers. [11705]

Malcolm Wicks: We are introducing a Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilot from next year which will help people at risk of losing their job due to illness or disability to stay in work. We consulted widely on the development of this pilot which attracted interest from a range of groups including insurers.

New Deal

25. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment his Department has made of the impact the new deal has had on youth unemployment. [11706]

Malcolm Wicks: Since 1997, youth unemployment has fallen by over 40 per cent., and long-term youth unemployment has been cut by almost three-quarters.

The new deal for young people has played a major part in this success. Up to August 2001, the programme had helped over 326,000 people into work, and independent research has estimated that, without the new deal, long-term youth unemployment would have been about twice as high.

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the new deal for disabled people. [11704]

Maria Eagle: Early evaluation found that the new deal for disabled people had a positive impact on helping disabled people move towards work.

The pilot phase of the new deal for disabled people helped over 8,200 people move into work and since July we have begun to introduce a network of job brokers nationally.

The new deal for disabled people is just part of the range of help we are providing to help people on Incapacity Benefit move towards work. These include removing benefit barriers to allow people to take part in worktrials and work placements and ensuring that taking up work is worthwhile by introducing the disabled person's tax credit.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the new deal for 50 plus; and if he will make a statement. [11682]

Mr. Darling: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) earlier today, at column 556.

Mr. Simon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment his Department has made of the effect the new deal has had on long-term unemployment in Birmingham, Erdington. [11687]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In Birmingham, Erdington since 1997, claimant unemployment has fallen by a third and the number of people unemployed for one year plus has been more than halved.

People who have been unemployed for 12 months or more can now benefit from the employment zone operating in Birmingham that has already helped over 2,300 people into work.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons have left the new deal for young people since its inception; how many of them have left to enter *(a)* jobs lasting less than 13 weeks, *(b)* sustained jobs and *(c)* jobs lasting more than 26 weeks; and what is the cost per person into a sustained job. [7982]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The results of the new deal for young people are contained in the monthly statistical first releases which are available in the Library.

By the end of July 2001, 594,300 people had left the new deal for young people. Of these, 239,500 were to sustained unsubsidised jobs and 190,770 entered unsubsidised jobs and did not return to claim jobseeker's allowance within 26 weeks.

If someone on the new deal for young people moves into a job which lasts less than 13 weeks, they return to the new deal and are not classed as leavers.

The average cost per person into a job on the new deal for young people is around £4,000. This estimate cannot be broken down by the type of job obtained.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many participants in the new deal for lone parents have obtained places on *(a)* Employment Service programmes, *(b)* work based learning for adult programmes and *(c)* other training programmes since the inception of the new deal; and if he will give a breakdown of the qualifications obtained in each case. [9639]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The latest information on the number of participants in the new deal for lone parents programme who have taken up education or training is contained in the statistical first release (SFR) which is available in the Library.

Information is not recorded on the type of training undertaken or qualifications gained.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many places were *(a)* available and *(b)* taken up on (i) the employment option and (ii) the full-time education and training option on the new deal for the long-term unemployed in each year since its inception; and what the cost per place in each case was. [9332]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The new deal for 25-plus provides individually tailored help for long-term unemployed adults. Support through subsidised employment and education and training opportunities (ETO) is provided on the basis of individual need. As a result, the number of places available

for subsidised employment or ETO relate directly to the number of participants for whom such provision is the most effective route into sustained, unsubsidised employment.

The table shows the number of subsidised employment and ETO places that have been taken up since July 1998.

Year	Subsidised employment	ETO
From July 1998	1,811	1,381
1999	6,597	3,995
2000	5,692	2,383
January to July 2001	2,051	[1]199
Total	16,151	7,958

[1] Numbers taking up subsidised employment and ETO placements are for pre-April 2001 starts and hence do not include starts to the enhanced new deal 25-plus intensive activity period. The figures are taken from the Statistical First Release (SFR). The number of starts to ETO may be undercounted and future SFRs will show revised figures as necessary

Estimated average unit costs for subsidised employment and ETO are available for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. These are set out in the table.

£

Year	Subsidised employment	ETO
1999–2000	1,402	802
2000–01	1,557	869

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions further to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 904, on unemployment advice, what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into deadweight cost and the new deal. [9528]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have commissioned a comprehensive range of new deal evaluation, including that by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) which looked at the overall impact of the programme on the wider economy. This was a valuable piece of research showing that without new deal long-term youth unemployment would be about twice as high.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of the long-term unemployed have been subjected to sanctions in respect of the new deal for the long-term unemployed since its inception. [9335]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Up to September 2001, 50,913 sanctions had been imposed on people participating in new deal programmes. Figures are not available for individual programmes.

Source:

Employment Service Labour Market Statistics

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost to date has been of *(a)* publications on and *(b)* advertising of new deal programmes for the unemployed. [11651]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Figures available are as follows:

Publications[1]—£2,574,69)

Advertising—£17,522,471.

It does not include an element for new deal for lone parents (NDLP). Throughout the period from 1997 to date, publications for NDLP were included in the overall cost of marketing for all advertising campaigns run by the Department of Social Security in each of the relevant financial years. It is not possible therefore to separate out this cost.

[1] This figure covers only publications for new deal for young people, 25 plus, partners of unemployed, 50 plus, disabled people and action teams

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many participants in the new deal to date have been placed on a computer skills course as part of the Ambition: IT partnership. [11649]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Ambition: IT initiative is currently being developed. Training will be available from January 2002.

Universal Bank

26. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people he estimates will receive benefits through the universal bank. [11707]

Mr. Darling: Universal Banking Services are scheduled to be available when we begin to migrate our customers to payment by automated credit transfer in 2003.

Manufacturing Sector

27. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the monthly changes in the number of people employed in the manufacturing sector since 1998. [11708]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since 1998 the number of people employed in the manufacturing sector has fallen from 4.5 million to 4.1 million. Over the same period, total UK employment has increased by around 500,000.

Manufacturing is an important sector of the economy, with output at near record levels. But as in other industrialised countries, there are fewer people employed in producing these manufactured goods than 20 years ago. In a dynamic economy jobs are being created and lost all of the time. Where changes in the economy lead to job losses, and to upheavals in individuals' lives, help and support is available so they can find a new job as quickly as possible—wherever they live and whatever part of the economy they work in.

Pensioners Credit Scheme

28. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment the Government have made of the contribution the pensioners credit scheme will make to the income of pensioners in the United Kingdom. [11709]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Credit forms a key part of the Government's overall strategy for tackling pension poverty.

When introduced in 2003 it will mean that no single pensioner need live on less than £100 a week and no pensioner couple need live on less than £154 a week.

Over-50s

29. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what strategy his Department is developing to help people aged over 50 into work. [11710]

33. **Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help unemployed people over 50 years of age back into work. [11714]

36. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help unemployed people over 50 years of age back into work. [11717]

Malcolm Wicks: We are committed to the principle of extending opportunity for all to everyone regardless of age, and tackling age discrimination in the workplace. A key element of this is the New Deal 50 plus which has already helped over 50,000 people move into work since its national launch in April 2000.

We are developing proposals to increase take up of the New Deal 50 plus training provision, and employer involvement in the programme, in the form of 3rd Age Apprenticeships. These will offer work-based training organised on a sectoral basis, making use of existing New Deal 50 plus funding arrangements, particularly the Training Grant.

The on-going Age Positive campaign is challenging workplace attitudes towards age, ensuring employers realise the benefits of employing an age diverse workforce. An extensive direct mailing initiative early in 2001 successfully targeted recruitment agencies, in addition to the Federation of Small Businesses.

Social Deprivation

30. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help people back into work in areas of social deprivation in St. Helens, North. [11711]

Malcolm Wicks: Our welfare to work initiatives are helping people into work in all parts of the country. We have introduced Action Teams for Jobs which are providing tailored help to jobless people in the most employment deprived areas. Action Teams have already helped over 15,000 jobless people move into work.

The Merseyside Action Team, launched in October 2000, covered two areas of Merseyside: Wirral and St. Helens. We increased the number of Action Teams from 40 to 53 on 15 October 2001 and St. Helens now has its own Action Team which will focus even more closely on helping disadvantaged jobless people in the area move into work.

Jobs (Peterborough)

31. **Mrs. Helen Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the impact of measures to create jobs in Peterborough since 11 September. [11712]

Malcolm Wicks: The current labour market position in Peterborough is strong. The claimant unemployment rate in September 2001 was 2.3 per cent., below the national average of 3.1 per cent. Total unemployment in the constituency has fallen by 40 per cent. in the last four years. Over the same period the number unemployed for one year or more has fallen by two thirds, while the number of 18–24 year olds unemployed for six months or more is down by almost 75 per cent.

Our aim remains employment opportunity for all throughout the country. We have put in place a framework that delivers:

a platform of economic stability and low inflation, to promote sustained growth in output and jobs;

investment in education and training so people have the skills they need to take up work;

a labour market policy with a strong work focus so all jobless people have access to vacancies, advice and help with jobsearch;

a range of New Deal programmes which help disadvantaged groups move from welfare into work;

policies such as the National Minimum Wage and Working Families Tax Credit designed to make work pay; and

locally focused initiatives designed to tackle the problems of particular areas, such as Action Teams for Jobs.

These policies, alongside continued economic growth, have combined to ensure steady improvement in the labour market.

Jobfinder Plus

32. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the role of compulsion in jobfinder plus. [11713]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In parallel with the introduction of Jobcentre Plus we a requiring new and repeat claimants to working age benefits to attend an interview with a Personal Adviser to ensure that they are aware of the support that is available to help them into work. Other than for claimants of Jobseekers Allowance, to whom the current rules continue to apply, there is no requirement on them to take any other steps to look for work.

Employment Programmes

34. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had recently with employers to discuss the Government's employment programmes. [11715]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since June of this year we have met with key employer organisations and many individual employers. Their input is central to the development of our employment policies and to ensuring that our employment programmes meet local labour market needs and employers' recruitment needs.

We have also created the National Employment Panel to ensure that employers, and other key customers, have a strong and permanent voice within the Department. The panel is an employer-led body that will provide independent advice on the design, delivery and performance of our welfare to work initiatives.

Employers have a central role to play in achieving our goal of creating and sustaining employment opportunities for all.

Training Providers

35. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the average length of time

taken by his Department to release funds to training providers following audit in the latest six-month period for which figures are available. [11716]

Malcolm Wicks: Audits are carried out by the Department, as part of its normal commercial relationships with external providers. Departmental auditors are not empowered to withhold funds which are payable to providers. They will advise on any irregularities that may have been identified during the course of the audit. Contracting teams will decide on any appropriate action in these circumstances.

In the last six months, there are no instances of the Department withholding payment to training providers as a result of audit activities.

Maternity Benefit

37. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the operation of sure start maternity benefit. [11718]

Malcolm Wicks: The Sure Start Maternity Grant complements the Sure Start programme, which is helping many thousands of children from the most deprived areas to get the best start in life.

The Grant is available to people receiving Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Working Families' Tax Credit, or Disabled Person's Tax Credit. It is worth up to three times as much as the Maternity Payment it replaced and provides more help to those families in most need.

Employment Zones

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of employment zones in reducing unemployment. [11681]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Employment Zones are one of a range of initiatives we have introduced to help people move into work. The 15 Employment Zones are performing well and have already helped over 14,500 people into work. We are currently evaluating the Zones before deciding how to take the initiative further.

Tax Credits (Pensioners)

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what further plans he has to introduce tax credits for pensioners. [11694]

Mr. McCartney: As announced in the Gracious Address, the Government will introduce a Bill to provide for Pension Credit in this session.

The Pension Credit forms a key part of the Government's overall strategy for tackling pensioner poverty.

When introduced in 2003 it will mean that no single pensioner need live on less than £100 a week and no pensioner couple need live on less than £154 a week.

Around half of all pensioners will gain as a result of the introduction of the Credit.

Pensions

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on the status of the basic state pension within overall pension provision in the United Kingdom. [11701]

Mr. McCartney: The basic state pension will remain the foundation of income in retirement. We have increased the rates above inflation this year and we will do so again next year.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 242W, on pensions, if he will provide quarterly figures on the sales of personal pensions for the last five years. [12449]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table:

Thousand

Time period	*Number of personal pension and Group Personal Pension contracts sold*
1996	
Qtr 1	254
Qtr 2	300
Qtr 3	247
Qtr 4	253
1997	
Qtr 1	300
Qtr 2	398
Qtr 3	329
Qtr 4	279
1998	
Qtr 1	360
Qtr 2	384
Qtr 3	318
Qtr 4	332
1999	
Qtr 1	307
Qtr 2	327
Qtr 3	279
Qtr 4	271
2000	
Qtr 1	251
Qtr 2	268
Qtr 3	234
Qtr 4	242
2001	
Qtr 1	300
Qtr 2	314

Notes:

1. Figures sourced from the Association of British Insurers.
2. The figures include both single premium and regular premium pensions. They do not include additional voluntary contributions.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the feasibility of using the administrative mechanisms that he uses to ensure that women receive their retirement pension as

soon as they reach 60 years to allow him to pay winter fuel payments to women who reach 60 years after the qualifying date but before the end of the winter. [14032]

Mr. McCartney: Using a qualifying week allows us to gather and verify household information in order for payments to be made in time for the coldest weather. To do otherwise could compromise our ability to make timely payments to more elderly recipients.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have responded to the recent winter fuel payment advertising campaign; and what steps have been taken to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign. [7913]

Mr. McCartney: Press advertising ran over a two week period at the beginning of August 2001 to support a targeted mailing to those newly eligible for a Winter Fuel Payment from winter 2001.

We measured press advertising specific response (period 2–23 August 2001) as follows:

A total of 27,016 calls to the Winter Fuel Payment Helpline. Of these 9,389 calls quoted specific press adverts.

Press coupons continue to be returned. Up to 5 October 2001:

19,232 press coupons had been returned requesting a claim form.

154,241 completed claim forms had been returned in total.

The campaign for winter 2001 will continue until the end of March 2002. Evaluation takes place on an on-going basis through call centre statistics. It will be assessed later in the campaign if customer interview research needs to be commissioned.

Inter-agency Liaison

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to improve liaison between the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. [11690]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The first 49 Jobcentre Plus offices opened on 22 October providing, for the first time, a fully integrated employment and benefit service. First reactions from both individual customers and employers have been overwhelmingly positive. We plan progressively to extend this integration nation-wide beginning later next year.

Pensions Complaints

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* cases were referred to OPAS, *(b)* complaints about OPAS were referred to the Pensions Ombudsman, *(c)* other complaints were referred to the Pensions Ombudsman and *(d)* complaints were upheld by the Pensions Ombudsman in respect of (i) OPAS and (ii) others and *(e)* complaints were rejected by the Pensions Ombudsman in each of the last three years. [12104]

Mr. McCartney: The available information is contained in the following table:

	Year ended 31 March 1999	*Year ended 31 March 2000*	*Year ended 31 March 2001*
Inquiries and complaints received by OPAS	30,984 (7,176 written)	32,174 (7,304 written)	36,322 (8,415 written)
Inquiries and complaints received by the Pensions Ombudsman	3,067	3,269	3,215
Inquiries and complaints rejected by the Pensions Ombudsman as not suitable for investigation[1]	2,395	2,594	2,409
Complaints upheld by the Pensions Ombudsman to some extent[2] (percentage)	59	49	39

[1] Most rejections are because the case is not within jurisdiction (eg referred to a different ombudsman) or because the matter has not been fully explored with the body complained against, or because OPAS has not been given an opportunity to resolve the matter. The complainant receives a decision in almost all cases which are within jurisdiction and where the matter has been explored/OPAS consulted.
[2] As a percentage of those investigated.

Complaints about OPAS are not within the Pensions Ombudsman's jurisdiction and no specific records are kept of complaints made about OPAS and rejected, but if people are unhappy with the result of inquiries made by OPAS they can refer the matter to the Pensions Ombudsman.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what training has been undertaken by staff commencing work in the new Jobcentre Plus offices. [14033]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to answer given to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 8 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 374W.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which Jobcentre Plus offices provide the facility for benefit claims to be made over the telephone; what length of time he estimates such telephone calls to take; and who is responsible for paying for the calls. [14035]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Customers making new and repeat claims in all of the 15 Jobcentre Plus areas that have been operating since 22 October are encouraged to make initial contact with Jobcentre Plus by telephone. During this call the member of staff will collect initial details about the customer, and subsequently send them the appropriate claim forms. We estimate that the phone call should take no longer than 20 minutes. Customers are told the expected call length at the beginning of the call and can request they are called back by the member of staff.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of the new Jobcentre Plus offices *(a)* have been risk assessed and *(b)* are awaiting risk assessment to determine the necessary level of security to be employed following the removal of glass screens. [14238]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: All of the Jobcentre Plus offices which are operating the new Jobcentre Plus process have been risk assessed.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions at what level of risk assessment it will be deemed necessary to provide a Jobcentre Plus office with security staff; and how many security staff he expects will be employed in Jobcentre Plus offices in the next 12 months. [14230]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Decisions on whether individual offices require security staff have been made on the basis of the recommendations of the risk assessments carried out in each office. Currently, 78 security staff are in place in 28 offices. Further risk assessments are shortly to be carried out in all Jobcentre Plus offices, in the light of experience of their actual operation. Further deployment of security staff will be decided in the light of the recommendations of these assessments.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what consultation with Benefits Agency staff was undertaken before the decision to remove glass security screens from new Jobcentre Plus offices; and what were the results of such consultation. [14224]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus management have been involved in lengthy discussions nationally with the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union regarding the layout and furnishings of the new Jobcentre Plus offices including in respect of the Risk Assessment process. Local PCS representatives have also been consulted about the safety arrangements in each of the new Jobcentre Plus offices, including in respect of local Risk Assessments. There have also been frequent and regular communications direct with staff in both the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who is responsible for carrying out risk assessments in the new Jobcentre Plus offices; and if this process is subject to reassessment following *(a)* appeal from office staff and *(b)* review at designated time intervals. [14237]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Risk assessments in Jobcentre Plus offices were carried out by specialist staff employed by the Employment Service and the company Land Securities Trillium which is responsible for the Benefits Agency estate.

Further risk assessments are shortly to be carried out in all Jobcentre Plus offices in the light of experience of their actual operation.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his Department's estimate is of the costs involved in equipping all new Jobcentre Plus offices with *(a)* CCTV, *(b)* panic alarms and *(c)* security staff. [14234]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The estimated additional costs in respect of these measures in the new Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices are currently in the order of £1 million–£2 million, which represents a mix of one-off and continuing costs.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Jobcentre Plus offices have opened *(a)* with and *(b)* without protective screens; and what contingency plans the Government have to ensure that claimants who live in areas affected by industrial action continue to receive their benefit entitlement. [14036]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: All 15 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder areas have screened facilities for the handling of customers or situations likely to give rise to particular risks.

Detailed contingency plans are in place to ensure that, to the maximum extent possible, customers continue to receive the benefits to which they are entitled, notwithstanding the current dispute.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what personal safety advice has been given to Jobcentre Plus staff following the removal of glass security screens in new offices. [14231]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: A key element in the introduction of the new Jobcentre Plus offices has been intensive training for staff in both interviewing and dealing with difficult situations and customers.

Each office has its own plan in place for handling incidents so that all staff know what action to take should an incident occur.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions according to what criteria new Jobcentre Plus offices will be risk assessed; and what protection will be offered to staff in offices determined to be high risk. [14226]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Risk assessments for each of the new Jobcentre Plus offices have been carried out within the framework of a generic risk assessment which was developed earlier in the year in consultation with staff representatives. This generic risk Assessment recommended a wide range of potential risk control measures which risk assessors used as a basis for completing risk assessments at each Pathfinder office. The list of control measures set out in the generic risk assessment is not prescriptive and assessors were free to make whatever recommendations were appropriate to each office.

Drawing on those assessments, and following consultation with local trade union health and safety representatives, a series of extra security measures have been introduced. These include wide coverage by closed circuit television; training for staff in how to handle difficult situations; better management in each office to avoid difficult situations building up; panic alarms; and more visible and effective security guards. Additionally, in each pathfinder area there are screened facilities to deal with individuals and parts of the business which pose a greater risk.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many security staff are employed in Benefits Agency offices; and what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of such staff in *(a)* deterring criminal acts and *(b)* helping to protect office staff when a criminal act is committed; [14233]

(2) how many old Benefits Agency offices are fitted with CCTV cameras; and what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of such cameras in *(a)* deterring criminal acts and *(b)* helping to provide evidence following a criminal act. [14232]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There are currently 387 CCTV systems installed and Land Securities Trillium has 1,179 permanent security staff members deployed in Benefits Agency offices. The number of security staff is supplemented by temporary staff where local needs demand.

The installation of CCTV cameras and the deployment of security staff are based on the recommendations of independent risk assessors in order to reduce risks for staff in those offices. The security teams regularly defuse situations at an early stage and where necessary take action to notify the police. No statistics are available on the number of occasions when security staff intervene or CCTV is used as evidence in a prosecution.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his Department's policy is for dealing with claimants who act in a threatening or violent manner towards Benefits Agency staff. [14235]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Ministers and senior management have made clear that we will take determined action against customers who in any way threaten, attack or abuse our staff.

Child Poverty

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proposals he has to end child poverty; and how many children living in poverty there were in *(a)* June 1997 and *(b)* June 2001. [13757]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* Child poverty and social exclusion are complex multi-dimensional concepts, affecting many aspects of children's lives—including their living standards, health, housing, the quality of the environment, and opportunities to learn. The third "Opportunity for all" report (Cm 5260) sets out the Government's strategy for tackling child poverty and social exclusion and presents the latest information on the indicators used to monitor progress against this strategy.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he plans to extend the use of the application registration cards for asylum seekers to all benefit claimants. [11741]

Malcolm Wicks: The new application registration card will replace the Home Office standard acknowledgement letter issued to all asylum seekers. The card will only be issued to acknowledge an application for asylum and for no other purpose.

As the application registration card is designed solely for use by asylum seekers, who are not eligible to receive social security benefits, it would be inappropriate to extend its use to non-asylum seekers who claim benefits.

Attendance Allowance (Care Homes)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the entitlement of self-funded residents of nursing and care homes to receive attendance allowance; and if he will estimate how many self-funded residents of nursing and care homes are receiving attendance allowance in each nation of the United Kingdom. [10915]

Maria Eagle: People who meet the whole cost of their place in a residential care home or nursing home entirely from their own resources and without help from public funds are termed self-funders and may be entitled to continued payment of attendance allowance which is based on care needs. Those self-funders who are entitled to attendance allowance can continue to be paid the benefit subject to their receiving no help from public funds.

We estimate the number of self-funders over the age of 65 in the UK to be:

	Number of self-funders
England	57,000
Scotland	7,000
Wales	6,000
Northern Ireland	2,000
Total	72,000

Notes:

1. Estimates are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Data for England, Wales and Northern Ireland to estimate the number of self-funders in receipt of attendance allowance in nursing and care homes were not available. We did have reliable information from the Scottish Executive for Scotland. This was used to then estimate the numbers in the remaining nations.
3. It is assumed that all those self-funders in residential and nursing homes are entitled to attendance allowance or the care component of disability living allowance.
4. It is assumed that the percentage of over 65s in care who are self-funders is the same in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as in Scotland.
5. May 2001 and February 2001 5 per cent. scan of AA and DLA computer systems and Scottish Community Care Statistics 2000 .

Combined Pension Statement

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to introduce the combined pension statement. [7575]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions will offer a new service to enable people of working age to more effectively plan their retirement incomes through the provision of combined pension forecast statements.

This voluntary service, which is a joint initiative between the Department's pension providers and employers, is being implemented in the three main phases.

Phase 1 saw the development of the service through a series of pilot exercises conducted with the pensions industry. The pilots, which began in January 2000, are now coming to a conclusion.

Phase 2, which commenced on 18 October 2001, sees the formal recruitment and registration of pension providers to the service.

Phase 3 represents the physical production of the new statement by the industry. This phase will take the form of a rolling programme building to a service which will aim to provide 15 million combined statements by 2005–06.

Devolved Administrations

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is with regard to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department giving evidence to (i) Scottish Parliament, (ii) Welsh Assembly and (iii) Northern Ireland Assembly committees; and to what categories of document he gives (A) full access, (B) restricted access and (C) no access to (w) Scottish Parliament, (x) Welsh Assembly, (y) Northern Ireland Assembly and (z) House of Commons Select Committees. [7021]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1003W.

Departmental Spending (Staff)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate total staff costs for his Department and its agencies by nation and region of the UK; and if he will make a statement. [6847]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is in the tables.

The Department for Work and Pensions administers social security and employment services across Great Britain on an integrated basis. Not all staff costs incurred by the Department and its agencies within a nation or region relate to customers within the same nation or region.

Department for Work and Pensions: total and percentage staff costs by grade level and region/nation

Table 1—total staff costs

£

Government office region	*All grades*	*SCS level*	*Level 6/7*	*SEO/HEO level*	*EO level*	*AO/AA level*	*Ind/other grade*
London	331,901,833	7,739,330	18,922,633	41,029,012	120,116,892	143,646,332	447,634
South East	196,724,201	[1]—	1,819,616	14,061,550	79,226,664	99,956,176	1,660,195
South West	144,022,302	[1]—	1,485,204	12,006,716	53,378,878	76,262,133	735,984
West Midlands	196,304,739	363,181	2,239,319	15,891,457	73,805,047	103,993,203	[1]—
North West	332,157,197	1,226,834	11,705,330	39,142,345	111,808,485	163,571,051	4,703,152
North East	245,071,976	1,378,687	6,319,869	28,017,167	73,061,108	135,318,111	977,034
Merseyside	100,380,994	[1]—	1,306,222	6,952,041	36,263,502	55,821,874	[1]—
Yorkshire and Humberside	255,268,964	3,017,964	13,627,902	48,812,860	94,385,696	95,372,417	52,125
East Midlands	105,249,208	[1]—	1,299,506	7,657,134	41,157,270	54,982,172	70,123
Eastern	96,206,315	[1]—	789,106	5,496,386	34,666,590	55,179,192	[1]—
England Total	2,003,287,729	14,037,429	59,514,707	219,066,668	717,870,132	984,102,661	8,696,138
Wales	116,956,484	[1]—	1,253,113	8,879,369	44,870,553	60,569,941	1,242,775
Scotland	247,708,964	[1]—	3,163,423	19,229,663	93,275,734	129,009,599	2,693,558
GB Total	2,367,953,177	14,515,151	63,931,243	247,175,700	856,016,419	1,173,682,201	12,632,471
Northern Ireland	156,169	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	156,169
Grand Total	2,368,109,346	14,515,151	63,931,243	247,175,700	856,016,419	1,173,682,201	12,788,640

Table 2—Percentage of staff costs

Government Office region	*All grades*	*SCS level*	*Level 6/7*	*SEO/HEO level*	*EO level*	*AO/AA level*	*Ind/other grade*
London	14	53	30	17	14	12	4
South East	8	[1]—	3	6	9	9	13
South West	6	[1]—	2	5	6	6	6
West Midlands	8	3	4	6	9	9	[1]—
North West	14	8	18	16	13	14	37
North East	10	9	10	11	9	12	8
Merseyside	4	[1]—	2	3	4	5	[1]—
Yorkshire and Humberside	11	21	21	20	11	8	0
East Midlands	4	[1]—	2	3	5	5	1
Eastern	4	[1]—	1	2	4	5	[1]—
England Total	85	97	93	89	84	84	68
Wales	5	[1]—	2	4	5	5	10
Scotland	10	[1]—	5	8	11	11	21
GB total	100	100	100	100	100	100	99
Northern Ireland	0	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	1
Grand total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

[1] Because there are three or fewer staff in this category the number and cost have not been separately identified.
[2] Staff costs for Northern Ireland have not been identified by grade because the small numbers in each category could potentially identify individuals and their salaries.

Notes:

1. Staff costs include basic salary and allowances plus employer's contribution to National Insurance and Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme.
2. Staff Costs do not include ancillary matters such as accommodation, office services, stationery etc.
3. The staff data from which these figures derive are as at 31 August 2001 as this represents the correct staffing position of DWP, which was formed in June 2001. Earlier DSS data is not comparable.
4. Employment Service staff are included.
5. War Pensions Agency Staff are included as they are still largely within the overall DWP administrative structure even though WPA is now technically part of the Ministry of Defence.
6. Casual and other staff on temporary contracts are included.
7. The grade groupings include specialist staff such as accountants, lawyers and auditors in their "generalist" grade equivalent.
8. Because the staffing make-up of DWP is different from the DSS, the figures above are not comparable with those provided for DSS in Civil Service Statistics 2000.
9. Overtime costs are not included as it would not be possible to collate the historical data required in sufficient detail in the time available.

Job Losses

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many job losses have occurred in the UK as a result of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. [9885]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Because normal labour market turnover is so large, it is difficult to assess how much is due to particular changes or events.

Jobcentres (Electronic Services)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many jobcentres have had electronic jobpoints fitted; how many jobs are accessible through this service; and what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of the service in placing people in employment; [11260]

(2) how much has been spent on the development and installation of jobpoint kiosks in jobcentres across the country. [11255]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since the first jobpoints were installed, a little over nine months ago, over 650 offices have been equipped with almost 6,200 machines. By February 2002, when all 1,000 jobcentres will have been fitted with a total of 9,000 jobpoints it will be the largest managed network in the world of this sort of terminal.

The Employment Service typically handles around 400,000 vacancies at any one time and these can be searched on jobpoints by job type, location, hours or other factors. In addition, there are usually more than 10,000 vacancies from other public employment services in the European Economic Area and around 1,500 which are being displayed by a small number of private agencies and recruiters as part of an experiment.

Jobpoints are part of an extensive programme of modernisation of the Employment Service, which also includes vacancies taken through a single national telephone number, an internet job bank and new job matching tools for staff. It is not possible to separate the cost of jobpoints from other elements of the modernisation programme because of the interdependencies within it. As we have said before in a press release dated 31 October 2000 the work is being carried out through an eight year contract with Electronic Data Systems. The first phase of this, which included the jobpoints, is at a total of £470 million. However, a substantial part of these costs will be offset through efficiency savings derived from the whole of the programme.

Evidence from an early evaluation of the Jobpoint Pathfinder offices is available in the House of Commons Library. It shows that the use of jobpoints is encouraging jobseekers to look at a larger range of jobs across wider geographical areas. Jobseekers are finding the machines easy to use and that they improve the effectiveness of their job searching. Evidence is emerging that people are applying for more jobs, and this should increase their prospects of moving from benefits to work, and doing so more quickly.

The effectiveness of jobpoints is currently being further assessed as part of a wider evaluation of the Modernising Employment Service (MES) Programme. Results from the first year of the evaluation will be published in 2002 with final results in 2003.

ONE Service

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the findings of his Department's research report number 149 "The Medium-Term Effects of Voluntary Participation in ONE"; and what steps he is taking to ensure that the findings of the report are acted upon. [11262]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The evidence from this report suggests that ONE has succeeded in providing a more individually tailored and work-focused service to clients. The report is only based on findings from the voluntary stage of ONE and so it is too early to draw definitive conclusions about ONE until evidence is available from the period when participation in work focused interviews became compulsory. However, emerging findings from ONE evaluation reports are being used to inform the development of the new Jobcentre Plus service.

Job Opportunies (Scotland)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action the Government are taking to help create new job opportunities in East Central Scotland. [9656]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since 1997, unemployment in the areas of Edinburgh, Fife, Lothian and Dundee has fallen by around a third, and long-term unemployment by around 60 per cent. Our aim is employment opportunity for all throughout the country. We have put in place a framework that delivers:

- a platform of economic stability and low inflation, to promote sustained growth in output and jobs;
- investment in education and training so people have the skills they need to take up work;
- a labour market policy with a strong work focus so all jobless people have access to vacancies, advice and help with jobsearch;
- a range of New Deal programmes which help disadvantaged groups move from welfare into work;
- policies such as the National Minimum Wage and Working Families Tax Credit designed to make work pay; and
- locally focused initiatives designed to tackle the problems of particular areas, such as Action Teams for Jobs, one of which started operations in Dundee on 15 October.

These policies, alongside continued economic growth, have combined to ensure steady improvement in the labour market.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department completed the planned checks on national insurance numbers in 2000; and how many of those checks resulted in anomalies that were passed to fraud investigators. [14128]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

During the 1999–2000 tax year, 626,641 payroll items were checked. Of these 288,924 errors were found and 6,223 cases were referred for potential fraud investigation.

During the 2000–01 tax year, 1,035,796 payroll items were checked of which 770,308 were found to contain errors and 22,777 were referred for potential fraud investigation.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how many national insurance accounts exist where no contributions are being made; and what assessment he has made of the actual or potential fraudulent use of such accounts. [14129]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

There are approximately 14 million national insurance accounts in existence where contributors have made no contributions or received any credits for over 3 years or more.

An assessment shows that there is no evidence to suggest that there is any higher incidence of actual or potential fraud on these accounts compared to any other.

Departmental Staff (Disability)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of staff in his Department had a disability in each year since 1992; and what targets are in place to increase the recruitment of people with disabilities. [9809]

Mr. McCartney: The proportion of staff with a disability employed by the Department for Work and Pensions is currently 5 per cent. The proportion of disabled staff employed by the former Department of Social Security and the Employment Service in each year since 1992 (where data are available) is set out in the table.

Percentage

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
DSS	6.1	—	4.9	4.7	4.7
ES	—	—	—	6.5	5.8

The figures for previous years omit the relatively small number of staff who have additionally transferred across to DWP from DfEE.

This Department has a range of policies and procedures in place to encourage the employment of people with disabilities covering their recruitment, retention and career development. In addition, this Department participates in the Positive About Disabled People Symbol scheme (known as the "two ticks" symbol) and operates a guaranteed interview scheme for job applicants with disabilities. Equality targets have been put in place to increase the representation of disabled staff at all levels within across the organisation, for achievement by March 2005. Details are set out in the table:

	Percentage of disabled staff as at December 1999	*Target percentage by 2005*
SCS	1.6	3.2
Grades 6, 7 and SEO	2.2	3
HEO and EO	5.1	6
AO and AA	4.7	6

Key:
SCS: Senior Civil Service.
SEO: Senior Executive Officer.
EO: Executive Officer.
AA: Administrative Assistant.
Grade 6,7: Senior management grades.
HEO: Higher Executive Officer.
AO: Administrative Officer.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland who receive incapacity benefit and have an occupational or personal pension income which does not affect their incapacity benefit; [12937]

(2) how many people in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland in receipt of incapacity benefit since 1 April have had their benefit entitlement reduced; how many of these have had their benefit reduced to nothing; and what percentage of them receiving incapacity benefit since 1 April have had it reduced. [12933]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The available information is in the tables.

People entitled to Incapacity Benefit (IB) whose benefit is affected by their occupational or personal pensions as at 31 May 2001

	IB reduced to nothing	*IB Reduced*	*Percentage reduced*[1]
Wales	[2]—	[3]200	4.7
England	[3]200	[3]500	2.0
Scotland	[2]—	[3]100	1.8

[1] Figures refer to the percentage of new and repeat claims to Incapacity Benefit made since 6 April 2001 where Incapacity Benefit was reduced or reduced to nothing.

[2] Numbers are taken from a small number of sample cases and are subject to a high degree of sampling error, they should therefore only be used as an indication of the current situation.

[3] Nil or Negligible.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Figures for Northern Ireland are not included. Social Security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Source:

Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the benefit computer system and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

Estimated number of people with an occupational or personal pension, which does not affect the rate of Incapacity Benefit they receive as at 31 May 2001

	Recipients
Wales	38,000
England	340,000
Scotland	41,000

Notes:

1. Figures include recipients with an occupational pension in excess of £85.00 per week, whose Incapacity Benefit is not affected because their claim was made for a period which began before 6 April 2001.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand, although estimates of recipients with occupational and personal pensions cannot be regarded as accurate to this degree.

3. Figures for Northern Ireland are not included. Social Security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Source:

Estimates derived from a 5 per cent. sample of the benefit computer system, excluding a small number of cases held clerically, and the 1999–2000 Family Resources Survey.

Disability Income Guarantee

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to uprate the disability income guarantee in line with earnings; and if he will make a statement. [8967]

Maria Eagle: In line with section 150 of the Social Security Administration Act, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently reviewing the rates of benefit. He will make an announcement in due course.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the part played by the resistance by farmers to the slaughter of their stock in the spread of the foot and mouth outbreak. [12421]

Margaret Beckett: Resistance to the slaughter of stock on contiguous premises has led to delays in some disease control operations, seriously hampering efforts to bring the epidemic under control. The longer that animals which are believed to have been exposed to the virus remain alive, the greater the risk of them developing disease and spreading infection to neighbouring farms.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to review licensing arrangements for animal movements following the recent foot and mouth disease outbreaks. [8546]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* The licensing arrangements for animal movements are kept under constant review and have been regularly amended to reflect the improving disease situation. Once foot and mouth disease has been eradicated, we will need to look closely at the way in which animal movements contributed to the rapid spread of disease. This aspect of the outbreak is likely to be one of the issues that will be examined by Dr. Iain Anderson's independent inquiry.

There have been restrictions on the movement of pigs for many years. Any proposal to retain licensing for other animal movements would need to balance carefully the needs of the livestock industry and the inherent disease control risks associated with animal movements.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the amount of FMD vaccine *(a)* held in the UK and *(b)* available from elsewhere in Europe. [12291]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* As at the end of October, the Government's commercial supplies of a suitable vaccine to protect against the current strain of FMD virus would be sufficient to vaccinate at least 2.5 million animals. The exact number of doses needed per animal depends on the potency of the final vaccine, the number of doses given and the length of time we wish the animals to be protected. Stocks were increased and kept up to date as part of our vaccination contingency plans.

We also have access to some of the estimated 6 million doses of the relevant vaccine held in the European vaccine bank. We placed a reserve on 125,000 doses in April 2001 as a precautionary measure.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts (i) negotiated and (ii) yet to be negotiated in relation to (A) cleansing and (B) restocking following infection of the foot and mouth disease. [8149]

Mr. Morley: Secondary cleansing and disinfection work required to be undertaken under contracts agreed with contractors and farmers has now been completed on about 5,300 premises. A further 1,400 premises which are subject to similar contractual arrangements are undergoing cleansing and disinfection at present, with another 210 still to be started.

The cost of carrying out contracted work on cleansing and disinfection, based on completed, continuing and a small number of premises still to be started, is estimated to be about £250 million.

Restocking of premises is a matter for the individual owner of the premises and stock and no contractual information is available.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans he has to lift the three kilometre D notice in the infected area in Leominster. [6662]

Mr. Morley: There have been no infected premises within 10 kilometres of Leominster and therefore there are no three kilometre D notice restrictions in place around Leominster. All protection zone restrictions in Herefordshire have been lifted; the last was lifted on 21 August. However, there is currently sampling and testing of the premises in the three to 10 kilometre surveillance zones in Herefordshire and until this has been completed satisfactorily, the county remains at "at risk" status.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the total number of animals, by species, slaughtered under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme since 19 February. [14055]

Mr. Morley: The Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme was opened on 22 March 2001, to deal with severe welfare problems arising from the foot and mouth disease movement restrictions that cannot be dealt with by any other means. As at 7 November, the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme had dealt with a total of 1,929,891 animals since it opened. Of these, 1,481,049 were sheep (76.7 per cent.), 279,126 were pigs (14.5 per cent.), 166,531 were cattle (8.6 per cent.) and 3,185 were other species (0.2 per cent.).

Chernobyl

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many sheep, on how many farms, are subject to restrictions resulting from the fallout of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986, broken down by region. [9938]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The table shows the current numbers of farms and sheep remaining under restrictions arising from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986. The figures are presented for England, Wales and Scotland. The last restrictions in place in Northern Ireland were removed in April 2000.

	Farms	*Sheep*
England	9	11,500
Wales	359	180,000
Scotland	18	38,000
Total	386	229,500

Crustastun

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support her Department is giving to Bristol University and to Silsoe Research Institute in Bedford for the development of the Crustastun. [11198]

Mr. Morley: I have been advised that DEFRA is not supporting the development of Crustastun which is a trade name. DEFRA has supported link projects looking at the use of electric stunning for farmed fish.

Litter

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the annual cost of clearing up litter in the UK in each of the last three years. [11968]

Mr. Meacher: The Government do not keep consolidated data on how much each local authority spends on litter removal annually. A recent estimate by the Tidy Britain Group suggests that total annual expenditure on litter removal in England is about £370 million.

Rural Recovery Programme

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the money committed to rural businesses as part of the rural recovery programme following the FMD crisis has been allotted. [9601]

Alun Michael: All of the £27 million allocated as direct grants to business in May has been committed. Some £21 million has already been approved for payment. Payment is made as soon as possible after a claim is submitted, subject to the usual checks, and it is expected that the full allocation will be used. The submission of a claim depends on the individual business which has received grant approval depending on individual RDA/ Business Link procedures.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft her Department recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside his Department. [13138]

Mr. Morley: There were no cases of computer hacking detected for 2000 and two cases in 2001, to date, perpetrated by persons outside the Department. There were no cases of fraud detected during the same period. The number of computer thefts detected was 19 in 2000 (15 by insiders and the remainder by persons outside the Department) and 16 in 2001, to date, (15 by insiders and the remainder by persons outside the Department). Figures for 2000 and until 11 June 2001 relate to Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and after that date to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those members of the Carbon Trust Board who represent *(a)* the energy supply industry, *(b)* the energy efficiency industry, *(c)* local government and *(d)* the rest of the public sector. [12102]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* For a full list of Carbon Trust Board Members, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to him on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 36–37W. Appointments to the Carbon Trust Board are a matter for the Chairman and the Board. However, Government non-executive directors are appointed to represent the public interest and the interests of their respective Departments and Devolved Administrations.

The independent non-executive directors are appointed on a personal basis and not to represent any particular interest. The aim is to bring the right balance of skills and experience to the strategic direction of the company. The executive team and work programme of the Carbon Trust will be developed to address operational or sectoral needs. In addition the Carbon Trust will be establishing stakeholder advisory groups to establish dialogue with and represent the interests of particular groups.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the total level of Government financial support made available to energy efficiency measures in each year since 1990. [12791]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The funding made available by the Department and its predecessors to support and promote efficiency measures in each year since 1990 is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1990–91	18.4
1991–92	39.3
1992–93	49.4
1993–94	60.3
1994–95	102.7
1995–96	128.5
1996–97	116.0
1997–98	110.5
1998–99	109.0
1999–2000	112.0
2000–01	[1]163.5

[1] Estimated

The core of this spend is the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme, support for the Energy Saving Trust and the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. Energy Saving Trust funding for Scotland was devolved from 1 July

1999. Between 1991–99, the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme covered the whole of Great Britain. In July 1999 and April 2000, separate programmes were set up in Scotland and Wales respectively. For these devolved areas, it is the responsibility of the respective Parliaments and Assemblies to comment on the funding situation.

AAPS

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will draw down the EU share, and pay the UK share, of the *(a)* first and *(b)* second tranche of aid on AAPS 2000 payments before 31 October. [9709]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 738W.

Livestock Disease Prevention

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the future viability of livestock markets in England and Wales; and what steps she has taken to provide financial assistance for the additional costs involved in implementing extra disease prevention measures. [11421]

Mr. Morley: The Department's immediate priority is to eradicate foot and mouth disease. We have not made a formal assessment of the longer term viability of livestock markets. However, there will be a need to consider the extent to which the movement of animals through markets contributed to the spread of the disease.

There are no plans to provide financial assistance to livestock markets for the costs incurred in relation to biosecurity arrangements. Livestock markets are legally required to carry out cleansing and disinfection at the conclusion of each market and must therefore bear these costs themselves.

Animal Welfare

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will commission a study on the efficacy of marketing animals *(a)* over the internet and *(b)* via video link in reducing (i) the cost, (ii) animal suffering and (iii) infection risks of livestock markets. [12283]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* It is for farmers to decide how best to market their animals, taking account of costs and animal health and welfare requirements. We are aware of various initiatives by auctioneers to hold video and internet sales and that these have met with a degree of success. Such initiatives are to be welcomed as they provide another option for farmers to market their animals and we will watch developments with interest.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what response her Department has made to the European Commission's proposal to reclassify medicines for food-producing animals as prescription-only medicines; and what assessment she has made of the consequence for *(a)* animal health and *(b)* the agricultural and equine veterinary medicine supply industry. [14063]

Mr. Morley: This proposal forms part of a much wider set of proposals produced by the European Commission to amend the procedures for the authorisation and control of both human and veterinary medicines in the EU. In its present form this particular proposal could result in UK farmers having to pay more by incurring veterinary surgeons' fees when obtaining those medicines that are currently available without veterinary intervention. This may deter farmers from seeking appropriate treatment. Furthermore, the proposal could restrict the number and types of veterinary medicines that may be supplied by registered agricultural merchants and saddlers, to a limited range of products for dogs and cats. This could have significant adverse effects on those businesses.

In considering the proposal the Government have taken account of its likely impact on the supply of veterinary medicines and has agreed that, during negotiations, UK officials should seek to modify the proposal to enable a flexible approach to the distribution of veterinary medicinal products that takes advantage of existing national practices, so long as consumer protection and animal welfare can be demonstrably assured.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessments she has made of the proposals by the European Commission that medicines for food-producing animals will become prescription only medicines; and if she will make a statement on the consequences of this proposal for rural agricultural businesses. [13860]

Mr. Morley: This proposal forms part of a much wider set of proposals produced by the European Commission to amend the procedures for the authorisation and control of both human and veterinary medicines in the EU. In its present form this particular proposal could result in UK farmers having to pay more by incurring veterinary surgeons' fees when obtaining those medicines that are currently available without veterinary intervention. Furthermore, it could restrict the number and types of veterinary medicines that may be supplied by registered agricultural merchants and saddlers, to a limited range of products for dogs and cats. This could have significant adverse effects on those businesses.

In considering the proposal the Government have taken account of its likely impact on the supply of veterinary medicines and has agreed that, during negotiations, UK officials should seek to modify the proposal to enable a flexible approach to the distribution of veterinary medicinal products that takes advantage of existing national practices, so long as consumer protection and animal welfare can be demonstrably assured.

Compensation (Tuna Fishermen)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received regarding compensation for UK fishermen who *(a)* have had and *(b)* will have their tuna drift net licences withdrawn. [11590]

Mr. Morley: I have received one such representation this year.

Recycling (Refrigerators)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the cost to local authorities involved in storing refrigerators and deep-freezers awaiting recycling *(a)* by each local authority area and *(b)* in total. [12032]

Mr. Meacher: The costs of storage will be affected by a range of factors, in particular the environmental protection standards that are set for storage facilities. This Department has been working with stakeholders to assess the appropriate standards for storage of waste refrigeration equipment and will finalise this guidance shortly. We will monitor the costs of such storage over the next few months.

Farm Business Advisory Services

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the waiting time is for access to the three-day farm business advisory services for farmers in *(a)* England and *(b)* the west midlands. [13198]

Alun Michael: Waiting lists vary across regions and it is not possible to provide a future for England. The waiting list in the west midlands region is currently open ended. To ease waiting lists we have switched £1.5 million of funding from the five-day "enhanced" service to the three-day service allowing demand for both services to be met. This will reduce waiting times considerably. The west midlands region anticipate that their three-day waiting list will be cleared within five weeks.

Farming (Diversification)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding is available to farmers to diversify into tourism outside objective 1 areas. [13019]

Alun Michael: Outside objective 1 areas, the main source of Government funding for farmers wishing to diversify into rural tourism is the Rural Enterprise Scheme. Rural tourism is a high national priority within the suite of measures supported by RES. The proportion of the £152 million RES budget allocated to rural tourism, like all other measures under the scheme, is determined at the regional level in the light of consultation with local stakeholders. DEFRA also offers assistance in the form of free planning consultancy advice to farmers who intend to pursue an eligible RES diversification project, which may include diversification into rural tourism. The RES is not available in objective 1 areas but equivalent funds are available through the objective 1 Programme for each area. Other funding for farm-based tourism projects which utilise existing farm buildings is available from Regional Development agencies in the form of redundant building grant.

Flooding

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the steps taken by the public bodies involved to reduce the risk of flooding in the south of Worcestershire since the Easter 1998 floods; and if she will make a statement. [13220]

Mr. Morley: A number of measures have been taken to reduce the risk of flooding in this area since 1998.

Liaison between the Environment Agency, local authorities and emergency services has been considerably strengthened, including a flood emergency exercise conducted in the Upper Severn area.

The south Worcestershire area has also benefited from enhancements to the Environment Agency's Flood Warning service and the national flood awareness campaigns conducted annually. Every property on the 'at-risk' database has been sent flooding information and everyone within telephone Flood Warning service areas has been invited to receive warnings.

The Environment Agency have been investigating flood defence options at five locations which suffered flooding Easter 1998 floods and, where sustainable, works to alleviate flooding have been carried out, or are planned. A new rain gauge has also been installed at Hindlip.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures the Government have taken to reduce the risk of flooding to one in 100 in high risk areas. [13006]

Mr. Morley: I am reducing the risk of flooding by investing in effective flood warning arrangements and flood defences in the highest risk areas. Funding for the Department's programme is increasing from £66 million 2000–01 to £114 million in 2003–04.

This Department provides funding to the Environment Agency, local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards for capital flood and coastal works that meet certain criteria. Responsibility for deciding which projects to promote and their timing rests with the operating authorities. The operating authority draws on its local knowledge of the area when deciding what needs to be done, including the design standard of protection within the economic justification of the project.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will provide funding for a flood defence scheme in Milby and Langthorpe. [13384]

Mr. Morley: I understand that the Environment Agency's initial assessment for a flood alleviation scheme in Milby and Langthorpe suggests that it cannot be justified economically. However, if the agency decides to promote a scheme, they can submit an application for grant aid to this Department. Such an application would be considered against our normal criteria for funding flood defences.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what preventive measures she has taken to ensure that the Ouse does not flood as a result of rivers to the north flowing into it. [13415]

Mr. Morley: Operational responsibility for flood alleviation measures rests with local operating authorities, namely the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards and local councils.

I understand that the Environment Agency's preliminary strategic review for the River Ouse catchment is due for completion early in 2002. The findings of this strategy will inform the agency's plans for a prioritised

programme of feasibility and capital works in the catchment, including any for rivers flowing into the River Ouse from the north.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will provide funding towards construction of a land drainage pumping station in Rawcliffe; [13386]

(2) what measures she has taken to ensure that Blue Beck in Rawcliffe does not flood and that run-off water will be diverted away from local homeowners. [13416]

Mr. Morley: Operational responsibility for flood alleviation measures rests with local operating authorities, namely the Environment Agency, internal drainage boards and local councils.

The Kyle and Ouse Internal Drainage Board is responsible for the Blue Beck and has commissioned consultants to examine how flood risk can be reduced, including an assessment of the justification of pumping facilities. If the board decides to promote works, they can submit an application for grant aid to this Department. Such an application would be considered against our normal criteria for funding flood defences.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on flood *(a)* warning and *(b)* prevention arrangements. [12885]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1095W.

Livestock Movements

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she plans to take to enable livestock to reach their winter accommodation before winter weather sets in. [10181]

Mr. Morley: The Department introduced livestock movement arrangements for the autumn on 17 September, in consultation with a wide range of interested parties. The scheme rules have been kept under constant review in light of the changing disease situation across the country and are designed to allow the maximum movement compatible with eradicating foot and mouth disease. Detailed information on the autumn movements arrangements have been placed on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/. A movement licence helpline is also available on 01392 314941 and is open from 8:30–17:30 on weekdays and 9:00–13.00 on Saturdays.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received relating to her Department's advice to farmers on the licensing provisions for livestock movements. [10177]

Mr. Morley: The Department has received a range of representations concerning the operation of the autumn livestock movement arrangements. Advice on licensing arrangements has been made available to farmers through leaflets, the DEFRA website and the movement licence helpline. My noble Friend Lord Whitty sent a detailed letter to all livestock farmers in England and Wales about the arrangements on 11 September. We have consulted regularly with stakeholders ever since the licensing scheme was introduced and we are always ready to consider suggestions for improving the way in which we disseminate information to farmers.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of animals over 30 months old which have not been transported owing to movement restrictions; and if she will make a statement. [12352]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* This information is not currently available. However, I have asked the British Cattle Movement Service to consider whether they can provide statistical information on the movement of over 30 month cattle, registered on the Cattle Tracing System. I will write to the hon. Member with more information as soon as possible.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investigations she has carried out into her Department's animal health division with respect to the delay in the granting of movement licences; and if she will make a statement. [12349]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The Autumn Movement Arrangements were introduced in three phases between 17 September and 1 October. The licensing system is dependent upon a database, which gave rise to a number of difficulties. My officials worked, and continue to work, very closely with local authorities and the livestock industry to resolve these difficulties, and I am satisfied that the arrangements are now operating satisfactorily.

The permitted range of movements under the Autumn Movement Arrangements is kept under review in the light of the developing disease situation.

Animal Health Act

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she plans to propose amendments to the Animal Health Act 1981 to give the Government powers to seize and destroy any animal; what right of appeal will be proposed; and what assessment she has made of compatibility with the Human Rights Act 1998. [13846]

Mr. Morley: The Animal Health Bill currently before Parliament does not give Ministers power to seize and destroy any animal. It provides for the Minister to cause animals to be slaughtered with a view to preventing the spread of foot and mouth disease (FMD). The term "animal" is defined in the 1981 Act and the Foot and Mouth Disease Order and the definition of animals for these purposes is restricted to FMD-susceptible animals.

In addition, the Bill contains provisions to extend such powers to other diseases, by Affirmative Resolution Order.

The two avenues of appeal against slaughter that are currently available remain unaffected. These are the ability to ask the local Divisional Veterinary Manager to review the case and to seek judicial review.

Under the scrapie provisions, the Bill provides for Ministers to issue restriction notices requiring that genetically susceptible sheep should be either castrated

(or sterilised) or slaughtered by their keepers/owners, and for Ministers to enforce these provision in the event of non-compliance. Appeals against a restriction notice could be made to an independent assessor.

In my view these provisions, and all others in the Bill, are compatible with the convention rights for the purpose of the Human Rights Act 1998.

Farm Study (Shropshire)

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if a decision has been made to grant a cash contribution to Shropshire county council's Farm Study for Shropshire. [12611]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* DEFRA has made a financial contribution to the Shropshire Farm Study via English Nature and the Countryside Agency. Our regional Rural Development Service staff based on Worcester have also provided technical assistance.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure that once the foot and mouth disease export restrictions have been lifted UK animals exported under licence to France and the Netherlands are not then re-exported to southern European countries. [13547]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* Animals are not exported under licence although there is EU legislation covering the animal health requirements that must be met before animals move within the Community and the veterinary checks that must take place. EU rules governing animal welfare during intra-community trade in cattle, sheep and pigs lay down specific requirements which must be met during any journey. We enforce these rules rigorously within our jurisdiction. When a journey starts in another member state it is the responsibility of the authorities in that member state to ensure compliance with animal health and animal welfare requirements.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make representations to other EU countries to end the payment of export refunds on the export of live cattle from the EU to the middle east and North Africa. [13550]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* Export refunds on live cattle exports to Third Countries are a component of the EU's market management measures for the beef sector. No refunds are paid in respect of trade from the UK because of the BSE-related export ban. Nevertheless, a number of member states, the UK included, wish to address the continuing animal welfare problems with this trade.

We have always maintained the UK's preference for a trade in meat rather than live animals. This view was reflected in the Council Resolution on the protection of animals during transport adopted at the June Council. The Resolution not only invited the Commission to produce recommendations to improve implementation and control of current EU animal welfare legislation, but also to report on options for reducing long distance transport of animals for slaughter. We hope the Commission produce their proposals and report soon.

EU Agrimonetary Compensation

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Government will claim the available EU agrimonetary compensation for arable farmers before 31 October. [9712]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 738W.

Dioxins

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many maximum tolerable daily doses of dioxin, as defined by the WHO, 1.1g represents. [13439]

Mr. Meacher: In June 2001, the Joint Food and Agriculture Organisation/World Health Organisation (WHO) Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) proposed a provisional tolerable monthly intake of 70 picograms (pg) WHO toxicity equivalents (WHO-TEQ) per kilogram (kg) bodyweight for "dioxins" (that is polychlorinated dibenzo-p-doxins, polyclorinated dibenzofurans, and dioxin-like polychlorinated bephenyls). For an adult weighing 70 kilograms, this corresponds to a tolerable daily intake of approximately 160 pg. 1.1 g is 6,875 million times 160 pg.

The 1.1 g figure which I quoted in my earlier response (23 October 2001) represents the emissions of dioxins and furans from municipal solid waste incinerators during 2000. This figure does not refer to human intake so it is not appropriate to make such a comparison with the TDI.

The most recent (1997) estimate of average daily intakes for adults in the UK is 1.8 pg WHO-TEQ per kilogram bodyweight, which (for an adult weighing 70 kg) corresponds to an average daily intake of approximately 130 pg.

The Government believe there is a strong case for reducing emissions to the environment further, and my Department will shortly be consulting on measures to achieve this.

Scrapie

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to bring forward legislation to provide for compulsory powers to cull sheep from flocks possessing the genotype susceptible to scrapie. [11211]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 30W.

Imports

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the volume of *(a)* food imports and *(b)* agricultural imports into the United Kingdom in the last three years. [12809]

Mr. Morley: It is not meaningful to combine volumes of different types of products. The table therefore shows the value of UK imports of food and agricultural products between 1998 and 2000.

More detailed information on food and agricultural imports, including volumes, can be found at the DEFRA website (www.defra.gov.uk/esg/work—htm/index/trade.htm and click on the link to "UK trade data in food, feed and drink including indigenity and degree of processing").

Food and agricultural imports 1998–2000

Values in £ million

Group	*Category*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Live animals	Pigs	9.9	10.0	13.5
	Sheep and goats	3.6	4.5	6.8
	Poultry	4.7	5.5	5.3
	Bovine animals	3.9	2.3	3.6
Live animals Total		22.2	22.4	29.1
Meat	Poultrymeat (inc poultry offal)	523.6	546.7	540.8
	Other meat products	381.1	407.8	473.8
	Beef and veal	395.7	431.8	461.0
	Bacon and ham	375.8	398.9	456.4
	Pork	178.0	215.4	275.2
	Lamb and mutton	203.8	194.3	199.6
Meat Total		2,058.0	2,194.9	2,406.7
Dairy Products and Eggs	Cheese	611.9	630.1	601.0
	Butter	210.1	230.3	234.8
	Yogurt and ice cream	150.1	158.1	173.4
	Eggs and egg products	30.6	31.6	43.6
	Milk and cream	59.6	47.4	41.7
	Other milk products	38.3	39.5	40.9
	Milk powder	32.3	38.2	37.6
	Condensed milk	12.1	12.1	16.6
Dairy Products and Eggs Total		1,144.9	1,187.4	1,189.6
Fish	Fish fresh, chilled or frozen	543.5	589.2	612.3
	Crustaceans	360.1	355.9	403.3
	Fish and crustaceans prepared or preserved	378.6	340.4	306.6
	Fish live	16.5	17.2	16.1
Fish Total		1,298.8	1,302.7	1,338.3
Cereals	Bread and biscuits	445.3	442.6	445.6
	Unmilled cereals	312.5	286.8	286.1
	Rice	173.5	178.8	152.6
	Mixes and doughs for baking	122.8	129.3	112.5
	Milled, rolled or flaked cereals	98.3	97.1	101.3
Cereals Total		1,152.5	1,134.7	1,098.1
Vegetables and Fruit	Fresh fruit	1,653.0	1,572.6	1,531.7
	Vegetables, fresh or chilled	1,071.1	1,053.4	1,090.4
	Vegetables, frozen, prepared or preserved	758.4	816.4	715.4
	Jams	306.4	290.3	274.7
	Fruit juice	268.8	285.3	250.3
	Nuts	111.0	115.4	117.7
Vegetables and Fruit Total		4,168.7	4,133.4	3,980.2
Sugars	Sugar	627.3	583.6	542.1
	Sugar confectionary	130.0	141.6	153.5
	Honey	21.0	16.1	16.4
Sugars Total		778.3	741.2	712.0
Coffee, Tea etc.	Chocolate	332.1	377.5	387.8
	Coffee	385.9	296.8	280.8
	Tea	225.9	204.2	211.3
	Cocoa	298.6	301.6	159.6
	Spices	57.2	54.6	64.0
Coffee, Tea, etc. Total		1,299.7	1,234.7	1,103.6

Food and agricultural imports 1998–2000

Values in £ million

Group	*Category*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Animal Feed	Oil cake	250.1	256.6	255.2
	Other animal feed	290.1	231.3	254.6
	Dog or cat food	159.9	161.8	194.8
Animal Feed Total		700.2	649.6	704.7
Miscellaneous Total		912.8	963.5	829.0
Beverages	Wine	1,763.0	1,918.3	1,688.5
	Other spirits	279.9	282.2	364.9
	Mineral water	187.3	268.3	289.5
	Beer	315.2	310.1	283.4
	Whisky	50.8	49.5	56.8
	Cider and other fermented beverages	26.6	26.0	23.4
Beverages Total		2,622.7	2,854.5	2,706.4
Oils and Fats	Vegetable oils and fats	755.8	672.6	604.8
	Processed fats and waxes	89.2	84.2	95.3
	Animal oils and fats, not chemically modified	73.2	60.5	59.7
Oils and Fats Total		918.2	817.2	759.8
Total Imports		17,076.9	17,236.2	16,857.5

Source:
HM Customs and Excise

Tenanted Farms

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the future viability of local authorities' tenanted farms. [12807]

Mr. Morley: The 47th Annual Report to Parliament on Smallholdings in England was published in 1999. This report which is available in the Library of the House, covered the period to 31 March 1997. This showed that the total expenditure in the year to 31 March 1997, by local authorities with smallholdings, was £16.9 million and total income in the same period was £25.3 million. The Department also conducts an annual survey of tenanted land although this does not separately identify local authority tenanted farms.

We have also commissioned work to establish the role local authority tenanted farms play in providing farming lets to new entrants. A preliminary assessment of the impact of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 was conducted by the University of Plymouth in 1997. This indicated that county smallholdings play an important but reducing role in providing farming lets to new entrants. A full policy evaluation of the 1995 Act is currently under way and this explores this area further. This work should be completed in early 2002.

Ragwort

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many horses have died from ingesting ragwort in each of the last 10 years. [13597]

Mr. Morley: This information is not collected by the Department. However I can confirm that where agricultural land, or land used by farmers who have diversified into equine enterprises, is threatened by the spread of injurious weeds such as ragwort the Department will continue to investigate any complaints received. We will also use our links with other organisations such as the British Horse Society to ensure horse owners are aware of the dangers of ragwort.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Legislation

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the President of the Council how many *(a)* Budgets have been introduced and *(b)* Government sponsored Bills have reached the statute book since 1997. [13866]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information requested is as follows—*(a)* Five and *(b)* 140.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

World Summit on Sustainable Development

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures she is taking to ensure that water and sanitation issues are considered by the world summit on sustainable development; and if she will make a statement. [10934]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

To ensure that the UK views on water and sanitation are considered at the world summit on sustainable development (WSSD), I led the UK delegation to United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in

Geneva in September. UNECE is the regional preparatory conference at which items for inclusion in WSSD are discussed. The conference agreed that WSSD should develop specific initiatives, building on work undertaken since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, in areas such as freshwater and sanitation.

In December this year I will be leading the UK delegation to the International Conference on Freshwater in Bonn at which water and sanitation issues will be further discussed. The discussions at the Bonn conference will be reported to the second preparatory committee for the world summit on sustainable development.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 13 November 2001

TREASURY

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average rate of sickness absence was in HM Customs and Excise in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to the latest date for which information is available. [9177]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 19 October 2001]:* No accurate figures are available for the average rate of working days lost to sickness absence in 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

The average rate of sickness from 1 April 2001 to 30 September 2001 was 4.6 working days.

Terrorism (Financing)

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the expected cost to Her Majesty's Government over the current financial year of the measures to combat the financing of terrorism which he announced on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 940–42. [10009]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* The costs of setting up the Terrorist Finance Unit are modest, but the benefits in terms of cutting off the resource available to the perpetrators of acts of international terrorism potentially immense.

Impounded Vehicles (Smugglers)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what legal basis Customs and Excise sell the impounded vehicles of individuals who have used them to breach their personal allowances for the importation of tobacco and alcohol. [12195]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Where a vehicle has been used for the carriage, handling, deposit or concealment of anything liable to forfeiture, that vehicle is itself liable to forfeiture to the Crown under s141(1)(a) of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. Any such vehicle is forfeit once a month has passed and no appeal has been received, or where there is an appeal and the Magistrates find in favour of Customs and Excise. The Commissioners of Customs and Excise will dispose of forfeit vehicles on behalf of the Crown in the most efficient and cost-effective way.

People travelling to the UK from other EU countries are entitled to bring into the UK, without charge, alcohol and tobacco which they have purchased tax-paid elsewhere in the EU, if it is solely for their own use. Customs do not enforce any absolute limits on such purchases, but travellers bringing in goods in excess of the Minimum Indicative Levels, set out in EC Directive 92/12/EEC, may be required to satisfy Customs that the goods are for their own use.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was derived from selling vehicles impounded by Customs and Excise because they were used to breach personal allowances for the importation of tobacco and alcohol; and how many of such impounded vehicles have been sold, in each year for the past four years. [12218]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The information is available only in respect of the sale of vehicles seized for all types of Customs offences. The revenue from the sale of such vehicles for the last four years was:

Year	£
1997	43,075
1998	32,585
1999	120,261
2000	523,951

The number of vehicles sold is not recorded.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many motor vehicles were seized on the grounds that they were being used for the illegal importation of spirits, wines, beer or tobacco products in 2000; and what the total proceeds of sale were. [13264]

Mr. Boateng: Customs record the number of vehicles seized for all Customs offences on a financial year basis. Figures for the number of vehicles seized in 2000–2001 were published in the Government's response to the independent report by John Roques into "The Collection of Excise Duties in HM Customs and Excise" (House of Commons command 5329, July 2001), a copy of which was placed in the Library on 19 July.

The total proceeds of sale from those seized vehicles which were subsequently sold in 2000 was £523,951.

Departmental Underspending

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 642W, on departmental budgets, if he will provide a breakdown for each listed Department of the main items of intended expenditure that were not spent, comprising each of the annual underspend totals. [13201]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The allocation of budgets within Departmental Expenditure Limits is normally a matter for individual Secretaries of State. Under this Government's system of full End-Year Flexibility, unspent provision is available for use in future years. Departmental Appropriation Accounts break down outturn by section of the Vote.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans *(a)* to introduce corrective procedures for underspend of Final Department Expenditure Limit and *(b)* to examine the financial procedures in the (i) Department of Health, (ii) Department for Education and Skills, (iii) Ministry of Defence and (iv) Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. [13200]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Under this Government's system of full End-Year Flexibility, unspent provision can be carried forward by Departments for use in future years. This removes the incentive, which applied under previous arrangements, to use up budgets wastefully at the end of the financial year. The allocation and management of budget within Departmental Expenditure Limits are in general a matter for individual Secretaries of State.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health regarding under-spend in the Department of Health. [13204]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers meet regularly with the Secretary of State for Health to discuss aspects of the Department of Health's performance and plans.

Public-private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the projects in his Department which have been considered as potential public-private partnerships since 1997 which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public-private partnership proposed; and if he will make a statement. [13453]

Mr. Andrew Smith: In our 1997 reforms of PFI, the Government abandoned the requirement to submit all capital projects to PFI testing. Accordingly, it will be concluded at a very early stage in the option appraisal process whether a PPP approach is likely to deliver value for money (vfm); where it is not, a public sector comparator (PSC) will not be constructed. Only when it is concluded, following careful consideration, that PPP is likely to offer vfm, will a PSC normally be developed.

Against this background, and with the maturing of the PPP process and the PPP market, it is likely that a high proportion of projects which do embark on the PPP route will contract on that basis, with competition helping to secure value for money and the PSC acting as a quantitative aid to informing judgment.

PPP deals continue to account for only a small proportion of the total sums invested to improve the delivery of public services. Public sector gross investment is projected to rise from £19 billion in 2000–01 to £35.2 billion in 2003–04. Over the same period, capital investment by the private sector through PFI will be about £3 billion annually.

So far as the Treasury as a Department is concerned, there have been no projects within the terms of the hon. Member's question.

Private Consultancy Expenditure

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Government have spent on private consultancy since 1997; and what review of such expenditure has been conducted to assess its value for money. [13907]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

The National Audit Office published a report in April 2001 (HC 400 Session 2000–01) entitled "Purchasing Professional Services". This set out the results of their examination of Departments' expenditure on professional services including consultancy.

Individual Departments are responsible for ensuring that their expenditure on consultancy represents value for money.

VAT (Nursing Homes)

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the impact of the charging of VAT on the residential costs of nursing home care. [12123]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are of the clear view that the care of vulnerable people provided in all residential homes should not be subject to VAT. In May, the VAT Tribunal confirmed that the care provided in residential nursing homes was exempt from VAT. However, the Tribunal also ruled that care provided by a commercial body was not exempt, and Customs and Excise are currently appealing against that ruling. Whatever the outcome of that appeal, the Government will take steps to ensure that residents of care homes and their families do not face increased costs as a result of VAT.

Employee Share Ownership Plans

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees of *(a)* mutual, *(b)* co-operative and *(c)* employee trust award companies would benefit if the present rules were changed to permit such organisations to participate in employee share ownership plans; what plans there are to expand ESOPs in this way; and if he will make a statement. [14464]

Ruth Kelly: Employees of registered industrial and provident societies which are co-operatives are already able to participate in the Share Incentive Plan introduced last year. Companies such as mutual organisations and trust-owned companies that do not issue shares are not able to participate.

We estimate that some 70,000 staff are employed by mutual organisations and around 60,000 are employed by trust owned businesses in the UK. We have not yet been able to devise a way in which the link between share ownership and company performance might be reflected in such corporate structures.

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees in the different sectors of the economy *(a)* are benefiting from and *(b)* are entitled to receive money under the employee share ownership plans (i) in total and (ii) as a percentage of employees in that sector; what plans he has to extend ESOPs; and if he will make a statement. [14465]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax advantaged share plans are generally open to employees in all sectors of the economy. However, Enterprise Management Incentives are not open to companies engaged in certain trades considered to involve low financial risk. We estimate that some 2.5 million employees are benefiting from tax advantaged share and share option schemes. Up to March of this year, some 81,000 employees have benefited from the new

Share Incentive Plan introduced last year. Figures are not available on a sectoral basis and the cost of obtaining the information would be disproportionate.

Female Employment (Statistics)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the female population *(a)* is of working age, *(b)* is in work or seeking work and *(c)* is seeking work in each county. [14133]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 13 November 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the proportions of the female population of working age, in work or seeking work, and seeking work in each county.(14133)

Estimates for counties and unitary authorities are available for mid-2000 of all women of working age as a proportion of the total female population. I have deposited a table showing these in the House of Commons library.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of the economic activity status of people aged 16 years or over. The summer (June to August) 2001 estimates, for counties and unitary authorities where the survey sample size is large enough, of the proportions of women who are (i) in work or seeking work and (ii) seeking work are available on Nomis®, which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many *(a)* Protestant and *(b)* Roman Catholic applicants to the new Police Service of Northern Ireland were successful in being selected for the first batch of recruits; [11938]

(2) how many serving members of the full-time RUC Reserve have applied to joint the new Police Service of Northern Ireland and have been successful in being selected for the first batch of recruits; [11942]

(3) how many female applicants to the new Police Service of Northern Ireland were successful in being selected for the first batch of recruits; [11940]

(4) how many female applicants to the new Police Service of Northern Ireland were successful in being short listed to the final pool prior to the selection of the first batch of recruits; [11939]

(5) how many *(a)* Protestant and *(b)* Roman Catholic applicants to the new Police Service of Northern Ireland were successful in being short listed to the final pool prior to the selection of the first batch of recruits; [11937]

(6) how many serving members of the full-time RUC Reserve have applied to join the new Police Service of Northern Ireland and were successful in being short listed to the final pool prior to the selection of the first batch of recruits. [11941]

Jane Kennedy: Around 550 candidates have qualified for entry to the merit pool. Of these, approximately 150 have declared themselves Catholic and approximately 400 have declared themselves Protestant or are non-determined; some 180 are female; and approximately 80 are serving members of the full-time Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve. Final figures will not be available for some time as a number of candidates are subject to outstanding issues, for example, medical appeals.

Of the first batch of 47 recruits, 24 have declared themselves Catholic and 23 have declared themselves protestant; 14 are female; and 10 are former full-time reserve officers.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Machinery Operators (EU Legislation)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received regarding proposed EU legislation to prohibit machinery operators from driving plant and equipment for more than two hours per day; what assessment he has made of the cost of this legislation to the British construction industry; and if he will make a statement. [12615]

Dr. Whitehead: There is no proposed EU legislation to prohibit machinery operators from driving plant and equipment for more then two hours per day. The proposed Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive introduces a limit value for exposure to whole body vibration. The European Parliament has proposed an amendment to the common position on the Directive reducing this limit value. This reduced limit value could, in particular circumstances, have the effect of restricting the driving time by individuals of certain equipment to two or three hours.

The Government have received representations opposing this European Parliament amendment from several industry sectors, including agriculture, construction, mining and quarrying and engineering. We intend to defend the common position against the European Parliament amendment.

The Government have not costed the implications of the Directive on individual industry sectors. A Regulatory Impact Assessment of the Directive covering the costs to industry as a whole and the health benefits to workers has been submitted to the European Scrutiny Committee and is available in the Libraries of the House.

Consultation Documents

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many consultation documents were issued by his Department and its predecessors from *(a)* 15 October to 14 January, *(b)* 15 January to 14 April, *(c)* 15 April to 14 July and *(d)* 15 July to 14 October in each year from 1996. [12876]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on Tuesday 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 198W, which is unfortunately incorrect. A more extensive search of Departmental records has revealed that the Department issued 33 consultation documents during the summer recess 2001.

Records of consultation exercises have been kept centrally only since the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation became effective on 1 January 2001. In this period, the Department issued 108 consultation documents broken down as follows:

1 January—14 April: 50

15 April—14 July: 16

15 July—14 October: 34

15 October to date: 8.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he held talks about affordable housing on the Eaves Green site; and who was involved in the talks. [13003]

Ms Keeble: The public inquiry into the Chorley Local Plan 1991–2006 concluded on 1 October. Officials at the Government Office for the north-west commented on the original and revised deposit drafts of the plan, including its policy on affordable housing but no discussions took place regarding Eaves Green.

Pedestrian Protection

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the results were of the European new car assessment pedestrian tests based on EEVC Working Group 10 tests. [13419]

Mr. Jamieson: Since the European new car assessment programme was established in 1997, three cars have obtained a three-star rating for pedestrian protection using tests based on the EEVC WG10 proposals; 65 have obtained two stars and 14 have obtained one star.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will publish the advice available to him from the Transport Research Laboratory on the effects of Phase One of the draft negotiated agreement on pedestrian protection of comparative *(a)* the bumper test on disabling knee injuries, *(b)* the head impact test and the proportion of the bonnet area untested or unprotected, *(c)* the absence of a bonnet leading edge test and femur or pelvic fractures and *(d)* the influence on car design and effective protection for pedestrians; [13392]

(2) if he will outline the scientific research concerning the 21 degree knee bending angle in the Phase 1 leg protection tests in the draft negotiated pedestrian protection agreement; and if he will publish the Transport Research Laboratory's opinion on the consequences for injury generation. [13391]

Mr. Jamieson: TRL has given only informal advice to my Department on these issues, other than its letter formally responding to our recent consultation exercise on pedestrian protection. A summary of this, and other responses received, has been placed in the House Library. Copies of the full responses can be seen at the DTLR Library. Our understanding of TRL's views, both formal and informal, are as follows:

Bumper test: It is likely that, for some struck pedestrians, the proposed 21 degree bending angle for phase one might encourage technical designs that would cause permanent disabling injuries rather than injuries that will heal without disablement. The TRL view is that, because the whole package, including phase two, will result in considerable overall benefits, the opportunity to have pedestrian protection on vehicles should not be put at risk over this issue.

Head impact test: In the Negotiated Agreement two thirds of the bonnet area would have to meet a HIC limit of 1000; the head protection level normally associated with occupant protection. The other one third could have a HIC limit of 2000. This carries a higher risk of injury. However, it is likely that a combination of manufacturers aiming for better standards in production, and the impossibility of designing a bonnet in practice that has a step change such that it only just met the higher level over the whole one third, means that the average level in that zone would probably be midway between a HIC of 1000 and a HIC of 2000.

In phase one, the adult area will be tested with a child headform. Despite this, the additional protection would still be of benefits to adults in many accidents. However, in some adult accidents the bonnet will be too soft, with a risk of pushing it down on to immovable underlying components.

Bonnet leading edge test: There has been a long term trend towards more streamlined vehicles which has helped reduce femur and pelvic injuries, and this is the lowest priority of the EEVC tests. However, there is a possibility that manufacturers may raise or stiffen the bonnet leading edge to help gain better performance in the legform test; this would increase the risk of femur and pelvis injuries. The current inclusion of the test with performance targets in phase one of the negotiated agreement would allow such a trend to be monitored if it were to occur.

The influence of car design: The effect of the long term change in style towards more streamlined shapes is mentioned above. Also, in TRL's view, designing the bonnet area that is likely to be hit by the adult head using the phase one headform will not help the development of design solutions to meet the adult head requirements of phase two.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if active pedestrian protection measures offered by car manufacturers are compatible with each of the choices of passive measures under consideration by COREPER and the Council of Ministers. [13387]

Mr. Jamieson: Active protection measures are intended to help reduce the likelihood of accidents whereas secondary safety measures reduce the consequences. There is no fundamental incompatibility; indeed, both approaches contribute to improvements in road safety today.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in what year the experimental safety vehicle of the Transport Research Laboratory demonstrated the feasibility of meeting the EEVC Working Group 10 pedestrian sub-system test requirements; and who funded this research. [13388]

Mr. Jamieson: The experimental safety vehicle, a Metro with modifications funded by the Department, was shown at a conference in 1985. However, this car was

produced before Working Group 10 existed, and its effectiveness was tested using child and adult pedestrian dummies rather than the WG 10 sub-system tests.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in what year in-depth pedestrian accident research work started at the Transport Research Laboratory in contributing to the research EEVC pedestrian protection work; and who funded this research. [13389]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport Research Laboratory has been contributing to the European pedestrian protection considerations since the 1970s. This early work was funded by the Department of Transport.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government first proposed to the European Commission that a directive on safer car fronts for pedestrians and cyclists should be introduced. [13418]

Mr. Jamieson: Formal requests to make car fronts safer for pedestrians were made in 1991 through the UK's involvement in the EEVC.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the ability of the European car industry to achieve working group 17 pedestrian tests requirements at an early date. [13421]

Mr. Jamieson: We have not made a specific assessment of this. However, it is clear that industry continues to see difficulty in meeting the full EEVC criteria as a universal requirement for cars at an early date.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the pedestrian fatality reduction potential of the Phase 1 tests in the draft negotiated agreement as a percentage of the potential in the EEVC Working Group 17; and what assessment he has made of the ability of the draft negotiated agreement to meet the level of protection in the harmonisation process required by the Treaty of European Union. [13390]

Mr. Jamieson: It is estimated that Phase 1 would deliver a benefit of around 25 per cent. for fatal injuries and 60 per cent. for serious injuries, relative to the Phase 2 levels associated with the EEVC WG 17 requirements. The negotiated agreement is likely to start delivering two years earlier than a directive, which would itself be likely to be phased.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how it is intended that the car industry will work to agreed longer-term targets for pedestrian protection if Phase 2 of the draft negotiated agreement is not specified with Phase 1. [13420]

Mr. Jamieson: Phase 1 and Phase 2 are both specified in the negotiated agreement.

I am satisfied that the technical requirements of the first phase will be operated in a flexible manner, which will allow manufacturers to deliver cars in Phase 1 which incorporate techniques more appropriate for meeting the Phase 2 levels. This will address one of the concerns raised by TRL and others about the headform test in Phase 1.

Millennium Dome

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when an announcement will be made on the future of the Dome; and what the monthly cost of the Dome is to the Exchequer. [13224]

Ms Keeble: On-going market testing is exploring all avenues, and on the basis of professional advice we are in discussion with a small number of serious contenders. To reveal details of the discussions would not be conducive to a successful conclusion and would be against the public interest. The aim is to secure a sale as quickly as possible, consistent with value for money, securing a worthwhile and sustainable future for the Dome and a deliverable outcome.

From 1 July 2001, when the lease of the New Millennium Experience Company ended, English Partnerships, the Government's regeneration agency, has been incurring an average of £240,000 per month on Dome maintenance and management related costs. English Partnerships also expects to incur expenditure in the order of £9.75 million this year on decommissioning the Dome contents in preparation for a future use and about £1.7 million in relation to the current sale process. Any money spent on these will be recovered from sale proceeds so the cost will not fall to the taxpayer.

Railtrack

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what advice he has received on the level of payments on debt that would *(a)* be required annually if the rating of the successor organisation to Railtrack were credit rated at (i) BBB and (ii) single A and *(b)* be required if it were able to borrow at the rate of Government gilts; and if he will make a statement; [13207]

(2) what advice he has received on the level of payments on debt that would be required annually if the rating of the successor organisation to Railtrack were *(a)* 1 per cent. higher, *(b)* 2 per cent. higher and *(c)* 3 per cent. higher than Government gilts; and if he will make a statement. [13208]

Mr. Jamieson: In relation to the proposal that the Government intend to put to the administrator for a company limited by guarantee, we will be targeting a long-term credit rating of A/A2 or higher, to reflect the financing capacity requirements of the rail infrastructure business. We are confident that this would allow the CLG to raise new debt and service existing debt on an efficient and cost-effective basis.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many planning inquiries there have been into applications for telecommunications masts over 15m by commercial operators that seek to replace a mast owned by Railtrack plc with one of their own. [13665]

Ms Keeble: The Department does not hold information on the number of planning inquiries in this form.

Road Surfaces

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the Highways Agency no longer takes responsibility for the surfaces of major roads in London; what sum was specifically transferred for this purpose to Transport for London; and if he will make a statement. [13538]

Mr. Jamieson: On 3 July 2000 the Highways Agency's responsibilities for all of its roads in London except for the stubs of the M1, M4 and the M11 were transferred to Transport for London. The Government pay the Greater London Authority Transport Grant to support the whole range of Transport for London's responsibilities. This grant rises from £714 million in 2001–02 to over £1 billion in 2003–04.

Housing Provision (Doncaster/Barnsley)

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council houses were sold in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Barnsley in each of the last 10 years. [13659]

Ms Keeble: The number of council dwellings (both houses and flats) sold in each of the last 10 years, as reported by Doncaster and Barnsley metropolitan councils, is in the table.

Number of council dwellings sold

Year	Doncaster metropolitan borough council	Barnsley metropolitan borough council
1991–92	291	350
1992–93	240	205
1993–94	299	177
1994–95	290	212
1995–96	237	111
1996–97	260	153
1997–98	341	195
1998–99	368	202
1999–2000	415	304
2000–01	386	400

Source:
DTLR Housing Activity P1(B) quarterly returns

Tables showing reported information on total council house sales in each English local authority for each financial year from 1979–80 are available in the Library.

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new social rented houses were built in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Barnsley in each of the last 10 years. [13660]

Ms Keeble: The numbers of new social dwellings, both houses and flats, built in Doncaster metropolitan borough council area and Barnsley metropolitan borough council area in each of the last 10 years are given in the table. Social dwellings include those built for registered social landlords as well as those built for the councils.

Number of social dwellings built

Year	Doncaster (MBC)	Barnsley (MBC)
1991–92	89	104
1992–93	157	40
1993–94	121	74
1994–95	164	59
1995–96	188	53
1996–97	116	38
1997–98	57	6
1998–99	15	28
1999–2000	42	0
2000–01	27	0

Rent Levels

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions at what date the 1 per cent. rise in levels above the rate of inflation will commence under his restructuring proposals for local authority rent levels; if it will apply equally to all local authorities; and whether mitigation will be introduced to dampen the effect where high-level rents are instituted in high-value areas. [13791]

Mr. Byers: Rents for local authority properties are set by the responsible authorities and depend upon decisions taken locally. The proposed 1 per cent. real terms increase in rents is the assumption for the purposes of calculating housing subsidy in England for 2002–03 which was announced at the end of the 2000 spending review. It is independent of our policy on rent restructuring. Ministers are considering how it will apply to each local authority in the light of responses to the consultation on proposals for subsidy changes and will make an announcement soon. We expect rent changes as a result of rent restructuring to be limited to a maximum of £2 per week in any year above normal inflation-related increases. We are considering whether there should also be a cap on the rents of high-value properties which would otherwise attract high rents.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what his estimate is in relation to his proposals for the restructuring of local authority rent levels, of average rents for *(a)* London and *(b)* Inner London on the former Inner London education authority boundaries (i) at April levels, (ii) for the initial restructured levels and (iii) in subsequent years; [13790]

(2) to what extent the average figures he has circulated in relation to his proposals for the restructuring of local authority rent levels reflect *(a)* reductions in rent levels for smaller properties and for those in less high value areas and *(b)* significant increases in rent levels for (i) family-sized properties and (ii) for those in higher-value areas. [13789]

Mr. Byers: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under his proposals for the restructuring of local authority rent levels, what account the restructured levels will take of the *(a)* nature and condition of an estate on which the property is located and *(b)* broad property values of the overall area. [13788]

Mr. Byers: Under restructuring, social rents will be based on a formula that includes local earnings, property size and relative property value. The property value will reflect the size, location and condition of the property.

Social rents will generally remain well below the levels charged by reputable private landlords for similar properties.

M6 (Morecambe and Heysham Port)

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to improve road access to Morecambe and Heysham Port from the M6 Motorway. [13741]

Ms Keeble: Access from Morecambe and Heysham Port to the M6 is the responsibility of Lancashire county council. They have recently conducted a public consultation on the two proposed routes for a Heysham to M6 link road. When the position on the Lancaster district local plan is resolved, it is a matter for the council whether to submit a bid for funding from central Government.

Fire and Civil Defence Authorities

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he will issue regarding the level of fire and civil defence authority precepts for 2001–02. [13599]

Dr. Whitehead: None. These are matters for fire and civil defence authorities to decide in consultation with local taxpayers.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the progress achieved by fire and civil defence authorities in metropolitan areas towards reducing *(a)* fire-related deaths and *(b)* malicious false alarm calls. [13600]

Dr. Whitehead: In 2000, an estimated 133 accidental fire related deaths in dwellings were recorded for the seven metropolitan brigades, out of a national total of 326. The number of accidental house fire deaths in metropolitan brigade areas had fallen in recent years from 167 in 1996 to the current estimated figure of 133 for 2000. The downward trend in dwelling fire deaths is reflected nationally for England and Wales. There were 588 dwelling fire deaths in 1996, compared with 516 for 2000.

Malicious false alarms, both for the metropolitan areas and nationally, have been falling steadily over recent years. In 1996 there were 57,100 malicious false alarm calls recorded by the metropolitan areas. In 2000, metropolitan brigades attended a total of 33,800 malicious false alarm calls—a fall of 41 per cent. against the 1996 figures.

These encouraging statistics reflect the merits of the integrated approach adopted by Government, the fire service and fire authorities over the past four years to implement strategies designed to drive down the number of preventable dwelling fire deaths and to educate the public about the dangers of malicious false alarm calls.

Business Rate System

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations have been received on the reform of the business rate system. [13734]

Dr. Whitehead: The Green Paper "Modernising Local Government Finance", published 19 September 2000, invited comments on a range of issues relating to reform of business rates. In response to that consultation we received 1,107 non-campaign responses of which the overwhelming majority included responses on business rates. A summary is available on the DTLR website at www.dtlr.gov.uk. We will set out our response to the consultation in the Local Government White Paper later this year.

On 16 February 2001 we issued a further consultation paper on extending the agricultural exemption from rates to machinery rings and share farming enterprises on which we received 34 responses. Again. we will set out next steps in the forthcoming Local Government White Paper.

My Department continuously receives correspondence on the business rates system, which includes representations on reforms to various parts of the rating system.

DVLA

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will review the resources and the priority being deployed by DVLA to answer telephone inquiries from members of the public. [14046]

Mr. Jamieson: The level of resources deployed on telephone inquiries by DVLA is under continuous review in order to meet the level of demand at any given time.

Terrorism

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the costs have been of operations undertaken by his Department in connection with events following the 11 September terrorist attacks; and if he will list the costs relating to *(a)* the British Transport police, *(b)* the aviation industry, *(c)* emergency planning and *(d)* other areas; and if these costs will be met from his Department's budget. [13845]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* To date my Department has not incurred any costs in connection with events following the 11 September terrorist attacks relating to the British Transport police, the aviation industry or emergency planning. Along with other Government Departments we have reviewed security at our buildings and have incurred extra costs of around £31,000 which will be met from within existing budgets.

We will give due consideration to any requests for financial assistance from those areas for which my Department is responsible.

Regeneration (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to promote the regeneration of deprived areas in the west midlands. [13534]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 12 October 2001]:* There are a number of initiatives across the west midlands, which are promoting regeneration of deprived areas.

The key ones are as listed:

£4.2 million over three years from April 2002 for "neighbourhood management" initiatives in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Burton-on-Trent.

Over £3 million through the "Community Empowerment Fund" to help communities get involved in local decision making. Seven areas in west midlands will benefit from this fund. These are Birmingham, Dudley, Coventry, Sandwell, Stoke, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

£1.1 million for "community chests" to support small community projects with grants they can get locally with minimum bureaucracy. Seven areas in west midlands will benefit from this fund. These are Birmingham, Dudley, Coventry, Sandwell, Stoke, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

"New Deal for Community" areas in the west midlands which will benefit from almost £2 billion over the next 10 years. These are:

Sandwell—(Greets Green Partnership)

A further £263.5 million for five Round 2 Partnerships in the west midlands was announced in April 2001. These are:

Birmingham—Aston Pride

Birmingham—Kings Norton, Three Estates

Coventry WEHM

Walsall—New Deal, New Horizons

Wolverhampton—All Saints and Blakenhall

Seven "Neighbourhood Warden schemes" are now operating across the west midlands. The programme is worth £1.027 million.

17 "Street Wardens programmes" have recently been announced in the west midlands. The total value of the scheme is £4.146 million which will be matched by Government funding.

"Neighbourhood Renewal Fund" will provide £121.5 million for three years from April 2001 to improve services in the most deprived neighbourhoods in the west midlands. Areas benefiting in west midlands are Birmingham, Dudley, Coventry, Sandwell, Stoke, Walsall and Wolverhampton. A Local Strategic Partnership in each area will develop a local "neighbourhood renewal strategy" to guide NRF expenditure.

Advantage West Midlands as part of its Economic Strategy has agreed with partners across the region the designation of six Regeneration Zones which cover 111 of the 153 most deprived wards in the region. Advantage West Midlands has undertaken to spend 70 per cent. of its resources in the zones to help achieve these aims.

European Funding

Objective 2 European Structural Funds for the period 2000–06 has earmarked over £100 million to support the regeneration of the most deprived areas in the west midlands. Additionally, the region will benefit from Objective 3 funds worth over £240 million during the same period to help to upskill people and improve their employability.

Terminal 5

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost was of the planning inquiry into the application to build a fifth terminal at Heathrow Airport. [14021]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* The total costs of the Terminal 5 inquiry to all participants is estimated at over £83 million of which the private sector is estimated to have spent some £64 million with the rest borne by central and local Government.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on job losses at Heathrow Airport as a result of the events of 11 September. [14020]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* BAA plc, as owners of Heathrow Airport, advise they have not cut any jobs at the airport following the events of 11 September. However, their organisation only represents around 5.5 per cent. of the workforce at the airport. We do not yet have firm information about the extent of job losses at Heathrow in other areas of the aviation industry.

I understand that the Job Transition Service is engaging with employers to ensure that those employees adversely affected have access to the fullest possible range of help and advice.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who *(a)* was invited to meet and *(b)* met the Minister of State during his visit to Heathrow Airport on 5 November. [14019]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* I visited Heathrow Airport on 5 November at the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who also arranged the other attendance. The meeting was attended by local MPs and numerous representatives of the air transport industry, trades unions and local communities.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the average length of the contractual working week for London Underground *(a)* drivers and *(b)* station staff in each year since 1991. [14604]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground has provided the following information:

Year	*Train operators contractual weekly hours*	*Station staff contractual weekly hours*
1991–92	[1]38	[1]38
1992–93	[1]38	[1]38
1993–94	38.5	41.25
1994–95	38.5	41.25
1995–96	38.5	40
1996–97	37	40
1997–98	36	40
1998–99	35	40
1999–2000	35	40
2000–01	35	40
2001–02	35	37.5

[1] Plus minimum of one Sunday in two

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the annual service charges to be paid by Transport for London for the London Underground public-private partnership contracts will be underwritten by central Government payments made to Transport for London; and for what period such payments will be guaranteed. [14612]

Mr. Jamieson: Subject to its representing value for money, London Underground intends to enter into long-term contracts to deliver a publicly run, privately built tube. These contracts will be between London Underground and the private sector Infrastructure Companies and will not be guaranteed by central Government. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will allow for the resulting contract payments when setting GLA Transport Grant.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the annual average leave entitlement of London Underground *(a)* drivers and *(b)* station staff in each year since 1991. [14602]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground has provided the following information:

Year	*Train operator annual leave*	*Station staff annual leave*
1991–92	[1]25	[1]25
1992–93	[1]25	[1]25
1993–94	[2]34	[2]34
1994–95	[2]34	[2]34
1995–96	[2]34	[2]34
1996–97	[2]34	[2]34
1997–98	[2]34	[2]34
1998–99	[2]34	[2]34
1999–2000	[2]34	[2]34
2000–01	[2]36	[2]36
2001–02	[2]37	[2]37

[1] Plus one day for credit transfer
[2] Inc. B/H

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements have been put in place to take account of the change in the length of the working week of the managing director of London Underground Ltd. [14585]

Mr. Jamieson: Paul Godier succeeded Derek Smith as full time managing director on Monday 8 October 2001. Derek Smith remains as Chairman of London Underground. London Underground issued a press release on 10 September http://www.thetube/com/content/pressreleases/0109/10.asp setting out details of the new arrangements.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ask the National Audit Office to examine the value for money aspects of the London Underground public-private partnership in advance of the contracts being signed; and if he will place in the Library his correspondence with the NAO on London Underground. [14615]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 503W. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not corresponded with the NAO on the subject of the London Underground.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when, for each line of London Underground, new trains will be introduced under the terms of the public-private partnership. [14588]

Mr. Jamieson: The public-private partnership is designed to achieve a comprehensive modernisation of the entire underground network. London Underground is currently negotiating the detailed requirements and will publish details once they have been completed.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what capacity increase, for each line of London Underground, will be achieved under the terms of the public-private partnership; and in which year this change will occur. [14587]

Mr. Jamieson: The public-private partnership is designed to achieve a comprehensive modernisation of the entire underground network. This is necessarily a long-term programme and there is a limit on the amount of work that can be done simultaneously without causing excessive disruption to the service to the public. The overall requirements have therefore been specified by London Underground to upgrade every line over time, prioritised to deliver the greatest benefits as quickly as possible. The capability of most lines is expected to be increased by around 10–25 per cent. The detailed requirements are currently being negotiated and London Underground will publish details once the negotiations have been completed.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the names of *(a)* companies in each of the consortia selected as preferred bidders for each London Underground PPP contract and *(b)* the board members of each of those companies. [14613]

Mr. Jamieson: Metronet is the preferred bidder for the BCV and SSL competitions. The Metronet consortium consists of Bombardier Transportation (formerly Adtranz), WS Atkins, Balfour Beatty, Seeboard and Thames Water.

Tubelines is the preferred bidder for the JNP competition. The Tubelines consortium consists of Amey, Bechtel and Jarvis.

The board membership of each company will be contained in the companies' annual accounts.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how, under the terms of the proposed public-private partnership for London Underground, companies will be incentivised to improve the performance of the underground; what new performance measures will be used; and what financial *(a)* incentives and *(b)* disincentives will be employed. [14586]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's plans for a publicly run, privately built London Underground are designed to deliver at least £13 billion of investment over the next 15 years. The private sector will be incentivised to deliver this investment by contracts that are principally output-based, with payments to the private sector infrastructure companies increasing as they improve capacity, reliability and the quality of the travelling environment on the tube network. The private sector will be similarly financially penalised for poor performance. These penalties will reflect the impact of any delay or disruption to passengers and not be limited by a cap.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if, under the proposed contracts for the public-private partnership

for London Underground, senior managers of Transport for London and London Underground who have been involved in PPP negotiations will be exempt from any subsequent legal challenge other than for fraud or impropriety, as regards the *(a)* content and *(b)* operation of PPP contracts. [14608]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that London Underground does not intend for the PPP contract to exempt London Underground senior managers from legal action by London Transport or London Underground. There will be a waiver in relation to legal action by infrastructure companies or bidders.

The position of Transport for London senior managers is a matter for the board of TfL.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the cost to London Transport of the recent London Underground advertising campaign to promote the public-private partnership for London Underground. [14609]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for London Underground.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to sign the final contracts for the London Underground public-private partnership; and when control of LU will pass to the Mayor of London. [14611]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will not sign contracts for the London Underground public-private partnership, which is the responsibility of London Underground. I understand that London Underground expects to sign contracts early next year.

London Underground will transfer to Transport for London once the competitions for the modernisation of the Underground have been completed.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if *(a)* his Department, *(b)* Transport for London and *(c)* London Underground intend to undertake further advertising to promote the public-private partnership for London Underground; and when it is envisaged that it will commence. [14610]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has no plans to undertake advertising to promote the public-private partnership for London Underground.

Advertising by Transport for London and London Underground is a matter for each of those organisations.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and its predecessors, *(b)* London Transport, *(c)* London Underground and *(d)* any other institution (i) controlled and (ii) funded by his Department or its predecessors on all work concerned with the (A) preparations, (B) contracts and (C) other aspects of the London Underground public-private partnership in each year since 1997–98. [14614]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1169W. It is not practicable to provide a breakdown in the form requested by the hon. Member.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many London Underground *(a)* drivers and *(b)* station staff there were in each year since 1991. [14603]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill) to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 9 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 386W.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who are the members of the boards of *(a)* Transport for London and *(b)* London Underground, and what are their (i) annual emoluments and (ii) monthly time commitment to LU; when they joined the board; and what are the particular responsibilities of each member as regards the public-private partnership for the underground. [14590]

Mr. Jamieson: Appointments to the Board of Transport for London are a matter for the Mayor of London.

The board members of London Underground Ltd., who are appointed by the Board of London Regional Transport are:

Derek Smith (Chairman)
Paul Godier (Managing Director)
Brian Appleton (Non-executive Director with special interest in safety)
Keith Beattie
Patrick Butcher
Mike Brown
Martin Callaghan
Tony Maguire
Rob Mason
Jon Smith
Mike Strzelecki.

Details of board members' annual emoluments and start dates are included in the relevant annual report and accounts.

All board members of London Underground Ltd., except Brian Appleton and Derek Smith, are full-time executive directors. Brian Appleton works 11 days per month, and Derek Smith 2½ days per week (from 8 October 2001).

The board of London Underground Ltd. considers all significant matters relating to the PPP, but the final decision on the award of any contracts is a matter reserved for the board of London Regional Transport. With the exception of Martin Callaghan, who is the PPP project director and leads on the negotiations with the PPP bidders. No other board members of either London Underground Ltd. or London Regional Transport has specific individual responsibilities in relation to the PPP.

Local Government Modernisation

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will place in the Library all *(a)* guidance and *(b)* other documentation

(i) published and (ii) otherwise distributed by the local government modernisation team with respect to ethics in local government; [14545]

(2) if he will place in the Library all *(a)* guidance and *(b)* other documentation (i) published and (ii) otherwise distributed to local authorities by the local government modernisation team with respect to the environment. [14557]

Mr. Byers: The purpose of the local government modernisation team is to help to communicate and explain to council members and employees the Government's agenda for the modernisation of local government, and to feed back council's views and experiences to Ministers and Departments.

The role of the members of the team is therefore to contribute their operational knowledge to guidance or other publications prepared by the Department. Examples include contributing to Government Guidance on New Council Constitutions and on Referendums under the Local Government Act 2000 and working with the Improvement and Development Agency in developing their ethical governance audit for local authorities. The remit of the local government modernisation team is primarily in relation to the modernisation of local government and not specifically on environmental issues.

Copies of such Government guidance and documentation are placed in the Library in the usual manner.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what are the criteria by which members of the local government modernisation team were selected. [14554]

Mr. Byers: To ensure members of the local government modernisation team were recruited on an open basis, consistent with guidelines from the Civil Service Commissioners, advertisements for posts were placed in both the national and local government press. Applications were sought from people with:

Senior local government experience;

the ability to command credibility and respect of members and senior officers;

knowledge of the (local government) modernisation agenda, with experience or expertise in one or more key areas;

excellent communication and presentation skills, and

good team players.

A panel including civil servants from my Department and an independent member from the Local Government Association interviewed the applicants and decided the appointments to be made.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who are the members of the local government modernisation team; and what are their relevant *(a)* experience and *(b)* qualifications. [14550]

Mr. Byers: Current members of the local government modernisation team are:

Avril Atkinson, former Director of Pupils and Services Division, East Sussex CC

Chris Haynes, former Head of Information Age Government, Knowsley

Richard Ollin, former Chief Executive, Stroud DC

Guy Ware, former Director of Finance and Information Services, LB Enfield

Janice Morphet, former Chief Executive, Rutland

Julian Bowrey, former Head of Policy and Review, Cambridgeshire CC

John Haward, former Head of Corporate Strategy, Southwark LB

Mike Reardon, former Council Secretary, Trafford MBC

Pam Fox, former Assistant Chief Executive, Portsmouth City

Peter Murphy, former Chief Executive, Melton BC

Rita Petty, former Executive Director, Kirklees MBC.

All members of the team have been recruited on the basis of ability, qualifications and suitability for the work as a result of an open competition held in line with guidelines set out by the Civil Service Commissioners.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the cost of *(a)* the establishment of the local government modernisation team and *(b)* its continuing operating costs. [14555]

Mr. Byers: The local government modernisation team was set up with an annual budget of £1 million which included the cost of establishing the team in the autumn of 1999. This was increased to £1.5 million in 2000–01 to cover new roles, in particular local government on-line.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what remuneration and superannuation is paid to members of the local government modernisation team. [14556]

Mr. Byers: Members of the local government modernisation team have been appointed on a mixture of short-term secondments or fixed-term contracts, usually of one to two years (full and part-time). Most members are senior civil service equivalents. Remuneration is based on salary before joining the team, and is currently in the range from £45,000 to £80,000 per annum. Members have the option of remaining in the local government pension scheme or joining the principle civil service pension scheme when they join the Department.

Bus Services

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he has taken to improve the quality of bus services with respect to *(a)* reliability of service and *(b)* the quality of information provided at bus stops since the publication of the bus quality indicators bulletin in September. [14546]

Mr. Byers: The Government want to see more regular and reliable bus services that will attract increasing numbers of passengers. Since the publication of the most recent bus quality indicators bulletin in September, we have commenced powers under the Transport Act 2000 with regard to statutory Quality Partnerships and Quality Contracts. This means that local authorities now have a wider range of powers at their disposal to help them to take steps to improve local bus services.

The Transport Act 2000 also requires all local transport authorities to develop arrangements for ensuring that appropriate bus passenger information is made available, and enables them to step in to provide proper passenger information, at operators' expense, if existing arrangements are inadequate.

We are continuing to discuss with the bus industry realistic targets for delivering improvements in service reliability, including monitoring the provision of passenger information at bus stops.

Deprivation (Lancaster)

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which are the 12 most deprived wards in the Lancaster City district, with reference to the Index of Local Deprivation. [13767]

Ms Keeble: Table 1 lists the 12 most deprived wards in the Lancaster district, as measured on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000. This is one of the main components of the Indices of Deprivation 2000, which is the current measure of deprivation in England.

Ward name[1]	*Rank of index of multiple deprivation across England*
Alexandra	280
Poulton	759
Skerton Central	795
Skerton East	843
Bulk	1,277
Harbour	1,279
Skerton West	1,290
Heysham North	1,325
Heysham Central	1,476
Heysham South	2,113
Castle	2,282
Victoria	2,417

[1] These are based on ward boundaries as at 1998

The components of the Indices of Deprivation 2000 are:

Separate indices at ward level on each of the six domains of deprivation: Income, Employment, Health Deprivation and Disability, Education Skills and Training, Housing and Geographical Access to Services. This allows all 8,414 wards in England to be ranked according to how deprived they are relative to other areas, for each domain.A ward level index that brings together information from the six domains of deprivation into one overall Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2000). Table 1 is based on this measure.

Six district level summaries of the IMD, which allow all 354 local authority districts to be ranked according to each measure. These summaries take account of the different patterns of deprivation found in different areas.

Table 2 shows how all Lancaster's wards are ranked according to the IMD and the six other ward domains included in the Indices of Deprivation 2000.

Ward Name	*IMD 2000*	*Income*	*Employment*	*Health*	*Education*	*Housing*	*Access to Services*
Alexandra	280	382	122	184	1,311	1,430	6,526
Arkholme	5,256	6,205	6,118	6,275	5,553	6,229	361
Bolton-le-Sands	6,122	6,947	4,835	4,210	7,724	7,268	1,775
Bulk	1,277	1,569	1,280	990	986	1,791	6,833
Carnforth	4,213	3,640	4,270	3,525	3,456	6,101	3,993
Castle	2,282	2,000	1,594	1,998	4,383	2,821	6,065
Caton	4,295	5,136	3,447	3,160	5,827	7,107	1,524
Ellel	4,490	5,787	4,652	4,736	7,728	2,927	592
Halton-with-Aughton	5,762	6,251	4,380	4,577	7,094	7,525	1,717
Harbour	1,279	755	961	753	3,790	4,828	5,702
Heysham Central	1,476	1,919	882	591	2,279	6,145	5,784
Heysham North	1,325	979	1,004	1,135	2,088	3,174	7,832
Heysham South	2,113	1,610	1,868	1,670	3,327	3,547	5,452
Hornby	5,811	7,440	5,999	5,948	6,709	6,717	380
John O'Gaunt	6,028	5,267	4,236	4,876	5,143	6,102	7,700
Kellet	4,737	4,798	3,639	3,748	6,971	6,071	2,240
Overton	2,924	3,765	3,247	2,669	3,408	1,457	2,392
Parks	4,366	4,690	2,584	1,973	6,686	8,229	6,412
Poulton	759	725	389	377	3,807	1,686	7,881
Scotforth East	6,258	6,376	6,174	5,715	4,558	2,993	4,789
Scotforth West	3,770	3,501	2,704	2,508	4,526	6,551	5,744
Silverdale	5,849	6,002	4,693	3,970	7,876	8,097	1,764
Skerton Central	795	867	1,127	876	336	1,472	7,410
Skerton East	843	815	889	939	440	2,715	7,460
Skerton West	1,290	1,366	1,644	1,873	636	1,366	5,301
Slyne-with-Hest	4,561	6,132	2,768	2,105	7,939	7,237	2,999
Torrisholme	5,156	4,828	3,870	2,673	6,690	7,972	4,729
Victoria	2,417	1,507	2,138	1,608	4,896	4,289	7,118
Warton	3,917	4,502	4,240	3,583	2,707	3,946	2,835

Regeneration (Morecambe and Lunesdale)

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what funding he has provided *(a)* to encourage employment opportunities and *(b)* to regenerate industrial estates in the Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency. [13768]

Ms Keeble: The constituency of Morecambe and Lunesdale has benefited from the following funding.

Single Regeneration Budget:

SRB Round One—Turning the Tide: Morecambe

This is a seven year strategy to halt decline and build tourism through comprehensive regeneration of an area of need in the town centre. It builds on pre-existing housing schemes and extends to business, training, and environmental schemes.

SRB Total is £4.3 million.

SRB Round Five—Luneside Regeneration

This seven year scheme seeks to tackle dereliction and draw private investment into key sites in Lancaster, creating new jobs close to the city's inner urban communities.

SRB total is £5 million.

European Regional Development Fund

Much of the constituency is eligible for support under the 2000–06 Objective 2 programme, and can expect to access business support through the wider north and west Lancashire action plan. This has been awarded £14 million for a range of business support activities.

Luneside Industrial Estate

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Government Office for the North West and *(b)* NWDA about improving access to the Luneside industrial estate. [13770]

Ms Keeble: Ministers have not had discussions with the North West Development Agency about improving access to Luneside industrial estate.

Regional Investment Funding (Lancaster)

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which wards in the Lancaster City Council District are eligible for Objective 2 priority 3 strategic regional investment funding. [13772]

Ms Keeble: Eligible wards are:

Alexandra
Bulk
Castle
Caton
Heysham central
Heysham north
Heysham south
Overton.

Wessex Rail Franchise

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his proposed timetable for the renewal of the Wessex Rail Franchise. [14295]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has submitted proposals for a revised franchise replacement/extension programme to the Secretary of State for consideration. An announcement will be made in due course.

DEFENCE

QinetiQ

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to divest QinetiQ; and when the funds derived from the sale will be credited to his Department's budget. [14626]

Dr. Moonie: QinetiQ will be floated as soon as its potential is judged to be suitably developed, subject to value for money considerations and provided the organisation has achieved appropriate performance targets. Since vesting of the company on 1 July 2001 work has mainly focused on preparing the company for a future transaction and assessing market conditions. It also remains possible that a strategic partner will be brought in to assist with the commercial development of the company prior to a flotation. The Ministry of Defence is likely to retain an interest in QinetiQ as a means to ensuring that taxpayers receive full value for the investment in past Government funded research. An announcement, hopefully early in the new year, will be made once a decision has been taken on the transaction route, and the proposed timetable.

It has been agreed with HM Treasury that the MOD will receive a credit of at least £250 million in FY 2001–02 in anticipation of a successful PPP. This receipt is not dependent on the actual timing of the final PPP transaction, nor is the figure an indication of the potential value of the transaction.

Veterans Task Force

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Veterans task force meeting held on 7 November. [13766]

Dr. Moonie: At the first meeting of the task force on 6 November, my ministerial colleagues from other Departments with an interest in veterans issues, representatives from the veterans' community and I agreed terms of reference committing us to making our policy development and services responsive to the reasonable needs and concerns of veterans. We agreed a vision focusing on the key themes of partnership, identity, recognition, education and care, and agreed a cross-government action plan to take these themes forward. This work is being undertaken in partnership with experts from veterans organisations and will include reviews of resettlement for the most vulnerable of those discharged from the armed forces, of the educational material on veterans and their achievements provided for Key Stage 3 of the national curriculum and of ways in which we might improve the effectiveness of our communications with veterans. Ministers also agreed to review their relevant public service agreements to identify those in which there was a significant and discrete veterans problem that merited action in its own right. Particular areas to be considered were focused on the most vulnerable and included the levels of service-related problems among the prison population, among marital breakdowns and among the unemployed. Deadlines have been set for action plan work items, and overall progress with the initiative will be considered at the next meeting of the task force in May 2002.

I consider that the task force agreements represent substantial progress towards achieving our objective of raising the profile of veterans' issues in Government and more widely across the nation, and of improving the delivery of benefits to veterans, particularly the most vulnerable.

Afghanistan

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the inclusion of the Territorial Army in the operations against Afghanistan; and *(a)* how many will be deployed and *(b)* how they will be deployed. [13128]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans to include formed units of the Territorial Army in the operations in Afghanistan. However, a call-out order has been made under section 54 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to permit up to 150 individual reservists from all three services to be called out for service in support of the current operation. They are needed to augment headquarters, and provide operational support to the Royal Air Force. Most will be based in the UK. Augmentation of this nature is a routine task for the reserves.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to disarm unexploded cluster bomblets used by Allied coalition forces in the conflict in Afghanistan. [14266]

Mr. Ingram: The Prime Minister has made it clear that the United Kingdom will not turn her back on Afghanistan and that any political settlement will be supported and sustained through rehabilitation and reconstruction, of which the clearance of unexploded ordnance may form a part.

Aircraft Scrambles

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions and in what circumstances planes have been scrambled to deal with perceived emergencies at nuclear or other installations since 11 September. [13720]

Mr. Ingram: Aircraft have been scrambled once to deal with perceived emergencies at nuclear or other installations since 11 September 2001. On 27 October two F3 Tornado aircraft conducted air policing in the vicinity of Sellafield in response to what proved to be a hoax threat telephone call to civilian police.

No-fly Zones

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many instances there have been in each year since 1991 of military aircraft accidentally breaching no-fly zones over *(a)* nuclear power plants, *(b)* nuclear reprocessing plants and *(c)* military nuclear plants. [14261]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Installations (Security)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations his Department has received in respect of the security of nuclear installations since 11 September. [14684]

Mr. Ingram: The security of nuclear installations is a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry. We are in close contact with the DTI and other Government Departments concerning any contribution the armed forces could make in this area, in response to the events of 11 September.

Exercise Saif Sareea 2

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of Exercise Saif Sareea 2 in Oman; and how successful it has been in developing the United Kingdom's Joint Rapid Reaction Force. [13512]

Mr. Ingram: The exercise activity of Exercise Saif Sareea 2 ended on 29 October and the recovery of our forces and their equipment is under way.

The objectives of the exercise were to deploy and sustain a major joint force across strategic distances, and conduct realistic coalition war fighting training in a testing desert environment. As such it was a major test of some of the equipment and personnel that are part of the Joint Rapid Reaction Force.

It will take some weeks to analyse all the results of the exercise and the lessons identified. But it is already clear that the exercise did indeed provide very valuable training and many very useful lessons have already been identified. Overall, our initial judgment is that the exercise has met its aims most successfully. It has demonstrated the ability of the United Kingdom to project forces over a strategic distance, and in doing so reaffirmed UK commitment to the stability and security of the middle east region at an important time.

Chinook Helicopters

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many spare gearboxes for Chinook helicopters are kept in stock; and where the Chinook gearboxes are supplied from. [14352]

Mr. Ingram: There were 30 serviceable gearboxes for Chinook helicopters in stock as at 9 November 2001. These gearboxes were supplied by Boeing.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Chinook helicopters *(a)* are in operation, *(b)* were deployed in Exercise Saif Sareea 2 and *(c)* are grounded because of a shortage of spare parts. [14630]

Mr. Ingram: As at 9 November, 27 Chinook helicopters were in operation and four were deployed on Exercise Saif Sareea 2. No Chinook helicopters were grounded because of a shortage of spares but a total of 13 aircraft were undergoing scheduled maintenance, repair or modification.

Apache Helicopters

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Apache helicopters there are in the United Kingdom; and how many he plans to buy. [14381]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is contracted to purchase a total of 67 Apache aircraft. Currently we own 17, which are based in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Apache operating manuals there are in the UK; if Apache operating manuals may be consulted by non-military personnel in the UK; and if DERA personnel are authorised to use Apache operating manuals. [14351]

Dr. Moonie: The Apache operating manuals are all computer-based Interactive Electronic Technical Publications (IETPs), which may be loaded onto any computer with the appropriate current user licence. The Ministry of Defence has purchased in the region of 465 laptop computers to receive the software.

Within the Joint Helicopter Command (JHC), both military and non-military personnel are currently authorised to consult the Apache IETPs. The non-military

personnel are either civil servants or employees of Westland Helicopters Ltd. (WHL), who are assembling the aircraft under licence from Boeing.

Prior to the vesting of part of the former DERA as QinetiQ plc on 1 July 2001, DERA personnel at the Aircraft Testing and Evaluation (AT&E) facility Boscombe Down, as part of MOD, had access to the Apache operation manuals. However, when these staff transferred to QinetiQ, they were temporarily unable to have access to such proprietary information pending the amendment of WHL's licence with Boeing. The licence amendment was submitted in July and US State Department approval was given on 1 October 2001. Once this approval is implemented, QinetiQ personnel will again be authorised to use the manuals, in support of MOD work.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if DERA personnel had access to the Apache Operating Manual before DERA was privatised; and if he will make a statement on the changes that have occurred in DERA's security classification since privatisation, with special reference to co-operation with the United States of America. [14354]

Dr. Moonie: Prior to the vesting of part of the former DERA as QinetiQ plc on 1 July 2001, DERA personnel at the Aircraft Test and Evaluation facility Boscombe Down, as part of the Ministry of Defence, had access to the Apache operating manuals and other proprietary information.

QinetiQ's security arrangements are in line with those of other defence contractors, who carry out work on sensitive contracts for MOD, other Government Departments and international collaborative partners, including the United States of America.

Eurofighter

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what British involvement there is in the manufacture of the cockpit frame for Eurofighter; what proportion of the parts of the Eurofighter cockpit are British made; which overseas countries are supplying components to the Eurofighter cockpit frame; which other parts of Eurofighter will be British made, and if he will make a statement. [14353]

Dr. Moonie: The front fuselage of the Eurofighter aircraft, which includes the cockpit frames, is manufactured by BAE Systems Warton as part of the UK's agreed overall aircraft programme work-share of approximately 36 per cent. Eurofighter cockpit equipments are manufactured by various consortia, comprising companies from the four Eurofighter Partner Companies from UK, Germany, Italy and Spain. Work is shared as far as practicable in line with the overall programme work-share. Other parts that are British-made are the front canards, right wing leading edge slats and trailing edge flaps, various avionic equipment and a significant number of major engine parts.

Royal Naval Reserve

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Naval Reserve personnel are serving on operations. [14625]

Dr. Moonie: Twenty RNR personnel have volunteered to be called-out to serve on current operations. This figure excludes naval service reserves engaged on other duties in support of the regular armed forces—eg those serving on full-time reserve service teams in a wide variety of appointments.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Promotions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if she will make a statement. [12275]

Dr. Howells: The Department's spending on information literature for the period 1996–97 to 2000–01 is as set out. Figures for 1995–96 are not available in the form requested.

Year	£
1996–97	501,366
1997–98	338,761
1998–99	288,100
1999–2000	448,238
2000–01	448,140

No advertising and campaign material was produced during this period.

Youth Hostels Association

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received concerning the financial situation of the Youth Hostels Association; and if she will make a statement. [12148]

Dr. Howells: We have received over 60 representations on the financial situation of the Youth Hostels Association for England and Wales (YHA). On 30 October 2001 I had a productive meeting with representatives of the YHA to discuss their difficulties and possible sources of help. The Government are pursuing several practical options to assist the YHA. We will also respond shortly to the recommendations in the report of the Rural Task Force, "Tackling the Impact of Foot and Mouth Disease on the Rural Economy" published on 18 October 2001.

Royal Palaces

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 355W, on the occupation of flats in the royal palaces, if she will list the residents. [11798]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The list of persons who occupy residences in the Occupied Royal Palaces other than members of the Royal Family at 31 December 2000 is as follows:

(i) Private Secretaries and Officials in the Queen's Household: 33

(ii) Private Secretaries and Officials in other Households: 6

(iii) Domestic staff in the Queen's Household: 29

(iv) Domestic Staff in other Households: 11

(v) Stables staff looking after the Civil List carriages and carriage horses: 19

(vi) The Queen's private staff and staff who work on the Royal Farms at Windsor: 9

(vii) Chauffeurs in the Queen's Household: 4

(viii) Chauffeurs in other Households: 4

(ix) Staff in the Queen's Household responsible for the maintenance of the Occupied Palaces Estate (including the Director of Property Services): 18

(x) Gardeners in the Queen's Household: 4

(xi) Gatekeepers and security staff: 6

(xii) Firepatrolmen in the Queen's Household: 4

(xiii) Craftsmen and porters in the Queen's Household: 19

(xiv) Royal Collection staff: 4

(xv) Crown Estate gardeners: 2

(xvi) Military Knights at Windsor Castle (Pensioners): 13

(xvii) Pensioners: 43

(xviii) Commercial: 16

Total: 244.

The total of (i) and (ii) is 39 and the list of posts by job title is as follows:

Private Secretaries and Officials in the Queen's Household provided with residential accommodation (i)

1. Assistant Private Secretary to the Queen
2. Keeper of the Privy Purse
3. Comptroller, Lord Chamberlain's Office
4. Crown Equerry
5. Director of the Royal Collection
6. Mistress of the Robes
7. Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps
8. Governor and Constable of Windsor Castle
9. Deputy Treasurer to the Queen
10. Deputy Master of the Household
11. Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures
12. Royal Librarian
13. Equerry in Waiting to the Queen
14. Sub-Dean Chapel Royal
15. Superintendent, Royal Mews
16. Superintendent, Windsor Castle
17. Secretary, Lord Chamberlain's Office
18. Chief Clerk, Master of the Household's Department
19. Chief Correspondence Clerk
20. Deputy Superintendent, Royal Mews
21. Administrator, Royal Collection
22. Superintendent of St. James's Palace State Apartments
23. Deputy Chief Clerk, Royal Mews
24. Assistant Curator, Royal library
25. Archivist, Royal Archives
26. Registrar, Royal Archives
27. Deputy Registrar, Royal Archives
28. Assistant Registrar, Royal Archives
29. Secretary to the Communications Secretary
30. Exhibitions and Maintenance Conservator, Royal library
31. Armourer, Royal Collection
32. Messenger of the Yeoman of the Guard
33. Serjeant of the Vestry, Chapel Royal

Private Secretaries and Officials in Other Royal Households provided with Residential Accommodation (ii)

34. Private Secretary to Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother
35. Private Secretary to the Duke of Edinburgh
36. Equerry in Waiting to the Duke of Edinburgh
37. Private Secretary to the Prince of Wales
38. Private Secretary to the Duke of York
39. Private Secretary to the Duke of Gloucester.

Television

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action her Department is taking to promote digital television to consumers who do not wish to take out a pay TV subscription. [12339]

Dr. Howells: On 12 October, the Government published a draft Digital TV Action Plan which sets out the issues on which action needs to be taken to enable and encourage take up of digital television. An essential element of the Plan will be the need to raise the awareness and knowledge of consumers including those who want to receive only free-to-view channels.

Creative Partnerships (Disadvantaged Areas)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Government will fulfil its commitment to establish creative partnerships linking schools with arts organisations in disadvantaged areas. [13449]

Dr. Howells: The formal launch of creative partnerships will take place as planned in April 2002, when the funds set aside for this initiative start to flow.

The 16 pilot areas for creative partnerships were announced in February 2002. Since then, Peter Jenkinson, the former Director of the New Art Gallery, Walsall, has taken up the post of National Director of Creative Partnerships, and preparations in the pilot areas are now well under way.

BBC Chairman (Ethnic Minority Candidates)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many black and Asian people were shortlisted for the post of Chairman of the BBC. [13610]

Dr. Howells: In the interests of confidentiality, it is not our policy to release information about individual shortlists.

Seaside Towns

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to implement the Resorts Taskforce report on seaside towns, "Sea Changes". [13739]

Dr. Howells: The Government welcomed the English Tourism Council's (ETC) report, "Sea Changes", which was produced in the light of advice from the ETC's Resorts Task Force. The report makes 20 recommendations, which would involve various bodies at a national, regional and local level, as well as the industry itself. This Department has asked the ETC to consider how that report can best be implemented and to

what timescale. To that end the ETC is working closely with the British Resorts Association and relevant tourism officers.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will consider the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* funding of a Seaside Regeneration Trust modelled on the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. [13740]

Dr. Howells: The English Tourism Council's report, "Sea Changes", published last February, makes a number of recommendations about how to approach regeneration that could be of use to resort towns.

The Government consider that the prime responsibility for resort regeneration, which often has some tourism focus, lies with those who administer individual resorts—working with local and regional partners. There is a variety of funding and organisational mechanisms now in place to help achieve this, for instance, Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies (for those eligible) and Local Strategic Partnerships. We encourage local authorities to make use of these mechanisms. However, while acknowledging the level of deprivation that has developed in some of our resorts over the years, we do not consider it directly comparable to the sudden and severe impact of pit closures on mining communities, which is what justified setting up the Coalfields Regeneration Trust.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to improve the infrastructure of British seaside resorts. [13742]

Dr. Howells: The Government believe that the principal responsibility for supporting the infrastructure of British seaside resorts lies with local government, working with other interested parties in the light of a clearly enunciated vision and strategy for tourism and other economic activity. It is also particularly important that aspects of planning and transport, for instance, as well as any overall plan for regeneration, dovetail with wider regional plans which are the responsibility of regional development agencies in England. In Scotland and Wales the infrastructure of seaside resorts is a matter for the relevant Minister in each devolved administration.

New Opportunities Fund

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the number of beneficiaries in the Buckingham constituency from the new opportunities fund. [14010]

Mr. Caborn: To date there have been six beneficiaries in the Buckingham constituency. A list of these awards is set out in the following table.

Total number of New Opportunities Fund awards made to the Buckingham constituency—12 November 2001

Distributing body/recipient	*Project title/Desc. Long*	*Award date*	*Award amount (£)*
New Opportunities Fund			
Buckingham After School Teens Club	The grant would be used to extend the group's existing provision (for 5 to 12-year-olds) by providing a total of 60 after school and holiday child care places catering for 11 to 14-year-olds. The schools served would be Buckingham School and Royal Latin School	12 July 1999	19,071
Southcourt and Walton Court Community Project	The applicant is a community project with charitable status in Aylesbury. It is managed by committee and has operated for eight years providing a range of child care as well as advice and activities for adults. It employs four part-time staff	20 October 1999	6,600
Drayton Parslow Playgroup	The grant would be used to provide an extra 24 places at the after-school club for children aged 3 to 4-years-old. The project would be situated in Drayton Parslow Buckinghamshire. School served would be Drayton Parslow County First School	10 December 1999	1,179
Southcourt and Walton Court Community Project	The grant would be used to provide three new breakfast clubs in the Aylesbury area which would create 128 places in total for children between the ages of 4–11 years. The places would benefit children attending three local schools	16 June 2000	20,020
Buckingham After School Club—Winslow	The grant would be used to create 34 after school places for children aged 5 to 11-years-old in Buckingham. School served would be Winslow Combined School, a contribution to the cost of employing a play leader and four play assistants	25 October 2000	18,001
Buckingham Secondary School	Our of School Hours Learning Programme	7 November 2000	42,654
Total value of NOF awards			107,525

Communications White Paper

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish the Government's response to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's report on the Communications White Paper. [15012]

Tessa Jowell: I have today published the Government's response to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's report.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has made to the BBC concerning the televising of Holocaust Memorial Day 2002; and if he will make a statement. [14721]

Angela Eagle: Following their successful collaboration with the Home Office in producing and televising the

national ceremony to mark the first United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January, the BBC have developed plans for covering Holocaust Memorial Day in the future. These will culminate in a major live televised ceremonial event on 27 January 2005, the 60th anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz. My officials will take up the BBC's invitation to discuss with them their strategy for covering Holocaust Memorial Day over the next four years, and to include representatives from the Home Office-led strategic group planning Holocaust Memorial Day.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the BBC televising the Holocaust Memorial Day national event; and if he will make a statement. [14501]

Angela Eagle: All those organisations involved in helping the Home Office plan the national event on Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2002 have expressed their disappointment that the BBC have decided to televise the national event every five years only, the next time on 27 January 2005 the 60th anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz.

However, the BBC have made an unequivocal commitment to mark Holocaust Memorial Day each year in a range of appropriate ways. They have invited Home Office officials and those organisations involved in planning Holocaust Memorial Day to discuss their strategy for the next four years with them. Their proposed strategy contains a differing mix of documentary, drama, current affairs, children's programming and news coverage each year leading to a major live ceremonial event for 2005.

In January 2002 the BBC have a major original film drama "Conspiracy", starring Kenneth Brannagh, about Reinhard Heydrich and the Wannsee Conference; their television religious strands "The Heaven and Earth Show" and "Songs of Praise" plan to feature Holocaust related material in their programmes on 27 January; the BBC are looking at a special edition of their BBC 2 current affairs programme "Correspondent" during the Holocaust Memorial weekend and it is likely that various programmes from Children's BBC will take up the theme too.

The BBC also intend to cover the national event next 27 January on their news bulletins on BBC 1 and 2 and on News 24, and likely on radio too.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact that the televised commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day had on the understanding of the general public of the issues raised. [14500]

Angela Eagle: There was an estimated audience of 1.2 million for the ceremony televised live on 27 January 2001 which got one of the highest quality ratings for a TV programme. Many people said they found the event both moving and challenging. In addition, many others will have become aware of the purpose of Holocaust Memorial Day through the many local activities around the country, particularly in schools, to mark the day.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning the local events to be held for Holocaust Memorial Day 2002. [14202]

Angela Eagle: We anticipate there will again be a wide range of local activities around the country to mark Holocaust Memorial Day. Further guidance has been produced to help local authorities and community groups to plan their events; and new material for use in schools has also been produced. In each case the guidance has drawn on good practice from this year and suggestions for improvement identified through surveys of local authorities and schools.

Prisons (Filming)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests have been made in the last two years to visit and film in *(a)* prisons and *(b)* institutions for young offenders and other places where young people are in custody; and what the response to the requests was. [13940]

Beverley Hughes: These figures are not collated centrally, and there is no requirement to do so.

The Prison Service receives many hundreds of requests per year from international, national and regional TV companies to film in prisons and Young Offender Institutions for a variety of news broadcasts, dramas and documentary programmes.

Interdepartmental Ministerial Group

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the work of the interdepartmental ministerial group established following disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham earlier this year; and if he intends to publish the reports of the group. [13895]

Mr. Denham: The ministerial group on Public Order and Community Cohesion expects to complete its work in December. It is intended to publish its report in due course.

Police Pensions

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of policing expenditure in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* the last year for which figures are available was spent on police pensions; and if he will make a statement. [13894]

Mr. Denham: The figures requested are given in the table.

In recognition of the increased burden of paying police pensions, the proportion of revenue funding allocated to police authorities on the basis of pensions commitments has been increased from 12.9 per cent. in 1997–98 to 14.5 per cent. since 1999–2000. It will remain at this level in 2002–03.

Year	*Net pensions expenditure (£)*	*Net police expenditure (£)*	*Proportion of police net expenditure spent on pensions (Percentage)*
1992–93	456,479	5,621,763	8.1
1997–98	863,131	6,870,093	12.6
2000–01	1,029,454	7,739,163	13.3

Source:
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police Statistics
(Estimates for 2000–01)

Distraction Burglary Strategy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those projects which have been funded by his Department as part of his distraction burglary strategy; what the amounts involved are; and what the time scale is of the funding. [14362]

Mr. Denham: The work of the distraction burglary Taskforce and the two staff seconded for the duration from the police and local government sectors, is being funded through two means: support from utility companies such as the water industry, the Electricity Association, British Gas and British Telecom to the sum of £270,000. The second element is being met through the Crime Reduction Programme to the sum of £1 million.

In addition to the Taskforce, the Government are also separately supporting three police-led initiatives. These are located in Leeds, Sheffield and Alfreton Derbyshire, to the sum of £1,009,765.

These combined elements make up my Department's strategy to tackle distraction burglary. The elements, amounts and timescale for completion are:

	Timescale	*Value*
Completion of the Taskforce action plan	By end March 2000 with research element completed by June 2002	£1 million
Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative	By 2003	£554,000
Sheffield Distraction Burglary Initiative	By March 2002	£288,000
Derbyshire Database project	By March 2002	£168,000

Sexual Abuse

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation to strengthen the law in relation to protecting children and vulnerable people from sexual abuse; and if he will make a statement. [13893]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* When the Government set up the Sex Offences Review in January 1999, its terms of reference included "to provide coherent clear sex offences which protect individuals, especially children and the more vulnerable, from abuse and exploitation".

We are committed to introducing strengthened legislation on sex offences, and will announce our conclusions once we have completed our analysis of the responses to the consultation paper 'Setting the Boundaries'.

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were classified as category A prisoners in prisons in England and Wales on 1 November [13926]

Beverley Hughes: On 1 November 2001, there were 961 men and four women classified as category A prisoners in prisons in England and Wales.

Community Court Order Warrants

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if warrants for breach of a community court order are systematically withdrawn after 12 months have elapsed; and if he will make a statement. [13831]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* All cases are considered on their merits and no central policy directions have been given to the National Probation Service, on the period after which a warrant should be returned to the courts for consideration of withdrawal. I am aware that practice does differ across the country and the National Probation Service is currently considering whether further advice should be given in these circumstances.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many warrants for the breach of a community court order have been withdrawn since 1 January; and if he will make a statement. [13832]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* This information is not available centrally.

Bedfordshire Police

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of salary differences and the free rail travel offer to those officers within a 70-mile radius of Charing Cross station on the number of police officers transferring from Bedfordshire Police to the Metropolitan police. [13438]

Mr. Denham: Officers in the Metropolitan police qualify for a London allowance and London weighting in addition to their basic pay. For officers who were appointed before 1 September 1994 and who receive a housing emolument, the London allowance is worth £1,011 a year. From 1 July 2000, officers who were appointed on or after 1 September 1994 and who are not in receipt of a housing emolument receive a London allowance of £4,338 a year. London weighting was increased to £1,773 a year for all Metropolitan police officers from 1 July this year. In addition, officers in the Metropolitan police have free rail travel to and from work within a 70-mile radius of Charing Cross Station.

From 1 April 2001, officers in Bedfordshire appointed on or after 1 September 1994 who are not in receipt of a housing allowance receive an allowance of £1,000 a year in addition to basic pay.

The increase in the London allowance and the new allowance for officers in Bedfordshire were approved by the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), following agreements in the Police Negotiating Board (PNB). PNB is the statutory negotiating body for police pay and conditions which makes recommendations to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State approved the new allowances in recognition of the recruitment and retention difficulties associated with the higher cost of living in London and Bedfordshire.

Since 1 July 2000, 12 officers have transferred from the Bedfordshire police to the Metropolitan police and two have moved from the Metropolitan police to Bedfordshire police. I will keep the position under review.

Deportations

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been deported from the United Kingdom since 1 January. [13633]

Angela Eagle: I regret that this information is not available.

The only information currently available about the number of people removed in the current year relates to the number of asylum seekers removed in the period January-June. There were 4,660 such removals. Of this number, 2,805 were on-entry removals (persons refused entry to the United Kingdom and subsequently removed) and 2,570 were after-entry removals. It is not possible to say how many of those who were the subject of deportation action were deported, and how many left before a deportation order was actually signed.

Corresponding information on the number of non-asylum removals for the period is not currently available as these data are yet to be quality assured.

Fireworks

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many convictions there were against persons who have injured others with fireworks in each of the last five years in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK; [13163]

(2) how many prosecutions have been brought against persons who are alleged to have damaged property with fireworks in each of the last five years in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK; [13189]

(3) how many convictions have been secured against those prosecuted for sales of fireworks to underage children in each of the last five years in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom; [13186]

(4) how many prosecutions have been brought against suppliers of fireworks for sales to underage children in each of the last five years in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom; [13185]

(5) how many convictions have been secured against persons who have damaged property with fireworks in each of the last five years in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK; [13190]

(6) how many prosecutions have been brought against persons who have injured others with fireworks in each of the last five years in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom. [13187]

Mr. Denham: Information held centrally on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relating to England and Wales, does not identify separately the offence of "selling gunpowder to children" under s31 of the Explosives Act 1875, from other summary offences under the Explosives Acts.

Neither does it enable a distinction to be made between prosecutions and convictions for offences connected with personal injury or damage to property with fireworks, as the circumstances of violent and property offences are not collected.

Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively.

Elderly Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many frail elderly *(a)* men and *(b)* women at present are serving prison sentences in England and Wales. [13447]

Beverley Hughes: The numbers of prisoners aged 60 and over currently serving a prison sentence as at 30 September 2001 are listed in the table. Information about the state of their health is not collected centrally.

	Male	*Female*
60–69	1,017	3
70–74	163	4
75+	61	0
Total	1,241	7

Disabled Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women serving prison sentences in England and Wales are confined to a wheelchair. [13448]

Beverley Hughes: This information is not collected centrally.

Prison Construction

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons being constructed in England and Wales, and the date when these prisons are expected to come into use. [13445]

Beverley Hughes: There are no prisons under construction in England and Wales at present. Two prisons, to be built at Ashford, Middlesex and Peterborough, are under procurement. Construction is planned to start in 2002. The prison at Ashford is due to open in July 2003 and the prison at Peterborough in April 2004.

Al-Muhajiroun

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will investigate (1) the links between *(a)* Medina Ltd, TransGlobal Security International, Mark Yates and Paul Field and *(b)* Sakina Security Services Ltd, Al-Muhajiroun, and Omar Bakri Mohammed; and if he will make a statement; [13626]

(2) the activities of TransGlobal Security International; and if he will make a statement; [13625]

(3) the links between Anil Shah and Sakina Security Services; and if he will make a statement. [13627]

Mr. Denham: I have been in close touch with the relevant enforcement units, following their work in monitoring and evaluating any information that might be used in connection with any prosecution. The investigation of any alleged criminal offences is of course entirely a matter for the police. Any information that my hon. Friend is aware of which might assist the police in their investigations should be supplied to my Department immediately.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will investigate the alleged terrorist training camps *(a)* in the north of Scotland and *(b)* at Yetgoch in Hebron, Wales; and if he will make a statement. [13628]

Mr. Denham: I am aware of the allegations of terrorist training camps and the particular concerns of my hon. Friend in relation to the alleged terrorist training camps in Scotland and Wales. I understand that the police have made inquiries: they have advised me that there is no evidence to show that any criminal offences have been committed at either location.

It is of course an offence under section 54 (1) and (2) of the Terrorism Act 2000 to provide instruction or training or to receive instruction or training in the making or use of firearms, explosives, or chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. In addition, under subsection (3)(b), a person commits an offence if he invites another to receive instruction or training and the receipt would constitute an offence under subsection (2) but for the fact that it is to take place outside the United Kingdom. Any concrete and verifiable evidence of such activities will be dealt with immediately.

Immigration Status

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 285W, when he formed his policy of not answering questions on immigration matters. [13521]

Angela Eagle: It has been long-standing Government policy not to disclose details of a person's immigration status to a third party since this is regarded as confidential information.

Vivisection

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a royal commission into vivisection. [13672]

Angela Eagle: The Government have not ruled out a royal commission, but strongly believe that resources can best be used to make immediate improvements to the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and to promote the fullest application of the 3Rs—the replacement of the use of animals with alternative methods; the reduction of the numbers of animals used; and the refinement of the procedures to minimise pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm.

In this context, the Animal Procedures Committee issued a public consultation paper in December 2000 as part of its review of the cost-benefit assessment of applications for authority to conduct scientific research using animals. As part of this work, the Committee plans to produce an authoritative statement on the validity of animal experiments. I understand that the Committee hopes to present its report in the first half of 2002.

The House of Lords have established a Select Committee on the validity of the use of animals in scientific procedures and its work is under way.

Metropolitan Police (Funding)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much additional funding has been made available to the Metropolitan Police Authority to finance the additional security duties of the Metropolitan police in the capital following events of 11 September. [12413]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* I greatly appreciate the immediate response made by the Metropolitan Police Authority and Service after the terrorist attack in the United States of America on 11 September.

I recognise that establishing and maintaining measures to counter increased risks to security has given rise to additional costs. I am considering with the Metropolitan police the financial implications.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

"Your Guide"

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future funding of the "Your Guide" pilot scheme. [13651]

Mr. Alexander: A total of £35 million over three years has been set aside to pilot the concept of Post Offices as Government General Practitioners. Up to £25 million of this has been made available to cover the cost of the "Your Guide" pilot currently running in Leicestershire and Rutland. Future funding decisions will depend on the outcome of the pilot.

Anthrax (Mail Services)

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Post Office regulator on the impact of anthrax scares on the performance of the Royal Mail. [13650]

Mr. Alexander: My officials are in regular contact with the Postal Services Commission. The Commission has advised me that it is too early to assess the impact of anthrax scares on the performance of the Royal Mail. The situation is being kept under review by the Commission, Consignia and the Consumer Council for Postal Services.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of anthrax scares on Consignia's quality of service targets. [13731]

Mr. Alexander: Quality of services targets are a matter for Consignia and the Postal Services Commission. The Commission has advised me that it is too early to assess the impact of anthrax scares on Consignia's quality of service targets. The situation is being kept under review by Consignia, the Commission and the Consumer Council for Postal Services.

Consignia

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what volume of mail was handled by Consignia and its predecessor in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000. [13744]

Mr. Alexander: This is an operational issue for Consignia.

The company has provided the following information, which can be obtained in its report and accounts.

Million

	Total inland letters (first and second class)[1]	*International letters (number of letters posted)*[2]
1996–97	16,251	785
1997–98	17,423	815
1998–99	17,934	830
1999–2000	18,738	839
2000–01	19,092	772

[1] The basis of calculation for inland letter volumes has been changed for 2000–01. Previous years' figures have been restated to reflect this change.

[2] Items are outbound from the UK only. For 2000–01 the basis of calculation for international letter volumes has been changed. Previous years' figures have been restated to reflect this change.

Nuisance Calls

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultation she has had with *(a)* Oftel, *(b)* the Information Commissioner's Office, *(c)* BT's nuisance calls bureau, *(d)* NTL's nuisance calls bureau and *(e)* the Direct Marketing Association about providing telephone users with protection from silent calls by power diallers; and if she will make a statement. [13176]

Mr. Alexander: Oftel and the Information Commissioner's Office both have responsibilities for the consumer protection safeguards that are in place relating to silent calls by power diallers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry does not have an enforcement role in this area. However, DTI officials are in regular contact with Oftel, the ICO, and the DMA over policy in this area, and recently participated in a working group meeting set up by the DMA to tackle the problems caused by power dialling systems. My officials have consulted with Oftel, the Information Commissioner's Office and the Direct Marketing Association, together with representatives from operators' nuisance call bureaux, to ensure that consumers continue to benefit from the right level of protection.

Retail Petrol Market

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list by *(a)* grade and *(b)* number the officials employed in her Department monitoring the retail petrol market in Scotland. [12690]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* A number of my officials have responsibility for monitoring energy markets generally, including the petrol retail market throughout the United Kingdom.

Post Office

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* thefts and *(b)* unexplained losses of (i) letters and (ii) parcels were recorded by the Post Office and how much compensation was paid by the Post Office in each case in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [12765]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* This is an operational issue for Consignia.

I understand that Consignia is currently working with Postwatch on a system for measuring the loss and theft of mail and parcels.

Consignia holds figures on the number of complaints made with regards to alleged loss and theft for the previous two financial years.

Complaints on loss	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*
Letters	578,091	557,984
UK standard retail parcels	26,508	25,295
International standard retail parcels	18,510	16,031

Compensation paid (£k)	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*
Letters	6,134	5,192
UK standard retail parcels	234	n/a

Caravan Parks

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish a regulatory impact assessment of the effect on holiday caravan parks of the proposal by Ofgem to change the arrangements under which caravan parks can pass on electricity charges to their customers. [R] [12764]

Mr. Wilson: This is a matter for Ofgem. I understand that they have issued two consultation documents on this subject and are presently seeking further views from interested parties prior to issuing their final proposals.

End of Vehicle Life Directive

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the application of the End of Vehicle Life Directive to manufacturers whose market share has grown significantly since the introduction of those vehicles which will be affected by the Directive after its introduction. [12742]

Mr. Wilson: No decision has yet been taken on the precise method of transposing and implementing the options in the End of Life Vehicles Directive. The period for responding to the DTI Consultation Paper on options closed on 2 November, and responses are now being assessed. Consideration is being given to the potential impacts on all vehicle manufacturers.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to increase investment in renewable energy. [13209]

Mr. Wilson: The Government have put in place a robust policy to increase investment in the development of renewable energy. The single most important mechanism, the new Renewables Obligation (RO) to be introduced next year and lasting right through until 2027, will drive forward investment in renewables. The RO is expected to create long-term support for renewables, worth over £1 billion per year, by 2010. The introduction of the Obligation will be underpinned by direct Government funding for renewables worth over £260 million between 2001 and 2004. This includes the Government's current sustainable energy research and development programme, worth £55.5 million over the next three years.

Other components to this strategy, which will increase investment in the renewable energy sector, include:

exemption of renewables from Climate Change Levy (CCL) payments. This is expected to lead to greater demand for renewable electricity and increased investment;

the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) Orders supported many renewable energy projects through the previous Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation. We have arranged that existing NFFO contracts will be honoured. We have also announced a proposal for a NFFO locational flexibility Order. Locational flexibility will be available for all NFFO 3, 4 and 5 projects that have not been commissioned, other than mixed waste incineration projects. This Order will allow projects not already built, to identify more appropriate locations, so that they can overcome any problems in securing planning permission. These initiatives are expected to bring forward investment in this sector in the near future;

the Government have also initiated regional assessments throughout all regions of the UK. The majority of these studies have been completed and have identified each region's capacity to generate electricity from renewable sources. Once all the assessments are completed, it is expected that specific regional targets will be adopted across the UK. These targets are expected to attract investment in the resources available in these regions.

Government policy is bringing about a much more positive approach to supporting renewable energy projects. Taking all these measures together, the Government believe the industry is well placed to attract and retain a significant level of investment.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to increase the target of energy generated from green sources. [10649]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The Department of Trade and Industry attaches great importance to green forms of energy and has set ambitious targets. The new Renewables Obligation as well as Scottish R. O. will create a long-term market for renewables which will be worth over £1 billion per year by 2010. The Obligation will be the main mechanism by which we will meet our renewables targets and will be underpinned by direct Government funding worth over £260 million between 2001 and 2004. This will include an extensive capital grants programme for the early development of offshore wind and energy crops, the initial stage of a major photovoltaics demonstration programme and a boost for research and development.

Our target is that by 2010, just over 10 per cent. of electricity sales by licensed suppliers will come from sources eligible for the Renewables Obligation. As set out in our recent statutory consultation document, we have proposed that the level of Obligation will increase from year to year as follows.

Period	*Estimated sales by licensed suppliers in GB TWh*	*Total obligation (GB) TWh*	*Total obligation as percentage of sales (GB) Percentage*
2002–03	313.6	9.4	3.0
2003–04	316.2	13.5	4.3
2004–05	318.7	15.6	4.9
2005–06	320.6	17.7	5.5
2006–07	321.4	21.5	6.7
2007–08	322.2	25.4	7.9
2008–09	323.0	29.4	9.1
2009–10	323.8	31.5	9.7
2010–11	324.3	33.6	10.4

The Obligation will remain in place until 31 March 2027, although to date we have not made any proposals for increasing the target after 2010. This will, however, be reviewed throughout the lifetime of the Obligation in the light of available information on climate change. The target may increase after this time, and this would be effected through an amendment to the Renewables Obligation Order which we aim to put before the House later this year.

While this is a description of the current position the question of the contribution to be made by renewables is part of the PIU's Remit of Energy Policy. If it appears feasible to achieve even more ambitious targets on renewables, I will closely examine the means of doing so.

Financial Assistance (Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* financial investment and *(b)* other assistance the North-West regional development agency has put into Chorley in each of the last three years. [13747]

Alan Johnson: The North-West Development Agency advise that the total financial investment and assistance in Chorley since 1998–99 has been £175,591 broken down as follows:

1998–99: £71,309

1999–2000: £85,269

2000–01: £18,013.

Most of this investment has been through inherited Derelict Land Grant projects. The biggest sum invested in any single project during this period has been £56,000 in 1999–2000 for studies in relation to the Royal Ordnance Site. Of the £18,013 invested in 2000–01, £12,594 was invested in the New Farming Horizons programme.

Unsolicited E-mail

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's position on the Telecoms Data Protection Directive (97/66/EC) in relation to unsolicited e-mail. [12380]

Mr. Alexander: There is on-going debate over the application of the current telecoms data protection directive (97/66/EC) to e-mail, and the Government welcome the European Commission's proposal to clarify the position under the new communications data protection directive which will replace it. The UK Government have argued that member states should be allowed to choose between opt-in and opt-out controls. This would allow an assessment of the situation in the light of working experience of both approaches.

Ministerial Visit (China)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement about the recent visit to China of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). [10119]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* My recent visit to China focused on promoting the UK aerospace and energy industries.

On aerospace, my agenda was to develop good bilateral relations with the Chinese aviation authorities and airlines—particularly in respect of commending the possible purchase of fifty Airbus narrow-body aircraft by China; promoting UK collaboration on developing a domestic Chinese regional jet and encouraging Chinese airlines to firm up outstanding options on the Airbus A340 large aircraft powered by Rolls-Royce engines. (As you will know, Airbus wings are made in the UK, as are Rolls-Royce engines).

As elsewhere, we have found that much of the aerospace business we have secured with China in the past has been dependent upon good, long-standing relations at Government level and with the airline and aerospace manufacturing industry.

China is the world's fastest growing aviation market and looks set to continue to grow rapidly over the next 20 years based on the anticipated expansion of the Chinese domestic economy. This will provide many new opportunities for the UK aerospace industry to benefit from both selling to China and entering into profitable industrial collaboration arrangements with the Chinese aerospace industry.

Current prospects in China remain buoyant, despite the aviation downturn in the West. Airbus has just announced that it is expected to deliver eight A318 aircraft to Air China by 2004 and no Chinese airline customers have postponed Airbus aircraft orders since Sept 11.

The opening up of China's vast western regions also offers enormous opportunities for UK companies to benefit in helping China develop its airport and energy infrastructure. During my visit I also encouraged the Chinese authorities to expand their use of UK companies in the development and upgrading of China's airports, building on the recent success by Ove Arup in winning the contract to design the new terminal building at Chongqing.

On the energy side, China's growing market for gas also offers good opportunities for UK companies. The Chinese Government have decided to develop a pipeline from the western region to the industrialised east. A number of major liquified natural gas (LNG) projects are also under way.

I addressed the Beijing Energy Forum, co-chaired by senior officials of the DTI and their Chinese counterparts. The establishment of the Forum was an important development, especially now that natural gas has been ear-marked as a major source of energy for China.

A newly established China-Britain Natural Gas Working Group will also strengthen links and help to identify opportunities in this area. The Working Group will facilitate the sharing of UK experience and help ensure that the development is both safe and environmentally acceptable. There are four key areas of collaboration—policy creation, gas supply, infrastructure and the utilisation of natural gas in China. The promotion of joint ventures to fill identified capability gaps in China will enable more activity between Chinese and UK businesses.

In Shanghai I launched a new brochure prepared by the British Consulate-General in Shanghai which catalogues current local opportunities for UK companies. The rate of growth in this dynamic region is awesome and the brochure outlines a number of major projects in which British companies could become involved. From my discussions with the Government and Shanghai city authorities it is clear that a higher level of British involvement would be welcomed. One of the major opportunities is presented by BP's involvement in the biggest-ever joint venture in China to build a petrochemicals complex at Caojing, on the outskirts of Shanghai. I held discussions with BP during my visit and asked them to encourage as much British involvement as possible in the supply chain.

Coal

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what quantity of coal was consumed in the UK in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [12755]

Mr. Wilson: The information requested is as follows:

	Total inland coal consumption in the UK Million tonnes
1991	107,513
1992	100,580
1993	86,757
1994	81,767
1995	76,942
1996	71,400
1997	63,080
1998	63,152
1999	55,720
2000	58,954

Source:
Digest of UK Energy Statistics 2001 Table 2.11

State Aid

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out by *(a)* colliery and *(b)* company the amount of state aid made available in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [13513]

Mr. Wilson: The tables detail the payments made under the UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme, by colliery and by company, as at 8 November 2001. Payments have been made in respect of two tranches: Tranche 1 (17 April 2000 to 31 December 2000) and Tranche 2 (1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001). Payment dates refer to the tranche to which the payments relate rather than the date on which they were paid.

State aid by colliery for production in 2000 and 2001—as at 8 November 2001

£

	2000	2001
Aberpergwm Colliery	0	1,031,000
Betws Colliery	870,200	1,966,000
Blaentillery No. 2	112,800	217,000
Blenkinsopp Colliery	470,500	1,168,000
East Pit Extension	2,977,500	0
Eckington Colliery	88,200	286,000
Harworth Colliery	14,722,100	0
Hatfield Colliery	3,931,900	3,807,000
Hay Royds Colliery	78,900	264,000
H. J. Banks central mines	661,100	0
H. J. Banks north-east mines	703,200	0
Longannet Mine	19,652,800	21,525,000
Maltby Colliery	13,559,700	0
Rossington Colliery	3,207,200	0
Selby Complex	23,186,500	20,324,500
Tower Colliery	3,317,200	0

State aid by company for production in 2000 and 2001—as at 8 November 2001

£

	2000	2001
Anthracite Mining Limited	0	1,031,000
Betws Anthracite Limited	870,200	1,966,000
Blenkinsopp Colliery Ltd.	470,500	1,168,000
Celtic Energy Limited	2,977,500	0
Coalpower Ltd.	0	951,750
Ffynonau Duon Mines Ltd.	112,800	217,000
H. J. Banks & Co. Ltd.	1,364,300	0
Hatfield Coal Company Ltd.	3,931,900	2,855,250
J. Flack & Sons Ltd.	78,900	264,000
Mining (Scotland) Ltd.	19,652,800	21,525,000
Moorside Mining Co Ltd.	88,200	286,000
Tower Colliery Ltd.	3,317,200	0
UK Coal Plc	54,675,500	20,324,500

Road Fund Licences (Post Office Sales)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new contracts for the sale of road fund licences were made with sub-post offices in the last 12 months. [14025]

Mr. Alexander: I have been informed by Post Office Ltd. that when an office selling motor vehicle licences closes, this work is transferred to an alternative office, taking into account both customer demand and the geographical spread of the population. Post Office Ltd. keeps service availability under constant review to ensure that it is best meeting customer demand throughout the 4,000 post offices which offer motor vehicle licences.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices which sold road fund licences closed in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [14024]

Mr. Alexander: I have been advised by Post Office Ltd. that closure figures of offices selling vehicle licences are not separately maintained. If such an office closes, Post Office Ltd. endeavours to transfer all products and services offered to a new location, thereby maintaining the total number of post offices selling motor vehicle licences.

Airline and Aerospace Industries (Assistance)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice and assistance she is giving to the *(a)* airline and *(b)* aerospace industries in coping with the aftermath of 11 September; and if she will make a statement. [13713]

Mr. Wilson: Officials in the Department of Trade and Industry remain in close contact with the UK aviation industry in co-operation with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

The Government moved quickly to underwrite, on a temporary basis, third party war risk insurance for UK airlines and service providers to the airline industry, an initiative which has subsequently been widely copied elsewhere. We are considering whether further aid should be paid to the UK airline industry, and will take guidelines issued recently by the European Commission on state aid fully into account in any decision.

The further effects on the aerospace manufacturing industry remain uncertain. The Government and the aerospace industry will continue to work together to ensure a successful future for the industry as the situation becomes clearer.

Regulations

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many regulations her Department has proposed to Parliament since June; what regulatory impact assessments have been made for those regulations her Department have implemented since June; and what plans her Department has to reduce the number of regulations affecting small businesses. [13631]

Ms Hewitt: The Department has proposed 36 regulations to Parliament since June. Of these regulations, more than two thirds were public telecommunications operator licences, amended or simplified regulations or preserved commercial electricity supply agreements.

Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) have to be produced for all new regulations in which the costs and benefits have to be assessed, particularly for small firms. The Department's policy is to "think small first" and the Small Business Service has to be consulted on all RIAs to ensure that the impact on small firms is not disproportionate. The Department is drawing up a Regulatory Reform Action Plan that the Government will publish.

Developing Countries (International Trade)

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* pledge cards and *(b)* representations she has received from members of the public regarding international trade with developing countries in the last 12 months. [14380]

Ms Hewitt: My Ministerial colleagues and I have received 64 letters from right hon. and hon. Members requesting responses to the pledge card campaign—"Pledge to the World's Poor"—which was focused on MPs.

My Department has separately received over 35,000 representations in the last 12 months regarding international trade with developing countries.

Gas Prices

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made on the three-point strategy in relation to gas price increases and their effect upon UK industry. [12448]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's three point strategy to address high gas prices is:

to work for greater market liberalisation in Europe

to work for improvements in the British gas market

to take action against any anti-competitive activity.

As part of our work on improving the British gas market the Government published a consultation document on 2 November "A Consultation on Gas Prices and Possible Improvements to Market Efficiency" which considers various concerns made about the gas market. The document also seeks views on the wider benefits to the gas market of increased information flows between the onshore and the offshore following a seminar held with the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association on 10 September. Copies of this document are available from the Department of Trade and Industry website www.dti.gov.uk.

There has also been progress with the strategy more generally. In March the EU Commission published proposals for a revised Gas Directive which was a positive step towards greater liberalisation. Interconnector (UK) Ltd now publishes details of flows with a one day lag instead of the previous six week delay. The Government have also been working with IUK and interconnector shippers on improvements to interconnector governance and marketing arrangements. The EU Commission's inquiry into the operation of the interconnector, which was undertaken at the request of the Government, is now reaching its final stages.

Heysham Industrial Estate

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance she is providing for the *(a)* clearance and *(b)* remediation of (i) derelict and (ii) contaminated land on the Heysham industrial estate. [13769]

Alan Johnson: The North West Development Agency has so far agreed to provide £18,250 preliminary funding for site studies in respect of the remediation of Trimpell Tip on Heysham industrial estate.

Regeneration (Morecambe and Lunesdale)

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funding has been allocated to the Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency by the regional development agency for economic regeneration. [13773]

Alan Johnson: Funds managed by the North West Regional Development Agency are allocated to specific projects and initiatives rather than to constituencies. The Agency is currently contributing £4.9 million to three major regeneration projects in the Morecambe area.

Luneside East Industrial Estate

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much funding the North West Development Agency has allocated to Luneside East industrial estate; and for what purpose. [13771]

Alan Johnson: The North West Development Agency has agreed to make up to £130,000 available to support various feasibility studies and investigations, project appraisal and co-ordination, and cost and value estimates in respect of Luneside East industrial estate.

Electricity

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the cost of electricity generated by nuclear power in pence/kilowatt hour, broken down into *(a)* building costs, *(b)* running costs, *(c)* decommissioning costs on a discounted basis and *(d)* other costs, identifying the assumptions made; and if she will make a statement. [13270]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has made no recent estimates of the cost of electricity generated by nuclear power. The last study published in 1995 concluded that the levelised costs of nuclear power were around 3.9p/kWh. Studies suggest that capital costs account for about 70 per cent. of total costs, operating and maintenance costs about 20 per cent. and decommissioning and waste costs about 10 per cent.

The Department is contributing to the work of the energy review being undertaken by the Performance and Innovation Unit at the Cabinet Office, which is looking at the cost of new nuclear generation. A copy of their paper which includes estimates of nuclear generation costs can be found at http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/2001/energy/2050.pdf.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the *(a)* total amount of electricity generated from nuclear generators in the UK and *(b)* proportion of all electricity used in the UK generated from (i) nuclear generation and (ii) UK-based nuclear generation, since 1990. [12788]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Electricity supplied from nuclear sources in the UK GWh	*Proportion of total electricity supplied that was from UK nuclear sources (Percentage)*	*Proportion that was nuclear from all sources[1] (Percentage)*
1990	58,664	20	23
1991	62,761	21	25
1992	69,135	23	27
1993	80,979	27	31
1994	79,962	26	30
1995	80,598	25	29
1996	85,820	26	30
1997	89,341	27	31
1998	90,590	26	29
1999	87,672	25	28
2000	78,334	22	25

[1] Assuming that all electricity imported from France was from French nuclear stations.

Source:

Digest of UK Energy Statistics 2001 Tables 5.11 and 5.12.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the nuclear industry requesting exemption from the Climate Change Levy; and if she will make a statement. [12793]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The nuclear industry has made a number of representations for exemption from the levy for electricity from nuclear generation.

Nuclear-generated electricity is taxed in the same way as other forms of non-renewable generation as one rate of levy applies to all such electricity.

The PIU (Performance and Innovation Unit) is currently reviewing UK energy policy, and nuclear energy will form part of its consideration.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the total installed capacity of nuclear generators in the UK in each year since 1990. [12792]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Capacity of nuclear stations in the UK in DNC[1] terms MW
End March 1990	11,083
End March 1991	11,353
End March 1992	11,353
End March 1993	11,353
End March 1994	11,894
End March 1995	12,037
End March 1996	12,762
End December 1996[2]	12,916
End December 1997	12,946
End December 1998	12,956
End December 1999	12,956
End December 2000	12,486

[1] Declared net capability

[2] In 1996 a change was made to measure capacity at the end of the calendar year rather than at the end of March

Source:

Digest of UK Energy Statistics 2001 Table 5.7 and corresponding table for earlier years

NETA

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent meetings she has had with the Regulator to discuss the impact of New electricity trading arrangements on *(a)* the Combined heat and power sector and *(b)* the renewable sources of energy sector; and if she will make a statement. [12661]

Mr. Wilson: I have had numerous meetings with the Regulator to discuss the impact of NETA on CHP and renewables, most recently on 25 September 2001. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will be meeting the Regulator on Thursday 15 November 2001 to discuss this subject, among other matters.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the British Wind Energy Association regarding the impact of NETA on trading in renewable energy; and if she will make a statement. [12660]

Mr. Wilson: My Department received representations from the British Wind Energy Association regarding the impact of NETA on trading in renewable energy as part of BWEA's response to the DTI Preliminary Consultation on the Renewables Obligation of October 2000. In addition, my Department has had numerous representations from industry on this issue, including the renewables and wind sectors, for example the Confederation of Renewable Energy Associations.

On 1 November, I issued a consultation document in response to Ofgem's reports 'The New Electricity Trading Arrangements—Review of the First Three Months' and 'Report to the DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators' of 31 August 2001. I welcome views and representations from all industry bodies. I hope that the British Wind Energy Association will take this opportunity to respond to our consultation. The consultation document can be accessed at www.dti.gov.uk/consultations/.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the *(a)* Combined Heat and Power Association, *(b)* British Association for Biofuels and Oils, *(c)* British Photovoltaic Association, *(d)* British Hydropower Association and *(e)* Solar Trade Association Limited regarding the impact of NETA; and if she will make a statement. [12673]

Mr. Wilson: I have received numerous representations from the Combined Heat and Power Association on the impact of NETA, most recently at a meeting on 20 September 2001.

I have received no representations from the British Association for Biofuels and Oils, the British Photovoltaic Association, the British Hydropower Association, or the Solar Trade Association Limited.

I have, however, had numerous representations from industry bodies regarding the impact of NETA.

On 1 November, I issued a consultation document in response to Ofgem's reports 'The New Electricity Trading Arrangements—Review of the First Three Months' and 'Report to the DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators' of 31 August 2001. I welcome views and representations from all industry bodies. I hope that the above associations will take the opportunity to respond to our consultation. The consultation document can be accessed at www.dti.gov.uk/consultations/.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will take steps to encourage companies to provide a consolidation service within NETA for small generators; and if she will make a statement. [12732]

Mr. Wilson: On 1 November 2001, I issued a consultation document in response to Ofgem's reports "The New Electricity Trading Arrangements—Review of the First Three Months" and "Report to the DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators" of 31 August 2001.

The Government recognise the issues faced by smaller generators under NETA. The Government's key proposals are, broadly:

To ensure imbalance prices are genuinely cost reflective; and

To ensure that effective consolidation services emerge.

The Government are also inviting views on other proposals put forward by industry.

The Government believe consolidation services are vital in order to establish and foster smaller generation plant. While consolidation services are now starting to emerge in the market, the Government have proposed establishing a working group of smaller generators, the National Grid Company, BSC (Balancing and Settlement Code) participants, Ofgem, the DTI and DEFRA to look urgently at possible structural or regulatory obstacles to consolidation, including the likely time scale on which competitive consolidation services will emerge. The Government will ask this group to provide an interim report by 24 December 2001, and a final report by 31 January 2001.

The consultation document can be accessed at www.dti.gov.uk/consultations/.

Departmental Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the projects in her Department which have been considered as potential public-private partnerships since 1997 which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public-private partnership proposed; and if she will make a statement. [13431]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. In respect of my Department, there have been no potential PPP projects that have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the PPP proposed since 1997.

Embedded Generators

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will take steps to introduce electricity Distribution Charging Arrangements which *(a)* reduce the capital cost of connecting new embedded generators to the distribution network and *(b)* encourage lower network losses and reduced costs of network investments relating to embedded generators. [12734]

Mr. Wilson: Distribution Charging Arrangements are a matter for Ofgem.

Ofgem's recent consultation paper "Embedded generation: price controls, incentives and connection charging—a preliminary consultation document" considers whether there might be an alternative to the payment of "deep" connection charges up-front. This paper is specifically aimed at moving without delay to a workable interim solution, under the existing pricing control and possibly from 1 April 2002. Ofgem have asked for responses to the consultation by 16 November, and I understand it is their intention to produce a summary of responses before the end of the year.

Embedded generation offers the prospect of a significant reduction in network losses, but more work is needed to understand the best way to achieve this goal. The distribution price control already contains incentives for distribution network operators (DNOs) to reduce network losses, but work on embedded generation presents new opportunities for achieving significant reductions.

An Embedded Generation Coordinating Group (EGCG) is currently being established to ensure that these issues and the wider recommendations outlined in the Report of the Embedded Generation Working Group into Network Access Issues are addressed in a timely and co-ordinated manner. An announcement about the EGCG will be made shortly.

BCCI

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she next plans to meet the liquidators of BCCI. [13638]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No such meeting is planned. The liquidators report formally to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry each year pursuant to the provisions of the Insolvency Regulations. Copies of that report are made available to creditors.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will call a meeting of the creditors of BCCI. [13640]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has no power to call meetings of creditors in companies in liquidation. Meetings may be called by the liquidator or may be requisitioned by creditors in accordance with the Insolvency Rules.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices closed in the second quarter of the current financial year. [12588]

Mr. Alexander: I understand from Post Office Limited that total net closures of post offices in the second quarter of the current financial year was 56. These closure figures are net of 51 reopenings.

Glass Industry

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact the *(a)* aggregates tax and *(b)* climate change levy have had on the competitiveness of the British glass industry; and what support she is giving to the industry to assist with related increases in business costs. [12813]

Mr. Wilson: Sand and other minerals used in the manufacture of glass will be relieved from the Aggregates Levy under Section 30 of the Finance Act 2001. The Climate Change Levy was introduced only in April and it

is too early to assess its impact on businesses in the glass industry. The glass industry has a sectoral negotiated agreement with the Government under which eligible sites are working to deliver energy saving targets in return for an 80 per cent. levy discount.

Job Losses (Relocation)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of jobs lost this year as a result of UK-based firms relocating production overseas. [13923]

Ms Hewitt: Systematic information is not available from which to derive any reliable estimate.

Fireworks

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many incidents involving injuries with fireworks have occurred in the last five years *(a)* prior to 5 November, *(b)* on 5 November and *(c)* after 5 November in each year in (i) Scotland and (ii) the UK. [13188]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* We collect data of accidental injury cases involving fireworks for a period of four weeks from mid October to mid November, from Accident and Emergency departments in Great Britain. Similar information is collected separately by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland. The GB data is set out in the table:

Firework injuries in Great Britain 1996–2000

	2000	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*
Scotland:					
Prior 5 November	29	15	13	15	42
5 November	33	38	33	21	26
Post 5 November	6	29	14	21	17
Total	68	82	60	57	85
England and Wales:					
Prior 5 November	482	257	174	324	637
5 November	230	273	208	264	313
Post 5 November	137	444	389	263	198
Total	849	974	771	851	1,148
Great Britain total:	972	1,056	831	908	1,233

Aggregates Tax Fund

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in reviewing arrangements to refine the way the aggregates tax fund works. [12815]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

We published a consultation paper on the possible distribution of the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund in England on 2 October 2001. A copy is available on the Department's website http://www.defra.gov.uk/ and is also available in the Library of the House.

The consultation paper includes proposals to support work under three objectives and three following initial distribution of funding.

£ million

	2002–03	*2003–04*
Minimising the demand for primary aggregates	6.5	9.0
Promoting environmentally friendly extraction and transport	6.0	6.0
Reducing the effect of local aggregate extraction	16.5	14.0
Total[1]	29.0	29.0

[1] Totals to be finalised to £29.3 million

The consultation period closes on 27 November.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

House of Lords Reform

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the President of the Council what assessment he has made of the number of MLs who may be appointed under the Government's proposals for reconstituting the upper House, based on the assumptions in the White Paper. [14356]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I gave to the House on Wednesday 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 239–41.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lord Ashcroft

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 484W, on Lord Ashcroft, when the official of his Department passed classified documents to an unauthorised person; who the unauthorised person was; when this official was disciplined; what the nature of the disciplining was; what the grade of the official was who was disciplined; and in which country the official was based when the offence occurred. [11617]

Mr. Bradshaw: A Diplomatic Service Officer, in the FCO Senior Management Structure and based in the United Kingdom at the time, passed classified documents to a journalist in 1997. The journalist concerned did not work for the newspapers where leaks later appeared; the official concerned is no longer in government service.

Sierra Leone

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the security situation in Sierra Leone. [13402]

Mr. Bradshaw: The security situation in Sierra Leone has improved dramatically over the past six months. We have continued to play a major role in Sierra Leone during this period. We have completed the initial training of an effective and accountable Sierra Leone Army. We have helped train the Sierra Leonean police force. We have worked with the UN on the Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme and to move forward the deployment of UNAMSIL throughout the country. We have maintained close links with regional leaders, especially Presidents Obasanjo of Nigeria and Konare of Mali, to ensure full and successful implementation of the Abuja Agreement. The Revolutionary United Front is now transforming itself into a political party. As DDR

continues, The Government of Sierra Leone are able to extend their authority across the country, ahead of elections now scheduled for 14 May 2002. A sustainable peace is now within our grasp.

But major challenges remain, both before and after the elections. We will continue to work with the Government of Sierra Leone, the United Nations and regional and international partners to help the Sierra Leonean Government consolidated the peace, prepare for and hold free and fair elections, and mobilise resources to rehabilitate Sierra Leone's shattered communities, institutions and economy.

Afghanistan

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the numbers of UK citizens held prisoner by *(a)* the Northern Alliance and *(b)* countries neighbouring Afghanistan as a consequence of activities with (i) the Taliban and (ii) al-Qaeda; and if he will make a statement. [13630]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are currently aware of one British prisoner being held by the Northern Alliance. He has been held since 1998, having been fighting for the Taliban. We do not have any Consular representation in Afghanistan and are therefore unable to give any accurate assessment on whether there are any other British prisoners being held there by either side. We are also not aware that any British prisoners are being held in relation to the current conflict in neighbouring countries.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the numbers of UK citizens killed or injured in Afghanistan while with *(a)* al-Qaeda and *(b)* the Taliban; and if he will make a statement. [13624]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have no consular representation in Afghanistan. It is not possible to provide any accurate assessment on the number of UK nationals who may have been killed or injured in Afghanistan.

Soviet Bloc (Weapons of Mass Destruction)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the risk of former Soviet bloc *(a)* nuclear and *(b)* chemical/biological warfare scientists selling their skills to foreign regimes. [13681]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is estimated that there may be many thousands of Russian nuclear and chemical and biological warfare scientists who have lost their jobs or who face the prospect of losing their jobs in the next few years. The possibility that these scientists may sell their skills to foreign regimes is one that the UK takes seriously. To address this, UK funds are directed, through the European Union, to the International Science and Technology Centre (ISTC). The ISTC was set up in 1994, following an agreement signed by the EU, US, Japan and the Russian Federation, to stem the possibility of recruitment of former Soviet scientists by potential proliferators, through the funding of non-weapons related research at former defence institutes.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the level of staffing is at the Joint Entry Clearance Unit. [13641]

Mr. Bradshaw: The current level of staffing in the Joint Entry Clearance Unit is as follows:

Permanent—69

Temporary (Persons between postings)—3

Retired officers on short-term contracts—2

Homeworkers (Part-time on contracts)—3

Total—77.

Ambassadors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for advertising the posts of ambassadors. [13642]

Mr. Bradshaw: None.

Mordecai Vanunu

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he raised the matter of the continued imprisonment of Mordecai Vanunu in his recent meeting with his Israeli counterpart. [14682]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regularly raise Mr. Vanunu's long detention with the Israeli authorities and the British Embassy in Tel Aviv monitor the conditions in which he is held.

UN Sanctions (Amendments)

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent changes there have been to United Nations sanctions against *(a)* Somalia, *(b)* the former Republic of Yugoslavia and *(c)* Sudan. [14970]

Peter Hain: With the support of Her Majesty's Government, the range of sanctions imposed against Somalia, the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and Sudan has been amended by the United Nations Security Council (the "UNSC").

On 19 June 2001 the UNSC adopted resolution 1356(2001) introducing certain limited exemptions to the arms embargo against Somalia. The arms embargo does not now apply to the temporary export of protective clothing for use exclusively by the UN, media or humanitarian and development workers, nor to supplies of non-lethal military equipment intended solely for humanitarian or protective use.

On 10 September 2001 the UNSC noted that the conditions called for by paragraphs 16(a)-(e) of resolution 1160(1998) had been met by the FRY Government, and subsequently decided to adopt resolution 1367(2001) which terminated the measures called for by resolution 1160(1998).

On 28 September 2001 the UNSC noted the steps taken by the Government of Sudan to comply with the provisions of resolution 1054(1996) and resolution 1070(1996) and agreed to adopt resolution 1372(2001) terminating the measures imposed by those resolutions.

General Affairs Council

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held in Luxembourg on 29 October. [14971]

Peter Hain: The information is as follows:

General Affairs Council, Luxembourg: 29 October 2001

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean and I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) on 29 October.

The GAC adopted the 'A' Points listed in document number 13233/01. It also noted the resolutions, decisions and opinions adopted by the European Parliament in its part-session of 19–20 September in Brussels and 1–4 October in Strasbourg listed in document numbers 11049/01 and 12365/01 respectively. Copies of all three documents have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

WTO

The GAC discussed preparations for the WTO Ministerial Conference, due to be held in Doha, Qatar from 9–13 November and agreed conclusions setting out the EU's position for this meeting. The Council conclusions of 26 October 1999 remained the basis for EU efforts to launch a new global round of multilateral trade negotiations, but the Council acknowledged that the final stages of negotiations would call for flexibility on the part of all participants. The Council emphasised the importance of the development dimension, highlighting the need for greater efforts to enhance the negotiating capacity of developing countries, and underlined the importance of the flexibilities of the TRIPS agreement in ensuring poor people in developing countries have affordable access to medicines.

The Council welcomed the European Parliament's resolution of 24 October 2001 on preparations for Doha and stressed the importance of dialogue with civil society, particularly with social partners, on trade issues.

Work in other Sectoral Councils

The Presidency drew attention to the Secretariat's stocktaking report of the main issues being discussed by other sectoral meetings of the Council of Ministers. In particular, the Presidency noted the road-map on implementation of a sustainable development strategy approved by the Gothenburg European Council, looking ahead to the Barcelona European Council on 15–16 March 2002 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg on 2–11 September 2002.

MEPs' Statute

The GAC approved Presidency proposals, focusing on fiscal/tax issues, allowances and pensions, as a basis for further discussions with the European Parliament.

Funding of European Political Parties

The GAC discussed the draft regulation to establish a temporary, two year regime for the statute and funding of European political parties. Discussion focused on issues including the regulating of donations and the transnationality threshold for qualification as a "European" political party. The Presidency asked Coreper to discuss the issues further.

EU political priorities for 2002

The GAC endorsed a UK Initiative for the GAC to coordinate the EU's overall strategic priorities through annual discussions. Spain, as the future Presidency, will schedule a further debate early next year.

MEPP

The Council issued a declaration on the tenth anniversary of the Madrid Conference. It called on the Israelis and Palestinians, immediately and without pre-conditions, to return to negotiations on the basis of the recommendations in the Mitchell Report and Tenet Plan. It called upon the Israeli authorities to withdraw their troops immediately from the zone that is exclusively under Palestinian administration (Zone A). It called upon the Palestinian authority to do its utmost to arrest those responsible for acts of violence against Israel.

Africa

The GAC agreed conclusions on:

(i) Zimbabwe

The Council reiterated the EU's readiness to help Zimbabwe hold transparent and fair Presidential elections next Spring, including through an exploratory mission and EU observers to monitor them.

The GAC decided to launch the consultation procedure with the Government of Zimbabwe provided for in Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement. The consultations would address the issues of concern as discussed by the GAC on 25 June, on which there had not been any visible progress to date:

ending political violence;

electoral monitoring;

freedom of the media;

independence of the judiciary;

ending the illegal occupation of properties.

The EU would give strong weight to ensuring co-ordination and complementarity with the efforts of SADC and the Abuja process.

(ii) DRC (Lusaka Process)

The GAC noted the disappointing results of the inter-Congolese dialogue meeting in Addis Ababa (15–21 October). The EU had honoured its financial commitments to help support the process, which was essential for the future of the DRC and the region as a whole. It called on the facilitator of the dialogue and the Congolese parties to set a time and place for substantive talks on the parameters for an inclusive, democratic transition with a realistic timetable.

(iii) Burundi (Arusha process)

The GAC discussed the demarches of facilitator Nelson Mandela to the Presidency and Commission of 15–16 October. President Mandela was seeking EU funding to set up a protection unit to ensure the safety of exiled politicians on their return to Burundi to form the Transitional National Government, starting on 1 November. The GAC agreed the importance of such funding, subject to clear assent of the Burundian parties to the Arusha Agreement, the backing of the UK, and precise details concerning the special unit's mandate and budget. The Council instructed its bodies to work with the Commission to examine President Mandela's proposals and report to the next GAC on 19 November.

(iv) Eritrea

The GAC would discuss Eritrea further at its next meeting, following talks between President Isayas Afewerki and the EU Heads of Mission (HoMs) in Asmara. It had agreed on 8 October, to recall EU HoMs in Eritrea for consultations, given its concerns over the arrest of political figures, the suppression of the independent press and expulsion of the EU Presidency's Representative to Eritrea.

(v) New Partnership for African Development and the Europe-Africa dialogue

The Council reiterated its support for the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). It was briefed by the Presidency and the Commission on the meeting on 10 October with the African Heads of State, supporting the NEPAD and on the EU-Africa Ministerial Conference on 11 October 2001. The Council agreed that it would pay particular attention to this significant initiative, above all in the framework of the Europe-Africa dialogue.

EU action following US attacks

The GAC noted the good progress made on the counter-terrorism road map agreed at the European Council of 21 September. It tasked the Committee of Permanent Representatives with the oversight and direction of the road map, paying particular attention to the priorities identified by the European Council:

a European arrest warrant, a common definition of terrorism and freezing of assets;

strengthening cooperation between the relevant authorities responsible for combating terrorism, especially to establish a common list of terrorist organisations before the year-end;

the fight against the funding of terrorism; and

the approval, without delay, of Commission proposals relating to aviation security.

The GAC also discussed the situation in Afghanistan and the surrounding region Discussion was informed by reports from the Presidency and Secretary-General/ High Representative (SG/HR) Solana about their recent meetings with the UN Secretary-General and his personal representative, Ambassador Brahimi, and with the former king of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah. They also discussed the situation in central Asia, on the basis of a paper by the SG/HR. The Council welcomed the Troika visit from 30 October to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Western Balkans

The GAC adopted Conclusions on:

(i) Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

It welcomed the progress made on constitutional reform, and all parties' commitment to conclude the parliamentary process on the Framework Agreement rapidly. It repeated that implementation of that Agreement by all parties concerned was the only constructive way forward, including in relation to Macedonia's rapprochement with the EU.

(ii) Kosovo

The Council underlined the importance of the elections on 17 November being conducted properly. The GAC repeated the need for a substantial electoral turnout from all communities, to ensure their representation in the provisional, new, democratically-elected institutions. It had asked the Belgrade authorities to co-operate closely with UNMIK/KFOR and to encourage the Kosovo Serbs to take part in the election.

(iii) Stability Pact

The GAC welcomed the outcome of the Regional Conference of the Stability Pact in Bucharest, which confirmed the EU's commitment to continue playing a leading role in the region, which would be complemented by the continuing role of the Pact. The Council agreed that the EU should review the future role of the Stability Pact in consultation with the other members of the Pact, including the possibility of better integrating the work of the Pact with the EU's Stabilisation and Association Process for the Western Balkans.

(iv) Croatia

The GAC welcomed the signing of the EU/Croatia Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the EC/Croatia Interim Agreement. It also welcomed the approval of the Joint Declaration on political dialogue and the holding of the first meeting of that dialogue.

Voting Record

No formal votes were taken on the points under discussion at the GAC.

Biological and Toxin Weapons Conference

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the failure of the negotiations for a compliance and verification protocol to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Conference; and how he will respond; [14468]

(2) what he aims to achieve at the Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Conference. [14467]

Mr. Bradshaw: Following the failure of the 24th Session of the Ad Hoc Group to agree a Protocol text, our aim is now to agree with all States parties, a Final Document at the fifth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention, in Geneva (19 November-7 December) that will lead to sustaining international progress on the further strengthening of the Convention. We welcome proposals that have been made for practical and effective measures to meet the biological weapons threat. We hope that these can be agreed at the Conference.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will be attending the Biological and Toxin Weapons Conference in Geneva. [14466]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary currently has no plans to attend the 5th Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention in Geneva.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent actions of Libyan military personnel in Zimbabwe; what role they have; and how many there are. [12147]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have seen media reports of Libyans in Zimbabwe as security advisers for ZANU(PF) officials. These reports have not been substantiated.

PRIME MINISTER

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many overseas visits he has undertaken and to which countries, since 11 September. [13636]

The Prime Minister: I have undertaken five overseas visits as part of the efforts to deepen the international coalition against terrorism. I visited:

Germany

France

United States

Belgium

Russia

Pakistan

India

Switzerland

Oman
Egypt
Syria
Saudi Arabia
Jordan
Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

I also attended the Informal Meeting of EU Heads of Government in Belgium on 19 October.

Meetings

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister which *(a)* Prime Ministers and *(b)* heads of state he has met since 11 September; when he met each of them; and where the meetings were held. [14692]

The Prime Minister: The following meetings with Prime Ministers and heads of states have already been announced:

12 September
President Lagos (Chile)—No. 10

17 September
Prime Minister Berlusconi (Italy)—No. 10

19 September
Taoiseach Ahern (Ireland)—No. 10
Chancellor Schroeder (Germany)—Kanzleramt

20 September
President Chirac (France)—Paris
President Bush (USA)—Washington

21 September
European Council meeting—Brussels

1 October
Chancellor Schroeder (Germany)—Brighton

4 October
President Putin (Russia)—Moscow

5 October
President Musharraf—Pakistan

6 October
Prime Minister Vajpayee—India

9 October
Shaikh Zayed, Ruler of Abu Dhabi—Geneva

10 October
His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said—Muscat

11 October
President Mubarak (Egypt)—Cairo

16 October
Prime Minister Rasmussen (Denmark)—No. 10
King Abdullah II of Jordan—No. 10

19 October
President Chirac (France), Prime Minister Jospin (France) and Chancellor Schroeder (Germany)—Ghent
Informal meeting of EU Heads of Government—Ghent

25 October
Prime Minister Verhofstadt (Belgium)—No. 10

28–29 October
President Cardoso (Brazil)—Chequers

31 October
President al-Assad (Syria)—Damascus
King Fahd of Saudi Arabia—Riyadh

1 November
King Abdullah II of Jordan—Jordan
Prime Minister Sharon (Israel)—Jerusalem
Prime Minister Berlusconi (Italy)—Genoa

2 November
Prime Minister Miller (Poland)—No. 10

4 November
President Chirac (France)—No. 10
Prime Minister Jospin (France)—No. 10
Chancellor Schroeder (Germany)—No. 10
Prime Minister Berlusconi (Italy)—No. 10
Prime Minister Aznar (Spain)—No. 10
Prime Minister Verhofstadt (Belgium)—No. 10
Prime Minister Kok (Netherlands)—No. 10

6 November
President Museveni (Uganda)—No. 10
President Kagame (Rwanda)—No. 10

7 November
President Bush (USA)—Washington

8 November
King Abdullah II of Jordan—No. 10
Prime Minister Nastase (Romania)—No. 10
President Musharraf (Pakistan)—No. 10

9 November
Prime Minister Aznar (Spain)—No. 10/Chequers

11 November
Prime Minister Vajpayee—No. 10.

I have also met President Arafat of the Palestinian Authority on 15 October and 1 November.

Kyoto Protocol

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has made to President Bush about signing up to the Kyoto agreements; and if he will make a statement on the results of these representations. [14456]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 820W.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil Servants (Remuneration)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the cost of implementing the proposals of the First Division Association for the remuneration of senior civil servants. [14247]

Mr. Leslie: Ministers have agreed a new pay system for the senior civil service, developed as part of the Civil Service reform programme. All senior civil servants and their trade unions were consulted and their views taken into account.

The costs of the proposed system will depend on the recommendations of the independent Senior Salaries Review Body and will be met from within existing departmental expenditure limits.

HEALTH

GP Audit

11. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether Swale primary care trusts have undertaken an audit of GP needs in the constituency of Sittingbourne and Sheppey. [12115]

Ms Blears: Swale Primary Care Group recently carried out an audit of local needs. As a result, the Government have provided additional resources to two local practices to fund the recruitment of additional general practitioners into the area.

Whittington Hospital

12. **Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will complete the evaluation of the proposals for refurbishment of the Whittington Hospital. [12116]

Mr. Hutton: The proposals for the rebuilding of a significant part of the Whittington Hospital are expected to be submitted by the Trust in January 2002. It is planned to complete the final approval soon after with the new building becoming fully operational in autumn 2004.

NHS Staff Morale

13. **Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what initiatives he has in place to improve the morale of the staff in the health service. [12117]

Mr. Milburn: Staff morale is a key issue for the Government. We are committed to improving morale in the national health service by expanding staff numbers, improving NHS employment practice and giving frontline staff greater control over resources.

NHS (East Lancashire)

14. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure the NHS in east Lancashire remains focused on service delivery during the process of organisational changes. [12118]

Mr. Hutton: During the process of devolving more power and responsibility to primary care trusts, the national health service must remain focused on meeting local health needs. To ensure that this happens, all regional offices and health authorities have produced business continuity plans.

In the north-west, three project directors are co-ordinating business continuity arrangements across the region, supported by lead managers who have responsibility for monitoring critical areas of business such as winter, cancer and access.

Heart Operations

15. **Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of heart operations carried out in the NHS in the past 12 months. [12119]

Ms Blears: The National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease target of an extra 3,000 heart operations for March 2002 has been met a year early. Provisional figures suggest that between September 2000 and September 2001, there were over 25,000 angioplasty operations and approaching 23,000 bypass operations. An extra £30 million has been allocated this year to further increase the number of heart operations.

Hospital Cleanliness

17. **Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress on raising standards of hospital cleanliness. [12121]

25. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in raising standards of hospital cleanliness. [12130]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan expressed our determination to create real and lasting improvements to standards of hospital cleanliness. Through our Clean Hospitals programme, the number of "red" hospitals has fallen from 253 in autumn 2000 to zero today. Every hospital in England now provides standards of cleanliness which are good or at least acceptable.

NHS Cancer Care

18. **Mr. Bailey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent progress has been made on improvement of diagnosis and treatment for cancer patients in the NHS. [12122]

Mr. Milburn: Good progress has been made in implementing the NHS Cancer Plan. 92 per cent. of people urgently referred with symptoms indicating a possibility of cancer are being seen within two weeks; around 13,000 patients each year will benefit from new treatments for cancer, following their appraisal by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; and expansion and upgrading of equipment used in the NHS to diagnose and treat cancer is well under way.

TNF Alpha Blockade

19. **Clive Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on variations in practice relating to the prescription of TNF Alpha Blockade. [12124]

Mr. Hutton: The two main drugs involved in this therapy, etanercept and infliximab, are currently being appraised by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. Until NICE has completed its appraisal, national health service bodies have been advised to use their existing arrangements to determine local prescribing policies, using the publicly available evidence to inform their decision.

Care Home Beds

20. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds there were in elderly care homes in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available. [12125]

32. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in elderly care homes there were *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* on the latest date for which figures are available. [12138]

Jacqui Smith: The Department's figures show that, in 1997, there were 261,600 residential places for older people in residential care homes and 154,200 registered nursing beds for them in nursing homes, private hospitals

and clinics. In March 2000, there were 263,200 such places in residential care homes and 149,600 such beds in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.

Homeopathic Treatment

21. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities fund GP referrals for homeopathic treatment on the NHS; and what plans he has to improve equality of access for such treatment. [12126]

Ms Blears: There is no central record of national health service referrals for homeopathic treatment. Current NHS reforms will give primary care trusts full responsibility for providing services for local patients. This environment of local autonomy and innovation should have scope for complementary therapies that can prove their worth.

Blood Transfusions

22. **Mr. Havard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the national blood supply was used on cancer patients as part of their treatment; and, on average, how old that blood was when it was given to them, in the past 12 months. [12127]

Mr. Hutton: The National Blood Service estimates that approximately 30 per cent. of red cells collected from blood donations are given to patients with cancer-related illnesses.

All fresh blood components in the national health service are used within strict expiry dates.

Private Finance (NHS)

24. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the use of private finance within the NHS. [12129]

Mr. Hutton: To be approved, the Private Finance Initiative option for every national health service capital investment project must demonstrate, in a full business case, that it provides improved facilities for the NHS and that, overall, it is value for money when compared to the publicly funded alternative, the Public Sector Comparator.

34. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the use of private finance within the NHS. [12140]

Mr. Hutton: To be approved, the private finance initiative option for every national health service capital investment project must demonstrate, in a full business case, that it provides improved facilities for the NHS and that, overall, it is value for money when compared to the publicly funded alternative, the public sector comparator.

Because of PFI, 10 major new hospitals have opened in the United Kingdom and another 17 are under construction, representing capital investment in the NHS of over £2.4 billion.

Nurses

26. **Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the use of agency nurses in the NHS. [12132]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are aware of the potential value for money and quality issues facing national health service employers using agencies. This is why we are fully committed to NHS Professionals, the non-profit making temporary staffing solution run by the NHS for the NHS. NHS Professionals is being rolled out by all health professionals by 2003.

27. **Colin Burgon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent steps he has taken to improve the recruitment and retention of nurses in the NHS. [12133]

Mr. Hutton: In the first year of the NHS Plan period the number of nurses employed in the national health service increased by 6,310.

The Government are fully committed to investing in NHS staff, to raising the number of nurses, increasing training places, encouraging former staff to return, and recruiting more nurses from abroad.

The NHS Plan introduced the Improving Working Lives Standard, a model of good employment practices against which NHS organisations are measured. NHS organisations are required to provide a portfolio of evidence that they are improving the working lives of staff.

Accident and Emergency Departments

28. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on improving the efficiency of accident and emergency departments in London. [12134]

Mr. Hutton: The Government recognise the importance of improving A&E departments. The A&E Emergency Modernisation Programme aims to modernise, upgrade and refurbish all accident and emergency departments that need modernising. A total of £150 million has been invested in A&E in three waves and London has received over £22 million from the Capital Modernisation Fund. This is the biggest investment in A&E services since the start of the NHS.

In October this year the Government announced a £100 million strategy for reducing long waits in A&E departments and ending inappropriate waits altogether over the next three years. London trusts received over £9 million of this funding.

MRI Scanners

29. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to ensure that more hospitals have access to an MRI scanner. [12135]

Jacqui Smith: Following past decades of under-investment in cancer equipment and facilities, investment through the New Opportunities Fund and the NHS Plan will provide 86 MRI scanners for the NHS by 2004. These scanners will support the accurate diagnosis and staging of cancer patients, as well as increased access to an MRI scanner for other patient groups.

31. **Patrick Mercer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on waiting times for MRI scans in the hospitals in Newark and Retford. [12137]

Jacqui Smith: Waiting times for MRI scans vary according to the clinical condition being investigated and the demand on the service. A recent survey of MRI waiting times in England showed average waiting times for patients attending for urgent examinations, such as

cancer, of approximately two weeks, while the average waiting times for orthopaedic procedures, for example, were in the order of six months with a 10–12 month waiting time not uncommon. 36 MRI scanners are being provided through the New Opportunities Fund. All of these are due for installation by the end of 2002. Under the terms of the NHS Cancer Plan, a further 50 will be installed by 2004.

MRI facilities are not available at the hospitals in Newark and Retford. At present, most Newark residents are referred to the Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham, where the waiting time for routine appointments is around 18 months. However, Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Trust, which has been responsible for Newark Hospital since April 2001, is working to establish better links between Newark and the King's Mill Centre near Mansfield. A mobile scanner already visits the King's Mill Centre and additional sessions will be provided in 2002, thereby reducing waiting times.

Most Retford patients requiring MRI scans are referred to the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield where waiting time for a routine referral is around six months. The Health Community in Retford is investigating the possibility of using a mobile scanner or referring patients to Doncaster as a means of reducing waiting times.

For urgent referrals, the waiting times vary from one to 12 weeks depending on clinical priority.

Orthopaedic Waiting Times

30. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on orthopaedic waiting times. [12136]

Mr. Hutton: We are is determined to reduce waiting times for orthopaedic patients. That is why we have established the "Action On Orthopaedics" programme as part of the modernisation of the national health service. The programme aims significantly to improve access to care and to reduce variations in waiting times through sharing best practice. It will lead the way in piloting new and innovative working practice.

In 2000–01, £9 million was made available directly to NHS practitioners to invest in specialist orthopaedic equipment. In 2001–02 a further £38.5 million was made available. Through this year's investment 23 new orthopaedic theatres will be built to create greater capacity to treat orthopaedic patients, which will facilitate reduced waiting times.

Waiting times for all patients are being reduced. In line with the NHS Plan, the maximum out-patient waiting time will be cut to three months by 2005 and the maximum in-patient waiting time will be cut to six months.

As a first step towards this, the maximum waiting time for an in-patient appointment will be 15 months by the end of March 2002 and the maximum waiting time for a first out-patient appointment will be six months.

Ashworth Hospital

33. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on long-term stay patients at Ashworth hospital. [12139]

Jacqui Smith: Our policy with regard to the provision of high-security psychiatric services is to secure the safety of the public, staff and patients, and to ensure that the best possible services are offered to patients who need to receive their care and treatment in a high-secure setting.

School Children (Health)

35. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last had discussions with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the health of school children. [12141]

Jacqui Smith: We have regular discussions and our respective Departments work very closely to ensure that the health needs of school children are met. We have also launched a number of joint initiatives including the healthy schools programme. Apart from supporting children with health problems we are committed to ensuring the promotion of child health and development through access to high quality physical education. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in January that all children will be entitled to a minimum of two hours high quality physical education and sport provision within and beyond the formal curriculum. This commitment is also outlined in the White Paper "Schools: Achieving Success" published in September.

Cardio-thoracic Unit

36. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what needs he has recently identified for a further cardio-thoracic surgical unit in the east of England. [12142]

Jacqui Smith: We are currently developing a national strategy for expanding revascularisation capacity, the aim of which is to deliver the targets of the coronary heart disease National Service Framework.

As part of that strategy the national health service eastern regional office has undertaken an assessment of its needs for cardiac surgery over the next 20 years and has taken many factors into account including the current and future population demands for such services.

The assessment has clearly identified the need for the development of further services for cardiac surgery.

NHS Beds

37. **John Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of *(a)* general and *(b)* acute beds in NHS hospitals. [12143]

Ms Blears: In the light of the National Beds Inquiry the NHS Plan set a target to increase the number of general and acute beds by 2,100 by 2004. Latest figures, published in September 2001, show that we are a third of the way towards reaching this target with an increase of over 700 in the number of general and acute care beds in the last year. The number of general and acute beds in national health service hospitals had been declining over the past 40 years. This is a clear indication that the downward trend is being reversed.

For three decades the prevailing orthodoxy in the NHS has been for fewer hospital beds rather than more. Patients see the consequence of that failed policy in unacceptable

trolley waits, long waiting times and cancelled operations. Today the NHS is growing again with an expanding number of NHS hospital beds.

Barnet Hospital

23. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about Barnet hospital. [12128]

Mr. Hutton: I am aware of and share my hon. Friend's concerns over Barnet and Chase Farm NHS Trust and the need to support improvements in its performance in key areas highlighted by the recent NHS Trust Performance Ratings.

The Trust has formally been given three months from 25 September to produce an action plan focused on areas of poor performance and will receive close support from the Modernisation Agency.

I have already arranged to meet my hon. Friend to discuss these matters.

Psychiatric Hospitals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were admitted to psychiatric hospitals in 2000–01. [10514]

Jacqui Smith: There were an estimated 187,600 admissions, under mental illness specialties, to national health service hospitals in England for 1999–2000, the latest year for which data are available. This figure has not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data and therefore has a provisional status.

NHS Dentistry

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in Shropshire were registered with a NHS dentist in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2000; and how many remained unregistered in the same year. [9258]

Ms Blears: Registrations of patients in the general dental service (GDS) began in October 1990. Registrations last for a fixed period which is renewed when the patient reattends the dentist. Initially the period for adults was 24 months while for children registrations lasted until the end of the following calendar year.

For new registrations made since September 1996, the registration period is 15 months for both adults and children. This affected registration numbers from December 1997 onwards when the first of the shorter registrations lapsed.

Registration numbers built up over the two years from October 1990. Thus registration figures for 1990 are not typical.

For Shropshire health authority, in the year 1997, the average number of registrations was 217,000 compared to an estimated population at mid-year 1997 of 425,000. In the year 2000, the registration average was lower at 186,000 because of the reduction in the registration period to 15 months. In addition, in the year 2000, 8,000 patients were seen by the personal dental service pilots which started in March 1999. The estimated population at mid-year 2000 was 436,000.

Many people are not registered with the dentist but choose to attend occasionally.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the *(a)* parliamentary constituencies and *(b)* NHS health trusts in which there are no NHS dentists taking new adult NHS patients; and if he will make a statement. [14131]

Ms Blears: General dental practitioners provide general dental services under arrangements made with health authorities. Some national health service trusts are commissioned to provide national health service dentistry but these services are a minority of what is provided within the NHS. While information on availability of NHS dentistry is not collected on a parliamentary constituency basis, every health authority in England has NHS general dental practitioners willing to treat new adult NHS patients.

We remain committed to ensuring that NHS dentistry is available to all. More treatment than ever before is being carried out by NHS dentists. Systems are in place to enable callers to NHS Direct to obtain information about where they can find NHS dentistry. We will continue to work with the profession to further develop NHS dentistry around patient needs, as part of modern primary care delivered at a local level.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dental practitioners there were on the Isle of Wight in each year since 1997. [14355]

Ms Blears: The number of general dental services (GDS) dentists on the Isle of Wight is shown in the table for 30 June in each of the years 1997 to 2001.

June	*Number of GDS dentists*
1997	38
1998	39
1999	43
2000	39
2001	40

A personal dental service (PDS) pilot, developing new ways of providing national health service dentistry, began in 1999. There were six dentists in June 2000 while in June 2001 there were eight PDS dentists of whom two also worked in the GDS.

Mental Health Services

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts have an advocacy scheme for users of mental health services; and what proportion of trusts this figure represents. [10011]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* Very few national health service trusts actually provide advocacy services as it is widely recognised that advocacy services should be independent of provider services.

The Department has commissioned a mental health service mapping exercise from Durham University which will provide an up-to-date picture of where mental health service users have access to an advocacy service. This exercise is expected to report later this year.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how much the NHS underspent on mental health in 2000–01. [12050]

Jacqui Smith: There are no expenditure targets relating to mental health, therefore there cannot be any underspend. The national health service does have service targets and in 2000–01 these were met.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of clinical outcomes in mental health in the UK in comparison to other EU countries. [13854]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* Currently there is no assessment of clinical outcomes in mental health in the United Kingdom in comparison to other European Union countries. However, there are currently two important initiatives under way that involve the measurement of clinical outcomes for individuals in receipt of mental health services in the UK that will enable comparisons with other EU countries.

One is the outcome measurement implementation programme headed by the national director for mental health, Professor Louis Appleby, who has established an expert group of the leading experts in the field of outcome measurement in the UK. They are advising on and overseeing the selection and the pilot implementation of instrumentation for the routine measurement of outcomes for individuals in terms of mortality, morbidity, quality of life and user and carer satisfaction with services. The evidence base for this approach is substantial and drawn from extensive research conducted in the United States of America, Europe and Australia over many years.

The other initiative is the establishment of the new National Institute for Mental Health for England (NIMH(E)) which I announced in July. NIMH(E) will be the key vehicle, which supports implementation of national mental health policy in England. It will work with all agencies and interests to develop a co-ordinated programme of research, service development, workforce development and support. NIMH(E) will also generate links with organisations responsible for mental health services in other countries. This will offer the opportunity for comparison of services and clinical outcomes, and the promotion of best practice. A consultation document on NIMH(E) was launched on 6 November.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he supports closer partnership working between statutory services and the Churches in the field of mental health; and if he will make a statement. [13847]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* The National Service Framework for Mental Health encourages health and social services to work with individuals and communities to promote mental health. As an integral part of many communities, religious centres and leaders can assist in combating discrimination and social exclusion associated with mental health problems.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what implications the EU working-time directive has for the staffing of acute mental health wards; and if he will make a statement. [13858]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* The Working Time Regulations, which implement the European Community Directive into United Kingdom legislation, came into force on 1 October 1998. To implement this in the national health service, the Department made national agreements in the General Whitley Council for GWC staff and with the British Medical Association for Career Grade Doctors which secured maximum operational flexibility. Mental health staff have benefited by having protected rest periods which have reduced the risks of long working hours. Consequently patients have been better safeguarded.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the number of people with severe mental illness who could benefit from assertive outreach; and if he will make a statement. [13848]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* It is estimated that some 20,000 people need assertive outreach and there is a NHS Plan commitment to have 220 assertive outreach teams established by 2004 to provide the necessary services.

Lung Cancer (Photodynamic Therapy)

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make photodynamic therapy for lung cancer sufferers available throughout the NHS. [12669]

Jacqui Smith: There is currently not enough evidence to support the introduction of photodynamic therapy in the national health service. If photodynamic therapy is considered to be a potentially significant intervention, it can be referred to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Drugs Budgets

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the level of spending against their drugs budget by *(a)* PCTs and *(b)* health authorities this year. [12598]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Health authorities and primary care trusts are responsible for setting primary care drugs budgets; decisions on the level of funding will depend on local priorities.

Forecasts of prescribing expenditure are provided to health authorities and PCTs and groups and it is for them to monitor this against their prescribing budgets. Prescribing budgets notified to the Department do not include any contingency reserves held locally.

We do take account of prescribing trends and other influencing factors in primary care prescribing when considering the overall levels of allocations that are made to health authorities. The latest national forecast for 2001–02 prescribing expenditure represents a 9.2 per cent. growth on 2000–01 out-turn.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account he will be taking of the level of spending against their drugs budgets by *(a)* PCTs and *(b)* health authorities this year when determining budgets for next year. [12599]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Health authorities and primary care trust drugs budgets are not determined centrally. However, the Department issues guidance each year to the national health service with

advice about factors that health authorities and primary care trusts should take into account in setting prescribing budgets. The latest guidance was issued in January 2001.

The latest guidance advises that

"over the past five years the average growth in the drugs bill has been around 8 per cent.",

and that when setting prescribing budgets,

"discussions should take into account local circumstances, including past trends and spending comparisons with similar areas."

Health authorities and PCTs and groups are also reminded to take account of additional costs from factors that influence prescribing costs, for example, national service frameworks, newly licenses drugs and National Institute for Clinical Excellence recommendations.

Health authorities and PCTs receive unified allocations to cover the costs of hospital and community health services, discretionary funding for general practice staff, premises and computers and primary care prescribing.

It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds.

We do take account of trends in primary care prescribing costs when considering the overall levels of allocations that are made to health authorities.

Electro-convulsive Therapy

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* mental health and *(b)* other patients, broken down by reason for their admission to hospital received ECT (i) having given informed consent in advance, (ii) not having given consent but having the matter put to a second opinion and (iii) not having given consent and not having the matter referred to a second opinion-appointed doctor, in each quarter over the last nine years; and how many patients for each of the quarters where figures are available were (A) under 16, (B) 16 to 59, (C) 60 to 75 and (D) 75 years and over. [13111]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available.

The most recent information available is contained in a one-off survey covering the period from January 1999 to March 1999, England only, that was undertaken to provide an up to date and accurate snapshot picture of the use of electro-convulsive therapy (ECT). Prior to this survey, the information previously recorded on ECT did not provide an accurate picture on the use of ECT treatment.

The results of the survey are contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Electro-Convulsive Therapy: Survey covering the period from January 1999 to March 1999, England", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department last undertook an evidence review into the use and efficacy of ECT that drew on *(a)* UK and *(b)* international research. [13110]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has commissioned a systematic review of the effectiveness and safety of electro-convulsive therapy (ECT). This review which covers both United Kingdom and international research led by Dr. John Geddes at the University of Oxford and is expected to report by the end of this year.

The Department has commissioned the Institute of Psychiatry to conduct a review of studies and information on consumers' perspectives on ECT.

The Department's health technology assessment (HTA) programme has commissioned a review, on behalf of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, on the clinical cost-effectiveness of ECT due to be completed in May 2002. The HTA programme has also commissioned a trial of the clinical effectiveness and cost of repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation versus ECT in severe depression. This report is due to be published in May 2006.

The National Health Service Centre for Reviews and Dissemination has conducted systematic reviews relating to the effectiveness of ECT including:

Electro-convulsive therapy for depression

Electro-convulsive therapy for schizophrenia

Half a century of ECT use in young people.

The details of these reviews can be found in the Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effectiveness available at: http://agatha.york.ac.uk/welcome.htm

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued to doctors relating to who should *(a)* administer and *(b)* receive ECT in hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [13109]

Jacqui Smith: In 1995, the Royal College of Psychiatrists issued guidance on the use of electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) called "The ECT Handbook—The Second Report of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Special Committee on ECT". This is an important source of guidance to patients and include sections on clinical guidelines; the administration of ECT; the law and consent. The college expects to issue an updated edition of this guidance in 2002.

In September 1998 the Chief Medical Officer and the president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists sent a joint letter to all consultant psychiatrists, health authorities and national health service trusts. Clinicians and mental health trust managers were expected to ensure ECT is administered to patients in accordance with the college's guidance.

Decisions on clinical interventions remain the prerogative of clinical staff. However, evidence and research tends to support the use of ECT treatment on patients with severe depressive illness and puerperal psychosis.

Nutrition

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what targets his Department has set for the reduction of under-nutrition; and what progress has been made to reach the targets; [12915]

(2) what strategies the Government have in place to *(a)* manage and *(b)* monitor under-nutrition in (i) hospital, (ii) residential care and (iii) the wider community; and if he will make a statement; [12916]

(3) what measures are being taken to screen patients for under-nutrition in *(a)* hospitals, *(b)* residential care and *(c)* the wider community; and if he will make a statement. [12917]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* In the NHS Plan, we made a commitment to reduce under-nutrition by developing a hospital nutrition policy to improve the outcome of care of patients by 2004. A number of measures and strategies are in place to manage, monitor and screen patients for under-nutrition in hospitals, residential care and the wider community. A full list of these initiatives has been placed in the Library.

We recognise that one of the most important factors in aiding hospital patients to gain improved health is through the provision of good quality nutritional food that the patient is able to eat and enjoy. Two reports published last year—from the Nuffield Trust and the British Association of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition—made recommendations for hospital nutrition services encompassing both hospital food and artificial nutrition.

We are introducing housekeepers on to ward teams to work with the ward sister. One of the key responsibilities of the housekeeper is to ensure that patients are given encouragement and assistance in, not only choosing suitable meals and snacks but also with eating if required. From 14 November, a housekeeping guide will be able on the national health service estates website. This guide has been compiled after consultation with NHS trusts and all staffing groups, ie dieticians, nurses, caterers, facilities, estates and hotel services. Patients have also been involved with the guide and have been instrumental in establishing the 11 patient-focused national service standards for housekeepers.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent each ambulance service in England met Government performance targets in the most recent year for which information is available; what the cost of each service was for that year; and what the cost per head of population of providing each service was in that year. [12926]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* Information about response times to emergency calls for all national health service ambulance trusts is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy is in the Library and available at www.doh.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Information on the cost of each service and the cost per head of population of providing each service is specified in the table (the most recent available figures are for 2000–01).

NHS trust	*Expenditure (£000)*	*Per weighted head population (£)*
Avon Ambulance Service NHS Trust	14,522	15.40
Beds and Herts Ambulance and Paramedic NHS Trust	23,902	16.02
Cumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust	9,753	19.82
Dorset Ambulance NHS Trust	12,575	18.09
East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust	33,029	16.36
East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust	45,090	16.13
Essex Ambulance Service NHS Trust	27,242	18.24
Gloucestershire Ambulance Services NHS Trust	8,593	16.70
Greater Manchester Ambulance NHS Trust	35,195	12.55
Hampshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	21,111	13.94
Hereford and Worcester Ambulance NHS Trust	12,080	19.02
Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust	2,455	17.95
Kent Ambulance NHS Trust	21,743	14.46
Lancashire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	27,150	18.02
Lincolnshire Ambulance NHS Trust	17,660	18.80
London Ambulance Service NHS Trust	119,785	15.01
Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS Trust	30,248	12.01
North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust	29,127	17.47
Oxfordshire Ambulance NHS Trust	9,900	18.27
Royal Berkshire Ambulance Service Trust	13,970	19.19
S Yorks Met Amb and Paramed Serv NHS Trust	16,848	12.04
Shropshire's Community and Mental HS NHS Trust	6,340	15.87
Staffordshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	16,218	16.09
Surrey Ambulance Service NHS Trust	19,518	20.55
Sussex Ambulance Service NHS Trust	27,872	18.19
Tees East and Nth Yorkshire Amb Serv NHS Trust	32,276	17.33
Two Shires Ambulance NHS Trust	18,835	16.75
Warwickshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	9,328	20.34
West Midlands Ambulance NHS Trust	39,167	14.21
West Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	45,173	20.82
West Country Ambulance Services NHS Trust	40,493	19.97
Wiltshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	9,744	17.99

Hearing Aids

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey), on 25 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 171–72W, on hearing aids, what plans his Department has to ensure funding for the continued provision of digital hearing aids under the modernising NHS hearing aids services project throughout the financial year 2002–03; [13779]

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) of 11 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 508, on digital hearing aids, at what date

following the presentation of the Institute of Hearing Research's final evaluation report he will make an announcement about extending changes in hearing aid services to all NHS audiology departments. [13746]

Jacqui Smith: The evaluation of the modernisation project will be taken into account when considering further investment next year in a national health service hearing aid service, which includes the provision of digital hearing aids. The Department has received interim evaluation reports from the Institute of Hearing Research, and will continue to be updated on progress. Planning and decisions on modernisation and associated funding and resources are being kept under review until further data can start to be taken into account.

National Blood Service

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisations and individuals make up the National Blood Service's appropriate use of blood and blood components group. [13508]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* The membership of the National Blood Service Appropriate Use of Blood group is:

Chairman:

Dr. Angela Robinson—Medical Director, National Blood Service

Members:

Dr. Paula Bolton-Maggs—Consultant Haemotologist, Alder Hey Hospital

Carol Cantwall—Chief Biomedical Scientist, St. Mary's Hospital, London

Prof. Marcela Contreras—National Blood Service

Jan Gordon—Transfusion Nurse, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital

Dr. Virge James—National Blood Service

Charles McCollum—Professor of Surgery, Manchester

Prof. Paul McMaster—Hepatobiliary and Transplant Surgeon, Birmingham

Dr. Mike Murphy—National Blood Service

Stuart Penny—National Blood Service

Dr. Fiona Regan—National Blood Service

Liz Reynolds—National Blood Service

Dr. Clare Taylor—National Blood Service

Dr. Dafydd Thomas—Consultant, Morriston Hospital

John Thompson—Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital

Dr. Dorothy Stainsby—National Blood Service

Brian Chaves—National Blood Service

Dr. Liz Love—National Blood Service

John McCoy—National Blood Service.

Traditional Medicines Directive

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representation he intends to make to the European Commission about the proposed traditional medicines directive. [13851]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* The United Kingdom comments on early drafts of the proposal for a directive on traditional medicinal products were set out in letters from the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) to the European Commission dated 18 December 2000 and 30 April 2001. Copies of these letters have been placed in the Library. The Commission has indicated that it expects shortly to adopt proposals for new provisions on traditional herbal medicinal products. We will decide what further representations may be required once we have assessed these updated proposals.

Psychosis

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy that by 2004 all young people who experience a first episode of psychosis should be offered the choice of being prescribed atypical medicines. [13849]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* As indicated in the mental health policy implementation guide, early intervention in psychosis teams should use either low dose traditional or atypical antipsychotics in first line treatment and they should involve service users in decision making and monitoring of effects. The NHS Plan states that by 2004 all young people who experience a first episode of psychosis, such as schizophrenia, will receive the early and intensive support they need.

Governing Bodies

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the *(a)* chairman of the council of the BMA, *(b)* president of the Royal College of Physicians, *(c)* president of the Royal College of Surgeons, *(d)* president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, *(e)* president of the Royal College of General Practitioners, *(f)* president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and *(g)* president of the Royal College of Nursing. [13857]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* Dates of the latest meetings with my right hon. Friend are shown. Where there have been no meetings with my right hon. Friend, the latest meetings with other ministerial colleagues are shown.

(a) Chairman of the Council of the BMA: 11 July 2001

(b) President of the Royal College of Physicians: 10 July 2001

(c) President of the Royal College of Surgeons: 19 July 2001 (my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Lords), Lord Hunt)

(d) President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists: 18 July 2001 (my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health (Mr. Hutton))

(e) President of the Royal College of General Practitioners: 10 July 2001

(f) President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

(g) President of the Royal College of Nursing.

NHS Budget (Hertfordshire)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the amount by which Hertfordshire will overspend on the NHS budget in the current financial year. [13244]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* The estimated projected overspend across Hertfordshire in 2001–02 is £8 million of which £5.1 million is for East and North Hertfordshire National Health Service Trust and £2.9 million in respect of prescribing. There are long standing financial issues that affect Hertfordshire and the NHS eastern regional office is actively involved in agreeing a financial recovery plan.

Hampshire and Surrey Ambulance Services

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of the consultation exercise on the proposed merger of Hampshire and Surrey ambulance services. [13503]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* The information requested is not available.

Smallpox

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the World Health Organisation regarding contingency plans for combating an outbreak of smallpox in the UK. [12253]

Jacqui Smith: Ministers and officials have frequent formal and informal contacts with the World Health Organisation on a range of health-related topics including issues around the health threats posed by a bioterrorist threat. Within the framework of these ongoing contacts, we have had no specific discussions on contingency planning for combating an outbreak of smallpox in the United Kingdom, although we are aware of the guidance WHO has published on these matters. As part of our contingency planning we will keep open our contacts with WHO so that we can call upon their advice and technical assistance as necessary.

Stoke Mandeville Merger

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy towards the proposed merger of the Stoke Mandeville Hospital and South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust. [14710]

Ms Blears: The merger of Stoke Mandeville Hospital national health service trust and South Buckinghamshire NHS trust has been proposed by the trusts and Buckinghamshire health authority. The proposal is currently with Ministers for consideration.

Primary Care Trusts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made for the transfer of funding streams from district health authorities to PCTs . [14340]

Mr. Hutton: At present my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State allocates resources to health authorities. Health authorities then allocate resources to their primary care trusts. In the future, as part of our programme to devolve power to frontline organisations, we intend that the Secretary of State will allocate resources direct to primary care trusts. The National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, currently before Parliament, seeks to give effect to this.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made to ensure the continuity of employment of staff transferring from district health authorities to component PCTs. [14341]

Mr. Hutton: For staff transferring from health authorities to primary care trusts under Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) Regulations 1981 or by terms reflecting TUPE principles (Transfer Orders), continuity of service will automatically apply. This means that there will be no break in service and existing pay and terms and conditions of employment will be protected at the point of transfer.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make decisions regarding the confirmation of primary care trusts in Cambridgeshire. [14023]

Mr. Hutton: The process of approving applications for primary care trust status is contained in Health Service Circular 1999/167. Primary care trust applications are currently being assessed and will be considered for approval against the published national criteria over the next two months.

Social Services Staff Training

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to overhaul training courses available to social services staff. [14343]

Jacqui Smith: Guidance on the training and qualifications that all social care staff should undertake is given in the National Training Strategy document: "Modernising the Social Care Workforce" which the National Training Organisation for Social Care published, with endorsement from the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), in July 2000.

In March 2001 we also announced the development of a three-year degree level qualification in social work to replace the current two-year Diploma course. The degree level qualification will be introduced in England from September 2003.

GP Recruitment (Financial Incentives)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reason Worthing is not included in areas eligible for his new incentive scheme for recruiting GPs to work in areas of high shortages; [14345]

(2) if he will list those areas eligible for his scheme to provide financial incentives to general practitioners to work in areas of high shortages; and what sums are available in each. [14344]

Mr. Hutton: There are incentives for all areas of up to £5,000 per eligible general practitioner. Those areas deemed as underdoctored will attract an additional payment of up to £5,000 more per eligible GP.

The primary care trusts/groups eligible for the underdoctored additional payment are those that have fewer than the national median number of GPs (GP principals or equivalent on whole-time equivalent basis) per 100,000 weighted population. The national PCT/G median is 52.695 GPs per 100,000 weighted population, Worthing PCG has 54.35 GPs per 100,000 weighted population and therefore each newly appointed GP will receive up to £5,000.

There is no cap to the amount of money available to any area under this scheme.

The list of areas eligible to receive the additional payment for being an underdoctored area, along with guidance on the golden hello scheme is available on

the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/pricare/goldenhello. A copy is also available in the Library.

Public-private Projects

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those public-private projects being negotiated within the national health service. [14338]

Mr. Hutton: Many contracts are negotiated every year between national health service bodies and private sector suppliers for a wide range of services and equipment. Information is only held centrally on private finance initiative (PFI) projects with a capital value of £1 million or greater. These are listed in the table (in negotiation is interpreted as any stage between OJEC notice and financial close).

Region/Trust	*Project description*
Northern and Yorks	
Newcastle-upon-Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust	Completion of Reconfiguration of Acute Hospital Services in Newcastle
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	Implementation of Leeds Acute Services Reconfiguration Strategy
North Durham Health Care NHS Trust	Chester-le-Street Community Hospital
Huddersfield and Calderdale NHS Trusts	EPR (Electronic Patient Record) scheme
Leeds Teaching Hospitals	EPR scheme
Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust and Airdale NHS trust	EPR scheme
Trent	
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust (2, 3)	Acute Reconfiguration
Nottingham Healthcare NHS Trust	Elderly Mental Health
Doncaster and South Humber NHS	Mental Health Services
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust	Staff residences
Eastern	
East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust	Ambulatory Care Centre
Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	Staff accommodation
London	
Havering Hospitals NHS Trust	Redevelopment of Hospital Facilities
Newham Healthcare NHS Trust	Rationalisation
The Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	Redevelopment of Acute Hospital Services
Parkside Health NHS Trust	Willesden
West London Pathology Consortium	Pathology Systems
Havering Hospital NHS Trust	EPR scheme
King's Healthcare NHS Trust	EPR scheme
Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital NHS Trust	EPR scheme
Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust	EPR scheme
South East	
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	Acute rationalisation
Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust	Radcliffe infirmary relocation to John Radcliffe Hospital Site
Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust	Partial Redevelopment
Newbury Primary Care NHS Trust	Consolidation of sites in Newbury
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust	Orthopaedic/Medicines redevelopment
Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust	Mental Health Acute Hospital reprovision
East Kent Community NHS Trust	West View Reprovision Joint NHS/Local Authority
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	Renal Unit Reprovision
Northampton Community Healthcare NHS Trust	Danetre Community Health Centre Joint NHS/Local Authority
Invicta Community Care NHS Trust	Mental Health Reprovision
Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust	Acute Mental Health Ward reprovision
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	Brighton Education Centre
Bournewood Community and Mental Health NHS Trust	Walton and Chertsey Health Centres
Ashford and St. Peter's NHS Trust	Energy Management Scheme
Mid-Sussex NHS Trust	Low Secure Unit
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust	RBBH Pas
Royal Surrey County Hospital	EPR scheme
Heatherwood and Wexham Park NHS Trust	EPR scheme
Milton Keynes General NHS Trust	EPR scheme
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust	EPR scheme
Stoke Mandeville NHS Trust	EPR scheme
North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust	EPR scheme
South West	
Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust	Site re-development
Exeter and District Community Health Services NHS Trust	Tiverton Hospital
Cornwall Healthcare NHS Trust	Western Mental Health, Cambourne and Redruth
Wiltshire and Swindon Health Care NHS Trust	Bradford-on-Avon Hospital
South West Regional Procurement	EPR systems
Swindon and Marlborough	EPR scheme

Region/Trust	Project description
West Midlands	
University Hospitals Warwickshire and Coventry NHS Trust	New DGH
City Hospital NHS Trust	Ambulatory Care Centre
Mid-Staffordshire General Hospitals NHS Trust	EPR scheme
North West	
Central Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	Service Reconfiguration
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Healthcare NHS Trust	Site Rationalisation
Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	Staff Residential Accommodation
Christie NHS Trust	EPR scheme
Blackburn NHS Trust	EPR scheme
Burnley NHS Trust	EPR scheme
North Manchester NHS Trust	EPR scheme
Chorley and Preston NHS Trust	EPR scheme
Salford Mental Health NHS Trust	EPR scheme

General Practice Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many practice nurses worked in general practice surgeries in each of the last five years; and what were their full-time working equivalents. [14346]

Mr. Hutton: Figures showing the number (headcount) and whole-time equivalent for practice nurses employed by unrestricted principals and equivalents in each of the last five years are shown in the table.

Practice nurses employed by unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[1] as at 1 October 1996–99 and 30 September 2000—England

	Headcount[2]	Whole-time equivalent
1996	17,900	9,820
1997	18,390	10,080
1998	18,890	10,360
1999	19,500	10,690
2000	19,200	10,710

[1] UPEs includes GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.

[2] Headcount data were not collected in 1998 and 1999; data for these years have been estimated from whole-time equivalents (wte) using the 1997 wte to headcount ratio.

Note:

Data are rounded to the nearest ten.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

National Clinical Director for Children

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the change of name to the National Clinical Director for Children. [14339]

Jacqui Smith: Professor Al Aynsley-Green's appointment was announced in July this year, following the publication of the report from the Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry. The term "National Director for Healthcare services" originated in a recommendation in that report.

However, Professor Aynsley-Green's role includes chairing the Children's Taskforce, and leading work to develop the Children's National Service Framework. Both of these roles require an overview across health and social care services.

The title of "National Clinical Director for Children" recognises Professor Aynsley-Green's particular expertise as a clinician, but does not limit the type of services in which he takes an interest. This formulation matches that used for many other national directors.

New Hospitals

Mr. Andrew Mitchess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new hospitals and significant hospital buildings, as defined by his Department, were *(a)* in progress in May 1997 and *(b)* opened during 1997. [14538]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's definition of a significant hospital building development is any capital investment scheme with a total cost of over £25 million. No such publicly funded schemes started construction in 1997 until the private finance initiative began to deliver, with the Dartford and Gravesham scheme in August 1997 and the Carlisle scheme in November 1997. Since 1 May 1997, 64 such schemes have been given approval to proceed under the private finance initiative.

In May 1997, 12 significant publicly funded schemes were in progress, having started construction several years previously. Eight such schemes reached completion during 1997.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Jury Service

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the Government's policy on the eligibility for jury service of hon. Members and Members of the House of Lords. [14711]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The right to be excused jury service was considered by Sir Robin Auld as part of his independent review of the criminal courts. He recommended that no-one should be excusable from jury service as of right, only on showing good reason for excusal. His report is the subject of public

consultation until the end of January 2002, and the Government will give careful consideration to these issues in the light of comments received.

Freedom of Information Act

Tony Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will bring the Freedom of Information Act 2000 into force. [15143]

Mr. Wills: I have today placed in the Library of the House a paper, containing a Schedule of organisations and dates, that sets out the Government's plans for implementing the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Lord Chancellor's Apartments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much money has been raised for charity by granting permission for outside bodies to use the Lord Chancellor's apartments in each year since 1997. [13634]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since March 1998 there have been about 150 charitable receptions in the Lord Chancellor's official residence. The following figures are a break down of the amount of money raised for charity between March 1998 and October 2001.

Financial year[1]	£
1997–98	541,650
1998–99	472,279
1999–2000	368,715
2000–01	711,667
2001–02	2,281,000
Total	4,375,311

[1] 1 April to 31 March

Law Society

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he next plans to meet the President of the Law Society. [13635]

Mr. Wills: I last met the President of the Law Society on 29 October but neither I nor any of my ministerial colleagues have appointments arranged with him at present. However, meetings with the President take place on a fairly regular basis and it is likely that further appointments will be arranged in the future.

Terence MacSwiney

Harry Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will arrange for the release of all official documents relating to Mr. Terence MacSwiney, former Lord Mayor of Cork; and if she will make a statement. [13539]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Records relating to Terence MacSwiney have been transferred to the Public Record Office by the Home Office, the Metropolitan Police and the Judge Advocate General's Office. Those that were closed under the guidelines that obtained before the 'Open Government' White paper 1993 (Cm 2290) will now be reviewed by the transferring departments under current guidelines. This is in accordance with standard practice, which is to undertake re-review of specific historical records on request.

Researchers who require access to closed records held by the PRO or to historical records still held by departments should write to the Departmental Record Officer of the department that created the records (or its successor) quoting the PRO reference where this is known. Requests for review of access restrictions are handled in the order in which they are received, regardless of the source of the inquiry or its subject matter. The only exception to this is where the information is urgently required for legal purposes.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Livestock Movements

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on animal welfare of the implementation of the licensing provisions for the movement of livestock. [10178]

Mr. Morley: The movement licence provisions were drawn up in close co-operation with the farming industry. They permit as much movement of live animals as possible consistent with the overall objective of containing and eradicating foot and mouth disease. The arrangements are kept under review in the light of the developing disease situation.

Cases for exceptional movements on the ground of welfare needs are considered on a case-by-case basis. The Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme is available as a last resort to those farmers who face unavoidable welfare difficulties.

Sheepmeat

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* additional finance and *(b)* new marketing initiatives her Department is providing to reinforce consumer confidence in the purchase and consumption of lamb, sheepmeat and related products. [11215]

Mr. Morley: Subject to state aids clearance, DEFRA will contribute match-funding of £2.72 million towards the Meat and Livestock Commission's autumn campaign to promote lamb consumption.

Hunting

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish the veterinary risk assessment report on the risk of spreading foot and mouth disease via the activities of hunts; and if she will make a statement. [12021]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish the veterinary risk assessment report on the effect of foot and mouth on a recommencement of hunting. [10392]

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to publish the results of the veterinary risk assessment of hunting with dogs. [10561]

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the veterinary risk assessment on hunting with hounds; and when she will lift the restrictions placed on hunting with hounds as a consequence of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [14270]

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the risk assessment report on the resumption of hunting with dogs will be published; and for what reason she has not published it to date. [13478]

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish the veterinary risk assessment into restarting hunting; and if she will make a statement. [13469]

Alun Michael: This veterinary risk assessment raises a number of complex issues regarding the future of foot and mouth disease related restrictions on hunting and such matters involve a careful balance of risks. It will be published as soon as Ministers and DEFRA officials have completed their consideration of the document. An announcement on the future of foot and mouth disease controls on hunting will be made as soon as possible.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to propose legislation in respect of hunting with dogs. [11806]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 6 November 2001:]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 635W.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will lift the restrictions placed on hunting with dogs as a consequence of the outbreak of foot and mouth. [13477]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 9 November 2001]*: This veterinary risk assessment raises a number of complex issues regarding the future of foot and mouth disease related restrictions on hunting and such matters involve a careful balance of risks. It will be published as soon as Ministers and DEFRA officials have completed their consideration of the document. An announcement on the future of foot and mouth disease controls on hunting will be made as soon as possible.

Regional Office (Exeter)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) on what date she was informed of *(a)* missing equipment and *(b)* the suspension of personnel at her Department's regional office at Exeter; and on what date the equipment was first found to be missing; [12828]

(2) if she will list the items discovered missing from her Department's regional office at Exeter; what data are contained on the equipment; and to what the data on the equipment related; [12830]

(3) on what date the Devon and Cornwall constabulary was informed of *(a)* missing equipment and *(b)* the suspension of staff from her Department's regional office at Exeter; [12829]

(4) for what reasons staff have been suspended from their posts at her Department's regional office at Exeter on

1 November; whether these suspensions are on a permanent or temporary basis; and if she will state the seniority and role of the members of staff involved. [12827]

Mr. Morley: 18 members of staff who had been based at Exeter are suspended from duty while the Department carries out its own internal criminal investigation concerning expenses claims. An investigation into missing equipment is also being carried out. The police have not been advised as my staff have the power to deal with criminal matters.

As the investigations are on-going it would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Farm Diversification

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to encourage more diversification of farmed land into *(a)* fuel growing, *(b)* aqua culture, *(c)* coppicing, *(d)* organic and biomass farming and *(e)* leisure uses in the next five years; and what changes she expects in the levels of employment as a result. [13717]

Alun Michael: All the activities listed by my hon. Friend are potentially eligible for support under the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), either as farm diversification projects or under specific schemes, such as the Organic Farming or Energy Crops Schemes. Encouragement of uptake under the ERDP is being promoted through a variety of routes, including in national and regional media, through the Department's presence at agricultural and similar shows providing the opportunity for direct contact with potential grant recipients, through revised specialist literature, and through the work of partner organisations and others providing business advice to farmers. Some crops grown for energy purposes may alternatively receive support under the Arable Area Payments Scheme.

As far as changes in employment levels are concerned, the ERDP was developed as a significant tool for the long-term regeneration of rural areas and the encouragement of an environmentally sustainable and economically diverse countryside. While the programme does include targets for numbers of jobs sustained or created under some of the measures, the impact of the programme on the rural economy and environment overall is potentially of greater significance than the single indicator of levels of employment.

Live Animals (Export)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure that all livestock vehicles transporting animals for over eight hours are required to install a forced ventilation system. [13549]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* Correct ventilation, control and monitoring of the conditions in livestock vehicles is important to maintain animal welfare. Discussions are continuing in the context of the European Commission's proposal for a revision of the EU regulation which sets standards for over eight hour livestock vehicle ventilation.

Flood Risk

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations the Government have received on the level of insurance premiums being demanded of homeowners whose property lies in an area classified as a high flood risk; and if she will make a statement. [13911]

Mr. Morley: The Government maintain close links with the insurance industry to help ensure continued availability of affordable flood cover. Together with the flood defence operating authorities, we are reducing the risk of flooding and are communicating this to the industry. However, it must be recognised that insurance companies need to take a commercial decision as to what risk they will cover and on what terms.

The agreement among ABI members is that they will continue to provide flood cover, except in exceptional circumstances, for domestic properties and small businesses which they currently insure, during 2001 and 2002. My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and I met the Association of British Insurers on 5 September to discuss our mutual aim of ensuring that affordable flood insurance cover continues to be generally available after December 2002. Further discussions between officials have taken place.

In relation to the concerns expressed by the ABI, the Government are acting to reduce flood risk, through substantial increases in investment in flood and coastal defence (which now totals over £400 million a year). Flood defences are being repaired, renewed, maintained and improved. Flood warning arrangements are continually being improved. The Government have issued strengthened guidance to local planning authorities on control of development in flood risk areas, and are reviewing the financial and institutional arrangements under which the flood defence service is delivered.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the efficacy of the flood risk area analysis, conducted by the Environment Agency; and if she will make a statement. [13890]

Mr. Morley: No formal assessment has been made by my Department. The Environment Agency flood plain maps are completed on the basis of the best information available. They are indicative only. A party seeking a more specific site related flood risk analysis should seek further, more detailed, local information from the Environment Agency, and/or carry out further investigations to determine the nature and extent of flood risk within a particular area. The maps are continuously improved and updated on an annual basis as better information is gained.

The agency is currently in the process of extending the scope of this mapping to provide an indication of an extreme flood outline for the whole of England and Wales which will give a better indication of the range of potential flood risk in many areas. It is expected that these maps will be published before the end of 2002.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Properties

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the number, value and location of properties newly leased in each of the last five years by his Department, broken down by those leases by the Department itself, its next step agencies and its non-departmental public bodies, differentiating between purchases made as a result of the creation of new bodies and those purchases made by established bodies. [7822]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Tables of information have been placed in the Library. The tables include details of both the freehold and leasehold accommodation that has been acquired by the former Employment Service (ES) in the last five years. Information about "PRIME leases" taken on by the former Department of Social Security (DSS) is provided from 1 April 1998, as details are currently available only from when the PRIME contract commenced. The PRIME PFI contract transferred the ownership of the former DSS freehold properties and all obligations for leasehold accommodation to our private sector partners Land Securities Trillium.

As modern leases have no intrinsic value as such, the rental cost of the former ES accommodation is given together with the market value of the freehold accommodation where appropriate. For the former DSS, details of the Facilities Price that we pay to Land Securities Trillium for the additional serviced office accommodation that has been taken on is provided. The Facilities Price covers not only the space we occupy but also a large number of building related services such as building management and maintenance, internal and external cleaning, and security.

The only additional accommodation that has been taken on as a result of the creation of a new body is for the Pension Service.

While we have taken on new accommodation in recent years, the flexibility in the PRIME contract has allowed us to reduce overall office space on the former DSS part of the estate from 1,488,701 sq m to approximately 1,300,000 sq m, as at October 2001. Taking the average 2001–02 Facility Price of £182 per square metre, this equates to a saving of approximately £34.34 m per annum.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many surplus national insurance numbers have been removed from his Department's Central Index since 1997; and what plans he has to tackle the problem of bogus and surplus numbers. [7477]

Malcolm Wicks: The Departmental Central Index (DCI) Data Cleaning Project removed 100,000 surplus duplicate National Insurance numbers (NINOs) from the DCI between April 1997 and March 2001.

To prevent the creation of further bogus and duplicate NINOs, the Enhanced NINO allocation process was introduced nationally from April 2001.

Stakeholder Pensions

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) by what means he will ensure that smaller companies provide stakeholder pensions to their employees; [10436]

(2) how many companies with 50 or fewer workers have registered to provide stakeholder pensions. [10382]

Mr. McCartney: Employers are required to provide employees with access to a stakeholder pension scheme. Employers are not themselves required to set up a pension scheme or to contribute to it.

Regulation of compliance with the requirement for employers to designate a stakeholder pension scheme for their employees will be undertaken by the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra).

The number of employees in companies that have designated stakeholder pensions schemes for their staff is not available. However, figures from the Association of British Insurers show that the end of September this year, 212,242 employers of all sizes had designated stakeholder pension schemes for their workforces.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to improve access to free or low-cost advice to those intending to take out stakeholder pensions. [13901]

Mr. McCartney: Stakeholder pensions are designed to be simple. Many pension providers currently offer basic advice within the 1 per cent. annual management charge cap for stakeholder pensions. Additionally, the Financial Services Authority has produced decision trees to assist consumers.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he has taken to ensure that local authorities have implemented their action plans drawn up in response to reports by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate. [11816]

Malcolm Wicks: Shortly after the publication of a Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) report, the local authority concerned is invited to respond to the BFI's findings, giving its proposals for improvement. Where the response indicates that the actions the authority has already taken or plans to take to improve its performance are satisfactory, the Department monitors the performance of the authority through the management information they provide and their performance against Best Value performance indicators.

Where there are continuing concerns, authorities are asked to submit progress reports to ensure that their planned improvements are being implemented and achieved. If it is thought necessary to gain additional assurance that improvements have been implemented, the BFI may be asked to undertake a further inspection.

Benefit Appeals

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* appeals and *(b)* successful appeals there were in respect of each centre processing (i) disability benefit claims and (ii) incapacity benefit claims (A) in 2000–01 and (B) since April. [11907]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

The number of appeals cleared for disability benefits and incapacity benefit in respect of each appeals service regional centre and the number found in favour of the appellant for 2000–01 and 2001 (year to date)

	1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001		*1 April 2001 to 30 September 2001*	
Appeals service regional centre/disability benefit	*Appeals cleared at hearing*	*Appeals found in favour of the appellant*	*Appeals cleared at hearing*	*Appeals found in favour of the appellant*
Birmingham				
Attendance Allowance	1,056	399	413	165
Disability Living Allowance	7,191	3,126	3,475	1,576
Incapacity Benefit	2,771	983	1,333	533
Industrial Injuries and Disability Benefit	1,273	526	541	262
Severe Disablement Allowance	172	62	75	33
Cardiff				
Attendance Allowance	1,266	516	725	311
Disability Living Allowance	11,696	5,685	6,422	3,426
Incapacity Benefit	4,761	1,777	2,667	1,111
Industrial Injuries and Disability Benefit	2,546	956	1,416	569
Severe Disablement Allowance	295	118	163	78
Glasgow				
Attendance Allowance	2,215	1,026	1,210	632
Disability Living Allowance	13,691	7,115	7,254	4,180
Incapacity Benefit	5,136	2,169	2,549	1,098
Industrial Injuries and Disability Benefit	3,241	1,261	1,767	795
Severe Disablement Allowance	238	83	123	50
Leeds				
Attendance Allowance	1,035	407	468	194
Disability Living Allowance	7,668	3,681	3,508	1,775
Incapacity Benefit	4,846	1,913	1,886	743
Industrial Injuries and Disability Benefit	2,857	659	1,526	315
Severe Disablement Allowance	185	41	59	10
Liverpool				
Attendance Allowance	869	345	304	129
Disability Living Allowance	9,755	4,697	3,940	1,935
Incapacity Benefit	4,785	2,115	1,980	961
Industrial Injuries and Disability Benefit	1,597	606	749	309
Severe Disablement Allowance	135	63	89	34
Newcastle				
Attendance Allowance	790	347	315	148
Disability Living Allowance	7,162	3,337	3,540	1,727
Incapacity Benefit	2,801	1,002	1,404	545
Industrial Injuries and Disability Benefit	2,583	1,311	1,485	730
Severe Disablement Allowance	100	47	71	30
Nottingham				
Attendance Allowance	1,462	668	680	289
Disability Living Allowance	10,356	4,957	5,614	2,800
Incapacity Benefit	5,000	1,761	2,016	694
Industrial Injuries and Disability Benefit	2,733	1,277	1,554	726
Severe Disablement Allowance	392	135	192	77
Salford				
Attendance Allowance	455	183	208	84
Disability Living Allowance	5,220	2,498	2,699	1,279
Incapacity Benefit	2,866	1,036	1,325	460
Industrial Injuries and Disability Benefit	824	380	342	140
Severe Disablement Allowance	69	33	53	27
Sutton				
Attendance Allowance	999	625	642	400
Disability Living Allowance	6,095	3,990	3,613	2,439
Incapacity Benefit	4,626	2,432	2,154	1,145
Industrial Injuries and Disability Benefit	944	498	330	177
Severe Disablement Allowance	255	124	96	38

Source:
Generic Appeals Processing System

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what were the total running costs in respect of each centre of *(a)* processing disability benefit appeals and *(b)* processing incapacity benefit appeals in (i) 2000–01 and (b) 2001. [11908]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the tables:

Total running costs in respect of each appeals service regional centre for disability benefits (disability living allowance and attendance allowance) and incapacity benefit for 2000–01 and 2001

£

	1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	
Appeals service regional centre	*Disability benefits*[1]	*Incapacity benefit*
Birmingham	1,298,036	582,388
Cardiff	2,095,244	1,332,337
Glasgow	2,517,265	1,183,681
Leeds	1,111,209	1,026,671
Liverpool	1,449,165	1,359,845
Newcastle	1,352,022	708,351
Nottingham	1,926,581	985,176
Salford	1,037,612	665,707
Sutton	1,484,387	1,298,467

£

	1 April 2001 to 30 September 2001	
Appeals service regional centre	*Disability benefits*[1]	*Incapacity benefit*
Birmingham	669,145	300,225
Cardiff	1,272,719	809,305
Glasgow	1,396,331	656,590
Leeds	599,987	554,341
Liverpool	662,309	621,487
Newcastle	791,802	414,840
Nottingham	1,191,271	609,168
Salford	533,631	342,365
Sutton	830,748	726,607

[1] Only Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Morley and Rothwell are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee; and how many pensioners he estimates are entitled to it. [13450]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of the numbers of people who may be eligible for, but who have not claimed Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) are not available below national level.

As at May 2001, there were an estimated 2,600 MIG recipients in the Morley and Rothwell constituency.

Agency Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost of the launch of the new agency to bring together the work of the Employment Service and parts of the Benefits Agency. [14095]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 160W.

Carers' Benefits

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will lay the orders implementing changes in carers' benefits. [13903]

Maria Eagle: We propose to make the changes by Regulatory Reform Order, to be introduced in the House as soon as possible.

Pension Funds

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department will hold discussions with the Law Commission on a review to clarify the ownership and distribution of pension fund surpluses. [14349]

Mr. McCartney: Officials have been exploring the matter with the Law Commission.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which Scottish local authorities had received a report from the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate on the administration of housing benefit by 8 November. [14348]

Malcolm Wicks: Benefit Fraud Inspectorate reports have been published[1] on the Scottish local authorities as listed:

Angus
Dundee
East Dunbartonshire
East Lothian
East Lothian (second inspection)
Edinburgh
Glasgow
Highland
Inverclyde
Scottish Borders
South Ayrshire
Stirling.

Copies of the reports can be found in the Library.

[1] The list does not include those authorities which have been inspected but the report has not yet been published.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Student Funding

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the projected funding levels are per full-time student in *(a)* sixth forms and *(b)* further education colleges for each of the next two years. [6683]

John Healey: The latest estimate of the average delegated funding per sixth form student in schools is for 2000–01 and is £3,230. On this basis, projected average funding for 2001–02 is £3,330, rising to £3,430 in 2002–03. The total funding per full-time equivalent student in FE sector colleges in 2000–01 allocated by this Department is £3,420 rising to £3,660 in 2001–02, and £3,760 in 2002–03. However, these figures are not directly comparable, as the FE unit funding figures include total public funding allocated for further education, while the schools' figures are based only on

delegated funds and exclude other funding which the school receives centrally from LEAs which impact on post-16 students.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much her Department has spent per student in higher education in each year since 1990, excluding contributions from outside the public sector. [11127]

Margaret Hodge: The available data for England are shown in the table.

Publicly planned funding for higher education institutions in England[1]

Year	*Funding per FTE student*[2]
1991–92	5,300
1992–93	5,060
1993–94	4,900
1994–95	4,830
1995–96	4,750
1996–97	4,580
1997–98	4,580
1998–99	4,700
1999–2000	4,810
2000–01	4,860
2001–02	5,020
2002–03	5,140
2003–04	5,290

[1] Unit funding is based on HEFCE/TTA recurrent grant and plus tuition fees, divided by the number of full time equivalent students. It excludes capital, funding for widening access and all student support

[2] Figures are rounded to nearest £10

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the timetable for an announcement on the new proposals for higher education funding; if representatives of the National Union of Students are being consulted under the review; and whether the present system of tuition fees will be abolished. [13000]

Margaret Hodge: We need to ensure that we have an appropriate balance between the contribution made by students, their families and the state to support our ambitions to widen access and participation in higher education. A range of policy options is being considered and no decisions have been taken.

We plan to consult widely on any proposals for change and would expect the National Union of Students to contribute. No decisions have been taken yet on the timing of an announcement.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many individual learning accounts have been opened *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each region and nation of the United Kingdom, (i) in absolute numbers and (ii) per capita of the population of working age. [11267]

John Healey: As at 31 October, an overall 2,529,609 people in England had opened an Individual Learning Account through the national framework, launched in September 2000[1].

The breakdown supplied of membership by region in the table excludes 86,355 cases for which postcode details are not held.

Area	*Number of Individual Learning Accounts opened to 28 October 2001*	*Per capita of working age population*[2] *Per cent.*
England	2,529,609	7.0
East Midlands	208,064	8.0
East of England	202,124	6.0
London	466,982	9.0
North East	92,103	6.0
North West	262,094	7.0
South East	346,929	7.0
South West	234,055	8.0
West Midlands	438,331	13.0
Yorkshire and the Humber	191,643	6.0

[1] Prior to the national ILA framework, 202,654 members applied via TECs. Of these, 79,901 transferred their membership to the national framework and are therefore included in the overall total; 122,753 did not.

[2] Source—Labour Force Survey, Summer 2001.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 620W, on Individual Learning Accounts, on what date her Department first received a complaint about the operation of the individual learning account scheme; and if she will provide a monthly breakdown of all subsequent complaints received to date. [12290]

John Healey: The Individual Learning Account (ILA) Centre received five complaints in September 2000. Between 4 September 2000 and 30 September 2001 the ILA Centre received a total of 6,053 complaints. At the end of October, taking account of complaints received direct by the Department, the total number of complaints was 8,448 against a backdrop of 2,529,609 Individual Learning Accounts opened. Around a quarter (2,314) of these related to learning providers not following the rules of the programme correctly. It is important to note that the complaints recorded are wide ranging and include issues such as the ending of the £150 opening offer as well as service provision and providers. The October figure relates to those received at the ILA Centre and by the Department. The table provides a breakdown of this figure by month and cumulatively.

Month	*Accounts opened (cumulative)*	*Complaints received (cumulative)*	*Percentage complaints (cumulative)*	*Percentage complaints (in-month)*
September 2000	109,564	5	—	—
October 2000	214,880	365	0.16	0.35
November 2000	292,641	744	0.25	0.49
December 2000	347,175	930	0.26	0.34
January 2001	446,724	1,066	0.23	0.14
February 2001	556,928	1,320	0.23	0.23
March 2001	661,558	1,492	0.22	0.16
April 2001	781,572	1,748	0.22	0.21
May 2001	988,539	2,019	0.20	0.13
June 2001	1,276,275	2,365	0.18	0.12
July 2001	1,578,014	3,096	0.19	0.24
August 2001	1,941,468	4,304	0.22	0.33
September 2001	2,386,238	6,053	0.25	0.39
October 2001	2,529,609	8,448	0.33	1.67

The Department set up a Compliance Unit on 25 September, and figures provided for October, include complaints received by the Unit as well as more general complaints received by the ILA Centre. Also in October

figures are 754 letters and recorded telephone complaints the Department received directly since the programme began, and not previously included.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 619W, on Individual Learning Accounts, what evaluation she has made of the system she introduced to monitor the operation of the individual learning account scheme. [12287]

John Healey *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* We published our first stage evaluation of the Individual Learning Account programme this September. In addition, we recently completed a follow-up survey which we expect to publish by the end of December.

Departmental Promotions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if she will make a statement. [12273]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: For each of the years requested, the Department's spend on advertising and on publications is as follows:

£ million

	Advertising spend	*Publication spend*
1995–96		
Employment Department	7.5	n/a
Department for Education	0.3	n/a
1996–97	7.5	2.5
1997–98	10.0	2.1
1998–99	15.7	0.8
1999–2000	11.9	2.8
2000–01	29.0	2.3

n/a = not available

Student Maintenance Grant

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimates she has made of the cost of reintroducing a student maintenance grant; and at what levels. [12744]

Margaret Hodge: We will consider the costs of making changes to the current system of student support as part of the review my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in October.

Higher Education

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of pupils entered higher education at 18 *(a)* in authorities which retain grammar schools and *(b)* in authorities which are fully comprehensive, at the latest date for which figures are available. [11630]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The latest available data on the proportion of 18-year-olds from each local education authority in England entering full-time undergraduate courses in the UK via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) are given in the table. The student figures in the table are based on the home domicile of 18-year-olds, but it should be noted that pupils will not always attend a school or college in the same authority as the one in which they live.

English domiciled students aged 18 accepted to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK via UCAS, autumn 2000 entry

Local education authority	*Population*	*Acceptances*	*Percentage*
Barking and Dagenham	1,963	198	10.1
Barnet[1]	4,060	1,196	29.5
Barnsley	2,681	412	15.4
Bath and North East Somerset	2,061	405	19.7
Bedfordshire	4,714	1,131	24.0
Bexley[1]	2,620	472	18.0
Birmingham[1]	13,888	2,255	16.2
Blackburn with Darwen	1,959	384	19.6
Blackpool	1,574	263	16.7
Bolton	3,457	750	21.7
Bournemouth[1]	1,710	358	20.9
Bracknell Forest	1,315	272	20.7
Bradford	6,812	1,147	16.8
Brent	3,255	924	28.4
Brighton and Hove	2,686	341	12.7
Bromley[1]	3,189	929	29.1
Buckinghamshire[1]	6,089	1,760	28.9
Bury	2,306	578	25.1
Calderdale[1]	2,302	442	19.2
Cambridgeshire	7,148	1,397	19.5
Camden	2,150	364	16.9
Cheshire	7,963	2,432	30.5
City of Bristol	4,843	664	13.7
City of Derby	2,903	498	17.2
City of Kingston upon Hull	3,264	288	8.8
City of London	41	22	53.8
City of Westminster	2,347	295	12.6
Cornwall	5,854	1,298	22.2
Coventry	4,182	715	17.1
Croydon	4,065	1,013	24.9
Cumbria[1]	5,565	1,213	21.8
Darlington	1,257	243	19.3
Derbyshire	8,376	1,744	20.8
Devon[1]	8,347	1,676	20.1
Doncaster	3,761	585	15.6
Dorset	4,544	956	21.0
Dudley	3,587	744	20.7
Durham	6,568	1,106	16.8
Ealing	3,637	951	26.1
East Riding of Yorkshire	3,911	880	22.5
East Sussex	5,492	1,156	21.0
Enfield[1]	3,014	802	26.6
Essex[1]	15,281	3,241	21.2
Gateshead	2,496	423	16.9
Gloucestershire[1]	6,876	1,724	25.1
Greenwich	2,800	344	12.3
Hackney	2,447	285	11.6
Halton	1,733	238	13.7
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,520	251	16.5
Hampshire	15,553	3,442	22.1
Haringey	2,432	452	18.6
Harrow	2,750	963	53.0
Hartlepool	1,201	188	15.7
Havering	2,775	478	17.2
Herefordshire	1,982	503	25.4
Hertfordshire	11,947	3,250	27.2
Hillingdon	3,026	637	21.0
Hounslow	2,537	644	25.4
Isle of Wight	1,428	295	20.7
Isles of Scilly	28	4	14.3
Islington	1,917	298	15.5
Kensington and Chelsea	1,821	305	16.7
Kent[1]	15,954	3,575	22.4
Kingston upon Thames[1]	1,629	441	27.1
Kirklees[1]	4,952	1,025	20.7
Knowsley	2,213	266	12.0
Lambeth	2,840	412	14.5
Lancashire[1]	14,565	3,303	22.7
Leeds	8,831	1,567	17.7
Leicester City	3,870	689	17.8
Leicestershire	7,583	1,710	22.6

English domiciled students aged 18 accepted to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK via UCAS, autumn 2000 entry

Local education authority	Population	Acceptances	Percentage
Lewisham	2,800	446	15.9
Lincolnshire[1]	7,498	1,602	21.4
Liverpool	6,197	953	15.4
Luton	2,430	395	16.3
Manchester	6,327	693	11.0
Medway Towns[1]	3,125	543	17.4
Merton	1,944	439	22.6
Middlesbrough	2,056	340	16.5
Milton Keynes	2,855	497	17.4
Newbury	1,964	439	22.3
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,517	609	17.3
Newham	3,361	599	17.8
Norfolk	9,094	1,538	16.9
North East Lincolnshire	2,022	311	15.4
North Lincolnshire	1,896	397	20.9
North Somerset	2,242	492	21.9
North Tyneside	2,399	474	19.8
North Yorkshire[1]	7,295	1,826	25.0
Northamptonshire	7,768	1,524	19.6
Northumberland	3,814	946	24.8
Nottingham City	3,828	352	9.2
Nottinghamshire	8,861	1,813	20.5
Oldham	2,912	502	17.2
Oxfordshire	7,868	1,662	21.1
Peterborough	2,157	322	14.9
Plymouth[1]	3,556	513	14.4
Poole[1]	1,630	313	19.2
Portsmouth	2,306	269	11.7
Reading[1]	1,701	293	17.2
Redbridge[1]	2,884	895	31.0
Redcar and Cleveland	1,852	302	16.3
Richmond upon Thames	1,899	541	28.5
Rochdale	2,863	482	16.8
Rotherham	3,175	484	15.2
Rutland	690	113	16.4
Salford	2,781	353	12.7
Sandwell	3,686	474	12.9
Sefton	3,567	916	25.7
Sheffield	6,171	951	15.4
Shropshire	3,641	867	23.8
Slough[1]	1,394	304	21.8
Solihull	2,428	704	29.0
Somerset	5,949	1,264	21.2
South Gloucestershire	2,691	565	21.0
South Tyneside	1,950	330	16.9
Southampton	2,749	319	11.6
Southend[1]	1,990	346	17.4
Southwark	2,588	333	12.9
St. Helens	2,263	496	21.9
Staffordshire	9,818	2,256	23.0
Stockport	3,483	902	25.9
Stockton-on-Tees	2,481	550	22.2
Stoke on Trent[1]	3,101	382	12.3
Suffolk	7,816	1,657	21.2
Sunderland	3,812	572	15.0
Surrey	12,760	3,429	26.9
Sutton[1]	1,953	524	26.8
Swindon	2,157	376	17.4
Tameside	2,791	440	15.8
Telford and the Wrekin[1]	1,970	354	18.0
Thurrock	1,597	168	10.5
Torbay[1]	1,452	264	18.2
Tower Hamlets	2,565	341	13.3
Trafford[1]	2,710	699	25.8
Wakefield	3,863	610	15.8
Walsall[1]	3,227	560	17.4
Waltham Forest	2,549	514	20.2
Wandsworth	2,216	461	20.8
Warrington	2,252	506	22.5
Warwickshire[1]	5,937	1,360	22.9
West Sussex	8,422	1,808	21.5
Wigan	3,864	673	17.4
Wiltshire[1]	5,240	1,194	22.8
Windsor and Maidenhead	1,775	454	25.6
Wirral[1]	4,210	1,043	24.8
Wokingham	1,837	588	32.0
Wolverhampton	3,193	625	19.6
Worcestershire	6,283	1,487	23.7
York	2,280	468	20.5
Not known	—	90	—
Total	606,687	123,708	20.4

[1] Authorities with grammar schools

Note:

Population figures are based on estimates as at 1 January 2001, with age as at 31 August 2000. Acceptance figures based on age at 30 September 2000.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students are in full-time studies in universities in England and Wales. [12745]

Margaret Hodge: The available data are given in the table.

Full-time higher education students in England and Wales[1], 2000–01

	Number
Postgraduate	143,623
Undergraduate	933,265
Total	1,076,888

[1] Home and overseas students in HE and FE institutions, and the Open University

Consultation Documents

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many consultation documents were issued by her Department and its predecessors from *(a)* 15 October to 14 January, *(b)* 15 January to 14 April, *(c)* 15 April to 14 July and *(d)* 15 July to 14 October in each year from 1996. [12897]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The answer is as follows.

	Number of consultation documents
1996	
15 January to 14 April	4
15 April to 14 July	7
15 July to 14 October	6
1996–97	
15 October to 14 January	5
15 January to 14 April	14
15 April to 14 July	19
15 July to 14 October	27
1997–98	
15 October to 14 January	21
15 January to 14 April	40
15 April to 14 July	46
15 July to 14 October	36
1998–99	
15 October to 14 January	38
15 January to 14 April	51
15 April to 14 July	49
15 July to 14 October	49
1999–2000	
15 October to 14 January	42
15 January to 14 April	13
15 April to 14 July	23
15 July to 14 October	14

	Number of consultation documents
2000–01	
15 October to 14 January	22
15 January to 14 April	25
15 April to 14 July	18
15 July to 14 October	17

Student Finance

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what consultations she has had with the devolved Administrations about her review of student finance; and if she will make a statement. [13177]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to Ministers responsible for higher education matters in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, to advise them that a review is taking place. We plan to consult with devolved Administrations in due course.

Age Discrimination

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures the Government are taking to combat age discrimination in the provision of skills training. [13171]

John Healey: The Government are committed to tackling age discrimination wherever it is found, and is a signatory of the EU Employment Directive on Equality, which commits the UK to introduce legislation to combat such discrimination in employment, vocational training and guidance by 2006. The Government have asked the Learning and Skills Council—as the body responsible for planning, funding and improving the quality of post-16 learning outside higher education—to promote age diversity and tackle age discrimination when translating its commitment to equality of opportunity into effective strategies and actions. The Employment Service, which operates training programmes including Work Based Learning for Adults, Work Trials and Programme Centres, is committed to equal opportunities and encourages employers to make effective use of the skills, experience and reliability that older people can contribute.

Class Sizes

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to publish data on class sizes in league tables of school examination results. [13393]

Mr. Timms: There are currently no plans to publish class size data along side the performance tables.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what funding she has set aside for *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04 to reduce class sizes in primary schools; [14583]

(2) if funding for lower class sizes in primary schools will be ring-fenced until 2003–04. [14584]

Mr. Timms: We have made £177 million available to reduce infant class sizes and £73 million to make progress on junior class sizes in 2001–02. Up to £180 million will be available to reduce class sizes in 2002–03. Funding levels for 2003–04 will be decided in the Spending Review 2002.

Class size grant will be paid to local education authorities as a ring-fenced grant through the Standards Fund in 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes have been made to the criteria qualifying primary school children for special needs status in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [13814]

Mr. Timms: It is for Local Education Authorities and maintained schools to identify and make suitable provision for all children who may have special educational needs in the light of the provisions of Park IV of the Education Act 1996, the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations 1994, and the statutory advice contained in the "Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of Special Educational Needs", published in 1994. This situation has remained unchanged between 1997 and 2001. From January 2002 a revised Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, which was approved recently by both Houses of Parliament, amendments to Part IV of the Education Act 1996 brought about by the SEN and Disability Act 2001 and revised Special Educational Needs Regulations will come into effect.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the funding regime for primary school pupils with special needs status was in *(a)* England and *(b)* Shropshire in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001. [13810]

Mr. Timms: Some special educational needs (SEN) funding is delegated to primary schools by local education authorities (LEAs) in budget shares, with amounts calculated for each school on the basis of factors which measure need either directly or indirectly. Other SEN funding is held centrally by LEAs and spent as required on pupils, for example on extra support for pupils with statements of SEN. This basic pattern has obtained in all five years mentioned, although the proportion of funding held centrally has declined since Fair Funding succeeded Local Management of Schools in 1999. In Shropshire, funding for primary age pupils with statements of SEN was held centrally before 2001, but some is now delegated to schools on the basis of eight bands of need. In 1997 and 1998 SEN funding for pupils with SEN but without statements was based on the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals; from 1999 a further indicator—the number of pupils on the SEN register at stages 2–4 of the SEN Code of Practice—has been used. From 1997 to 2000 schools with SEN units received place-led funding for such units; in 2001 this was subsumed into delegated funding for pupils with statements.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the average percentage of children with special needs status in *(a)* English and *(b)* Shropshire primary schools was in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001; [13809]

(2) how many special needs status primary school children there were in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* England and *(c)* Shropshire in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001. [13813]

Mr. Timms: The available data are shown in the following table.

Number and percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs in maintained primary schools

	UK[1]		England		Shropshire[2]		Shropshire[3]		Telford and Wrekin[2]	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
January each year										
1997	75,400	1.4	63,551	1.4	885	2.3	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
1998	79,300	1.5	67,014	1.5	894	2.3	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
1999	82,100	1.5	69,797	1.6	[3]—	[3]—	553	2.4	337	2.2
2000	84,900	1.6	72,525	1.6	[3]—	[3]—	529	2.3	311	2
2001[4]	88,200	1.7	75,300	1.7	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—

[1] For Scotland, pupils with a Record of Needs
[2] As a result of local government reorganisation in April 1998, Shropshire local education authority divided to form the following local education authorities: Shropshire LEA and Telford and Wrekin LEA
[3] Not applicable
[4] Special educational needs figures from the annual schools census for January 2001 are known to be incomplete. In order to provide reasonably comparable figures to previous years an estimate has been made based on the annual schools census returns for January 2000 and January 2001. These estimates are robust at national and Government Office region but are not available at local education authority level
[5] Not available

Education (Leeds)

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the cost to Leeds City council of the contract awarded to Capita. [13736]

Mr. Timms: The cost of Capita's contract is a matter for Leeds City council, Education Leeds and the contractor.

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional financial support will be awarded to Leeds City council to implement Capita's educational policies. [13738]

Mr. Timms: No additional funding will be awarded to Leeds City council to implement the education policies for which it is responsible and accountable beyond that derived from the Standard Spending Assessment and Standards Fund grants.

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the salary paid to Mr. Peter Ridsdale in his capacity as Chairman of Education Leeds. [13737]

Mr. Timms: Education Leeds is a company wholly owned by Leeds City council. Mr. Ridsdale's level of remuneration is a matter for Mr. Ridsdale and the council.

Internet Access

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the cost of internet access so far achieved in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in the last 12 months. [14249]

Mr. Timms: The Department for Education and Skills does not collect data on the cost of internet access. Internet costs are dependant upon the supplier, the bandwidth and the level of service and the cost therefore varies from school to school. However, I can report that the average annual school spend in England, as from January 2001, on ICT for teaching and learning was £8,500 in primary schools and £49,600 in secondary, this compares with averages of £6,800 and £41,800 in January 2000. Substantial progress has been made towards the Government's target for every school to have access to the internet with over 99 per cent. of secondary and 96 per cent. of primary schools connected as of January 2001.

Literacy/Numeracy Strategies.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost is of the *(a)* National Literacy Strategy and *(b)* National Numeracy Strategy in 2001–02. [14103]

Mr. Timms: The Government are supporting expenditure, through the Standards Fund, of £103 million on each of the two strategies in 2001–02.

Schools Adjudicator

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost is in 2001–02 of the office of the schools adjudicator. [14081]

Mr. Timms: The cost in 2001–02 will be known only after the end of the financial year. Expenditure in 2000–01 was £442,000 for adjudicators' costs (mainly fees and expenses) and £355,000 for support staff. We expect expenditure in 2001–02 to be lower than 2000–01 as the number of cases referred to the adjudicator has fallen.

Teachers (Pay Structure)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the cost of the new pay structure for teachers; and what effect it has had on recruitment and retention of staff. [14080]

Mr. Timms: Over 200,000 teachers in England applied to cross the performance threshold in the first round, some 80 per cent. of those who were eligible to apply. Of these, nearly 195,000 were assessed as meeting the threshold standards and are now receiving over £400 million per year in associated pay increases.

We intend to introduce a new grant to contribute towards performance points for leadership group members, post-threshold teachers and high performers on the main scale. We intend to make available £100 million in financial year 2002–03 and £150 million in 2003–04, in addition to existing threshold funding.

The future cost of the new pay structure will depend on the number of teachers applying for and crossing the threshold, and being awarded performance points.

The long-term effect of pay restructuring is not yet clear, but the impact of the Government's policies as a whole is that we had 11,000 more teachers in January 2001 than in 1997.

National College for School Leadership

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the cost of the national college for school leadership. [14222]

Mr. Timms: The cost of the new residential training headquarters for the national college for school leadership will be £25 million.

Fast-track Scheme

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the cost of the fast-track scheme. [14091]

Mr. Timms: In the financial year ending 31 March 2001 we invested £4.6 million to establish the fast-track teaching programme, which will attract high calibre graduates, career changers and serving teachers and support their development into leaders of the teaching profession.

The fast-track scheme is not designed to increase the number of classroom assistants. With local education authorities we are investing £350 million in the three years from 1999–2000 to 2001–02 to increase the number of teaching assistants; and we have recently announced a further £198 million for the financial year 2002–03. There are now 25,000 more teaching assistants in post than in January 1999.

Teacher Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost is in 2001–02 of the funding of initial teacher training recruitment. [14079]

Mr. Timms: £173 million is available in recurrent grants to provide initial teacher training places. A further £169 million in total is available for teacher training bursaries and the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes in 2001–02.

Child Care Places

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the cost of the 350,000 child care places planned for 2003. [14207]

Mr. Timms: £170.5 million is available through the New Opportunities Fund Out of School Hours Childcare Programme for the creation of 350,000 out of school child care places in England by 2003. £55 million has also been made available from April 2001 to provide additional funding for disadvantaged areas and this will create at least an extra 10,000 places.

Education Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the cost of the pilots of education maintenance allowances. [14251]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We expanded the education maintenance allowance pilot scheme to cover 56 LEA areas from September 2000. Planned expenditure in this financial year is £156 million with over 100,000 young people expected to benefit.

Public Service Agreement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost will be of the public service agreement target of increasing provision of nursery places for three year olds from 34 per cent. to 66 per cent.; and if it will be achieved by 2002. [14090]

Mr. Timms: Many local authorities provide funding for nursery education on top of resources the Government make available through direct grant to provide nursery education places. The Government have increased the under 5s sub-block within Education Standard Spending (ESS) by more than the level of inflation which has increased the resources available for this and other purposes. However, it is not possible to identify separately the total amounts spent specifically on three-year-olds.

We have made £390 million of direct grant funding available between 1999–2000 and 2001–02 to help increase the number of three year olds with access to a free early education place from 34 per cent. to 66 per cent. by March 2002. The target will be met in full.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will make a statement on progress made on the public service agreement targets for objective 2 which are described on page 8 of the departmental report 2000; [14089]

(2) on progress towards meeting the public service agreement targets of *(a)* an increase in the proportion of people aged 19 years who have achieved national vocational qualification level 2 or equivalent from 72 per cent. to 85 per cent. by 2002, *(b)* a reduction by one third in exclusions by 2002, *(c)* a reduction by one third in school truancies by 2002 and *(d)* increasing provision of nursery places for three-year-olds from 34 per cent. to 66 per cent. by 2002. [14049]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: While we are making good progress in increasing the achievement of level 2 by 19-year-olds which is based on current trends, it is apparent that the target may not be reached. We are working closely with the Learning and Skills Council to ensure maximum progress is made towards achieving this target.

LEA Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on expenditure per pupil in *(a)* Buckinghamshire local education authority and *(b)* other local education authorities in England and Wales in the last 12 months. [14252]

Mr. Timms: Information for the financial year 2000–01 is not yet available for England. I will write to the hon. Member when it has been collected. Responsibility for education matters in Wales rests with the National Assembly for Wales.

Qualifications Budget

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost is in 2001–02 of the qualifications budget. [14082]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The qualifications budget for 2001–02, at 1 April 2001, was £102 million. Expected receipts for the year total £334,000. The majority of this money (£69 million at 1 April 2001) comprises grant in aid for the Qualification and Curriculum Authority. The remainder of the budget is used mainly for development work. The costs of the qualifications themselves are met by schools, colleges and others through the payment of fees.

Sixth Forms

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell of 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 246W, if she will make a statement on the circumstances that led to those closure proposals. [14676]

Mr. Timms: Seven proposals were decided by the Secretary of State. The circumstances varied in each case. Some were published by the LEA, or school governors, to address changes in local demand for sixth form places, some featured as part of a wider reorganisation of schools in the area, others arose from the need to rationalise places to deliver more cost effective provision. The remaining six proposals were published after September 1999 and were decided under local decision making arrangements, introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Under these arrangements those publishing or deciding proposals are not required to send details of the background to the proposals to the Department, and we therefore cannot comment on the circumstances leading to these proposals.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to allow schools with sixth forms to make direct representations to local Learning and Skills Councils regarding sixth form funding. [14567]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the council's chief executive, to write to the hon. Member with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Student Finance Review

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what submissions she has received for the review of student finance following her announcement of such a review; if she will list those submissions; and if they will be taken into account before she publishes her proposals to reform student finance. [14540]

Margaret Hodge: Consultation on the review of student finance will begin next year. We shall take account of consultation responses when reaching a decision about the future of student finance.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will call for submissions to her review on student finance from *(a)* the National Union of Students, *(b)* Universities UK, *(c)* the Association of Colleges, *(d)* the Student Loan Company, *(e)* the Association of University Teachers, *(f)* the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, *(g)* the Standing Conference of Principals, *(h)* the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities and *(i)* others; if she will publish their submissions; and if she will make a statement. [14543]

Margaret Hodge: We plan to consult widely on any proposals for change that may result from the review.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with other Government Departments in relation to her review of student finance; if she will place such submissions in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [14541]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to Ministers responsible for higher education in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to Ministers in other Government Departments, to advise them that a review is taking place. Treasury and the Inland Revenue are represented on the review. We plan to consult on any proposals to emerge.

Student Loans

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what submissions she has received recently on the student loans system; if she will list such submissions; and if she will make a statement. [14539]

Margaret Hodge: We receive submissions, correspondence, etc., from a range of individuals and organisations, on a regular basis. It is not our practice to make correspondence with the Department public. We will be consulting on proposals that emerge from the review of student finance.

Basic Needs Grants

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria are used by her Department for the allocation of basic needs grants to schools. [14561]

Mr. Timms: Basic need is the requirement for additional school places in areas of population growth.

Funding for this is normally provided through the allocation of Basic Credit Approvals to local education authorities or grant to the governors of voluntary aided schools.

The criteria used by the Department to assess basic need are contained in the "Guide for the Schools Capital Allocation Round" issued to local education authorities annually, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

State Schools (Private Management)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what are the statutory provisions that govern schools in the state sector being run by private sector firms. [14578]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 46W.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which schools in the state sector are run by private firms. [14576]

Mr. Timms: No schools in the state sector are run by private firms. The legal responsibility for running a school rests with the governing body and head teacher, even where they are supported by expertise from the private sector.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received in the last year from local education authorities wanting to hand the running of a state school over to the private sector. [14577]

Mr. Timms: There have been no representations in the last year from local education authorities wanting to hand over the running of a state school to the private sector. State schools cannot be run by the private sector, although local education authorities and schools may enter into contracts for support to governing bodies.

Performance-related Pay (Teachers)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to allocate funds for schools to pay teachers awards on the upper spine of performance-related pay. [14566]

Mr. Timms: We intend to introduce a new grant to contribute towards performance points for leadership group members, post threshold teachers and high performers on the main scale. We believe their skills, expertise, commitment and leadership are crucial to the success of the teaching profession. We propose to make available £100 million in financial year 2002–03 and £150 million in 2003–04, in addition to existing threshold funding.

We will be consulting shortly on the details of the new grant to support the cost of performance points. Details of the consultation will be posted on the DfES website to enable schools to comment on the proposals.

School Threshold Payments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will guarantee funding of threshold payments to schools beyond 2004. [14563]

Mr. Timms: Crossing the threshold gives teachers a substantial and permanent pay increase by moving them to an upper pay scale. The Government have always accepted that this means a substantial and permanent increase in the overall cost of teachers' pay. Our financial planning will continue to take account of that.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in what proportion of cases the threshold assessment made by a head teacher has been overturned. [14564]

Mr. Timms: Verification of threshold assessments involves professional dialogue between heads and assessors about assessment methods and individual applications. Assessors overturn heads' judgments only when it is impossible to reach agreement. In the first round of threshold applications this happened in only 0.2 per cent. of cases—a clear indication that the system worked.

Learning Support Units

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many learning support units for children with challenging behaviour there were in schools in 1997. [14137]

Mr. Timms: The Department was carrying out a pilot of 41 learning support units in schools in 1997. This lasted from 1996–97 to 1998–99. The units were funded by the predecessor of our "Social Inclusion Pupil Support" Standards Fund grant.

There are now over 1,000 learning support units in schools, both within Excellence in Cities authorities and elsewhere.

Re-marked Exam Papers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will state the percentage of re-marked papers at *(a)* GCSE, *(b)* AS-level and *(c)* A-level which resulted in marks being (i) increased and (ii) decreased in each of the last three years. [14562]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In 1999 the awarding bodies were asked to re-mark 0.5 per cent. of GCSE papers, of which 11 per cent. resulted in a change of grade; and 3.3 per cent. of GCE A-level papers, of which 13 per cent. resulted in a change of grade. In 2000 the awarding bodies were asked to re-mark 1 per cent. of GCSE papers, of which 11 per cent. resulted in a grade change; 3.8 per cent. of GCE A-level papers, of which 16 per cent. resulted in a grade change; and 1.5 per cent. of AS-level papers, of which 15 per cent. resulted in a grade change. All of these grade changes were upwards as until 2001, grades could only be raised or remain the same as a result of a re-mark.

Figures for 2001 are not available at this stage as the inquiries on results and appeals process is not yet complete.

Pupil Sickness Rate

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of levels of sickness among pupils at key stages four and five since the introduction of the AS-level syllabus. [14560]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: None.

Data on authorised absence from schools are collected centrally only for pupils of compulsory school age. They do not distinguish between pupils of different ages, nor do they distinguish between sickness and other forms of authorised absence.

Value-added Measures

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the basis on which value-added measures have been developed for pilot publications in 2001–02. [14136]

Mr. Timms: Our proposals in respect of value-added measures were set out in detail in the Publication of School and Performance Tables in 2001 consultation document which issued on 30 March this year, copies of which have been placed in the Library. We are now working with some 200 volunteer schools on a pilot programme for the calculation of measures of progress made from Key Stage 2 to key Stage 3 and from Key Stage 3 to GCSE/GNVQ.

The results of the pilot will be published on 22 November with a full explanation of the methodology used. This pilot publication will be placed in the Library and will also be available on the DfES website at www.dfes.gov.uk/performancetables along with a questionnaire seeking the views of readers on all aspects of the pilot. This will be used as part of the evaluation of the pilot which, along with further consultation early next year, will inform final decisions on the publication of these two measures for all secondary schools in the 2002 performance tables.

LEA Intervention (Costs)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the *(a)* direct cost and *(b)* the cost of external contractors and advisers to her Department of each local education authority intervention in the last 12 months. [14135]

Mr. Timms: The direct cost to the Department of local education authority interventions is the staff time of the officials concerned. The cost of individual contracts with external contractors and advisers for intervention work is commercial in confidence.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 14 November 2001

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Lager Sales (Refreshment Department)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee how many barrels of Carlsberg Lager and Carlsberg Export Lager were sold by the House of Commons Refreshment Department in 2000. [14139]

Mr. Dennis Turner: It is difficult to give a precise answer to my hon. Friend's question, as figures are not kept in the form requested. However, I am able to inform him that in the 12-month period from April 2000 until March 2001, the House of Commons Refreshment Department purchased 210 11-gallon barrels of Carlsberg Lager. Barrels are purchased in response to demand, and it is reasonable to assume that the number of barrels sold is similar to the number purchased.

The Commons Refreshment Department does not sell draught Carlsberg Export Lager.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Walton Group Plc

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money is owed to his Department by Walton Group Plc in respect of Exchange Flags Liverpool; and if he will make a statement. [12620]

Ms Keeble: The Department is pursuing a civil claim against the Walton Group plc and Todd and Benn (Contractors) Ltd. to recover the full city grant value of £4,444,782. In addition, it is seeking interest totalling £2,603,062 as of 9 November 2001, and a claim for legal fees, costs and expert fees that are estimated at 8 November 2001 to be £280,000 (inclusive of VAT).

Yellow School Bus Pilot

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans he has to extend the yellow school bus pilot; and if he will make a statement; [12305]

(2) what research has been conducted *(a)* by and *(b)* on behalf of his Department on the yellow school bus pilot scheme; and when the results are to be published; [12303]

(3) in which local authorities the yellow school bus pilot scheme is in operation; and if he will make a statement; [12302]

(4) how much his Department has spent on the yellow school bus pilot scheme in financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02; and how much expenditure is projected for financial years 2002–03 and 2003–04; [12304]

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the pilot project for the introduction of yellow buses for home-to-school transport. [12317]

Ms Keeble: My Department has facilitated the introduction of American-style yellow school buses by agreeing to grant exemption from some of the provisions of the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations to enable pilot schemes to operate. The first such scheme is expected to start in Calderdale in the new year. My Department will collect base line data near the start of pilot schemes, and will evaluate them, probably after about a year's operation. The results of the evaluations will be published. The Department has incurred no costs so far other than staff time in considering the case for exemptions from regulations. Future costs will be staff time plus consultancy fees for data collection and evaluation. The level of these costs will depend on the number of pilot schemes, which will be a matter for agreement between local authorities and operators.

PowerShift Register

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish the amended version of the PowerShift Register to incorporate the extension of the LPG conversion grant scheme to include vehicles up to five years old; and if he will make a statement. [12093]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The PowerShift programme is administered on behalf of my Department by the Energy Saving Trust. The updated version of the PowerShift Register, now covering vehicle models up to five years old, is available on the Trust's website at www.est-powershift.org.uk. Grants for these vehicles are now available and the website provides full information on how they can be claimed. Information is also available on the Trust's telephone hotline on 0845 602 1425.

New Deal for Communities

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for a further round of New Deal for Communities funding to assist the regeneration of post-industrial areas of intense social deprivation. [13673]

Ms Keeble: There are no plans for a third round of New Deal for Communities (NDC) funding. The Government are fully committed to the NDC programme and to tackling multiple deprivation in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country, including many in post-industrial areas, to bridge the gap between these neighbourhoods and the rest of the country.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit is in the process of rolling out a range of programmes that will build on the lessons learned through NDC and strengthen and improve core public services in deprived areas.

Concessionary Fares (Coaches)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent meetings he has had with representatives of coach operators to discuss proposals for a half-fare concessionary scheme for pensioners on long distance coach journeys; and if he will make a statement. [13684]

Ms Keeble: We announced on 5 November our approval in principle of a proposal from the Commission for Integrated Transport under which coach operators would offer half-price fares to older and disabled passengers on long distance scheduled coach services in England. In return operators would—for the first time—receive Fuel Duty Rebate.

My Department has already had initial discussions with the Confederation of Passenger Transport about this proposal and we look forward to further discussions with them shortly on the details of its implementation.

Local Government Pension Scheme

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 228W, on best value, how many building direct labour organisations transferred to the private sector have been given admitted-body status to the local government pension scheme; and what pension provision will be made for those which will not remain in the LGPS. [13811]

Dr. Whitehead: Information about the transfer of building direct labour organisations (DLOs) to the private sector is not held centrally. When a local authority function is outsourced and the new contractor chooses not to seek admitted-body status within the local government pension scheme, transferred employees should be offered broadly comparable pension arrangements.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reform local government final salary pension schemes. [14696]

Dr. Whitehead: There are no plans to change the current benefit package provided by the local government pension scheme.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the total cost of local government final salary pensions in the last financial year. [14697]

Dr. Whitehead: In 2000–01, pensions paid to members of the local government pension scheme totalled £3.5 billion.

Public-Private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the projects which have been considered as potential public-private partnerships since 1997 which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public private partnership proposed; and if he will make a statement. [13455]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W. There are no cases of potential PPP projects within my department, or the former DETR, not being undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value.

English Partnerships Land Holdings

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the scale of English Partnerships land holdings is; and which proportion is earmarked for new housing in *(a)* Telford and *(b)* England. [13462]

Ms Keeble: In September 2001, English Partnerships owned a total of 5,700 hectares of land in England, 820 hectares (14 per cent.) of which was in Telford.

Of the overall total, 970 hectares (17 per cent.) is designated for housing in planning terms (ie it either has specific planning consent or is designated as such in the local plan). In Telford, 216 hectares (3.8 per cent.) were designated for housing.

Planning Applications

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the average period for a planning application from date of application to decision by the local authority over the last five years. [R] [13596]

Ms Keeble: The information available from the Department is the percentages of applications for planning permission and related consents which are decided within eight weeks, between eight and 13 weeks and in more than 13 weeks. These are shown in the table.

Local authority performance: England, 1996–97 to 2000–01

Percentage

	Decisions within eight weeks	*Decisions in eight to 13 weeks*	*Decisions exceeding 13 weeks*
1996–97	64	21	15
1997–98	62	22	16
1998–99	62	21	17
1999–2000	63	21	16
2000–01	63	20	17

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the latest annual figures for the number of planning applications under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in England and Wales by *(a)* region, *(b)* the number of applications passed, *(c)* the number sent to appeal and *(d)* the number of successful appeals; and if he will provide the same figures for the previous 10 years. [R] [13595]

Ms Keeble: The information for England is in the table. Figures for Wales are not held centrally on a consistent basis and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Thousands/percentage

Government office region	Planning applications[1] Decided	Granted	Refused	Appeals against refusal[2] Received	Decided	Allowed	Percentage of appeals allowed
1992–93							
North East	16.7	15.1	1.6	0.4	0.4	0.2	39
North West	44.3	38.6	5.7	1.5	1.4	0.6	40
Yorkshire and the Humber	35.9	30.9	5.0	1.3	1.2	0.4	31
East Midlands	33.4	29.2	4.2	1.2	1.1	0.4	34
West Midlands	35.4	30.2	5.2	1.3	1.1	0.4	31
East of England	44.5	37.8	6.7	2.1	1.9	0.6	33
London	38.6	31.3	7.4	1.9	1.7	0.6	36
South East	68.0	57.0	10.9	3.6	3.2	1.1	34
South West	48.7	41.3	7.3	2.4	2.2	0.7	32
England	365.4	311.4	54.0	15.7	14.2	4.8	34
1991–92							
North East	17.3	15.5	1.9	0.5	0.4	0.1	34
North West	49.3	42.0	7.3	1.8	1.6	0.6	36
Yorkshire and the Humber	40.9	34.4	6.5	1.6	1.4	0.4	30
East Midlands	36.7	31.1	5.6	1.5	1.4	0.5	33
West Midlands	39.0	32.6	6.4	1.7	1.4	0.4	30
East of England	49.7	40.8	8.9	2.7	2.5	0.8	31
London	42.5	33.5	9.0	2.2	2.0	0.7	35
South East	74.6	60.5	14.1	4.5	4.0	1.3	33
South West	54.1	44.1	10.0	3.1	2.8	0.9	32
England	404.2	334.5	69.7	19.5	17.5	5.7	32
1990–91							
North East	17.5	15.5	1.9	0.5	0.5	0.1	30
North West	53.0	44.2	8.8	2.0	1.8	0.7	38
Yorkshire and the Humber	42.7	34.9	7.8	1.7	1.5	0.5	32
East Midlands	40.1	33.0	7.2	1.7	1.5	0.5	33
West Midlands	41.5	34.0	7.5	1.8	1.6	0.5	32
East of England	55.3	43.5	11.8	3.3	2.9	0.9	32
London	44.8	34.6	10.3	2.5	2.2	0.8	36
South East	82.6	65.0	17.6	5.3	4.6	1.5	32
South West	60.7	47.7	13.1	3.6	3.2	1.0	32
England	438.3	352.4	85.9	22.4	19.7	6.5	33

[1] Section 70 planning applications, i.e. excludes applications for listed building, advertisement and conservation area consents.
[2] Figures relate to the number of appeals against section 70 planning applications refused in the year, not the number of appeals received in the year

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the average period for the consideration of an appeal to a planning application, up to a refusal to grant consent, under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 over the last five years. [R] [13593]

Ms Keeble: The provision of information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the inspectorate's Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Richard Younger-Ross, dated 14 November 2001:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the average time taken to determine planning appeals.

The average times, in weeks, are:

Period	Written representations	Hearings	Inquiries
1996–97	22	41	45
1997–98	19	35	41
1998–99	16	23	32
1999–2000	16	19	28
2000–01	16	19	26
2001–02[1]	16	20	27

[1] April to September

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average cost is to the Government of hearing planning appeals under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990; and what is the *(a)* maximum and *(b)* minimum cost, for each of the last five years. [R] [13594]

Ms Keeble: The Planning Inspectorate has calculated the average unit cost of processing a section 78 inquiry by written representation in each of the last five financial years to be as follows:

Year	£
2000–01	1,188
1999–2000	1,047
1998–99	854
1997–98	669
1996–97	635

The Inspectorate also effects section 78 appeals through hearings and inquiries. Unit costs for these activities have only been calculated for the previous two financial years, and are as follows.

	£
Section 78 hearings	
2000–01	1,977
1999–2000	2,135
Section 78 inquiries	
2000–01	5,967
1999–2000	5,617

Current methods of recording inspectorate activity do not provide for the calculation of a minimum and maximum cost in these periods.

Speed Cameras

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which local authorities do not have *(a)* speed cameras and *(b)* plans for their early introduction. [13494]

Mr. Jamieson: The numbers and locations of speed cameras in police force areas are not held centrally. A funding system is now available nationally that covers the cost of the purchase and operation of speed cameras and, therefore, removes the key obstacle for camera deployment. It is expected to take around two years for all police force areas wishing to join the scheme to do so.

Street Warden Funding

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which local authorities in the north-west of England were successful in bidding for Street Warden funding; and which were unsuccessful. [13647]

Ms Keeble: The Government office for the north-west received 46 Street Warden bids. Nineteen bids, totalling more than £2.9 million and benefiting each of the region's five counties, received approval.

Organisations other than local authorities, eg housing associations, were eligible to apply under this DTLR-funded pilot scheme. The table shows the successful and unsuccessful bids, the lead agency and the bid area.

Lead agency	*Bid area*
Successful bids	
Bury MBC	Whitefield
Chester Community Safety Partnership	Blacon and Lache
City of Salford	Winton and Little Hulton
Collingwood Housing Association	Spath Lane and Knowle Park
Congleton BC	Alsager
Derwent and Solway Housing Association	Workington
Hyndburn FIRST	Hyndburn
Initiative Burnley	Burnley
Irwell Valley Housing Association	Sale West and Manor Avenue Estates
Lancaster City council	Morecambe
Liverpool Housing Trust	Windmill Hill, Runcorn
New East Manchester Ltd.	Ancoats and Miles Platting
Preston council	Callon, St. Matthews and Ribbleton
Riverside Housing Association	Palacefields, Murdishaw, Halton Brook and Halwood Park, Runcorn
South Liverpool Housing	Speke and Garston
Stockport MBC	Stockport borough
Tameside MBC	Tameside
Trafford MBC	Lostock, Sale Moor, Broomwood
Vale Royal BC	Vale Royal
Unsuccessful bids	
Blackpool BCI	Grange Park, Mereside and George St./Caunce St.
Bolton Town Centre Ltd.	Bolton
Bury MBC	Huntley/Topping Fold
Carlisle City council	Botcherby, Raffles and Petterill Bank
CDS Housing Association	Castlefields, Runcorn
Chester Community Safety Partnership	Chester
Copeland BC	South Whitehaven
Eden BC	Eden
Fylde BC	St. Annes, Lytham and Kirkham
Groundwork Blackburn	Blackburn
Home Housing Association	Maryport
Impact Housing Association	Workington
Knowsley MBC	Kirkby
Liverpool City council	North Liverpool
Macclesfield BC	Knutsford, Macclesfield and Wilmslow
Manchester City council	Manchester
Manchester Housing	Cheetham
Metropolitan borough of Wirral	Bidston, Hoylake and Rockferry
Oldham council	Oldham
Poynton and Worth parish council	Poynton
Riverside Housing Association	Linacre
Rochdale MBC	Rochdale, Middleton, Heywood and Pennines
South Ribble BC	South Ribble
St. Helens BC	West Sutton, Parr and Hardshaw and Grange Park
Tranmere Housing Regeneration Partnership—Maritime Housing Association	Tranmere
West Lancs DC	West Lancs
Wigan MBC	Wigan and Leigh

Polling Stations

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will review the advice to returning officers regarding conduct at polling stations to accommodate the beliefs of members of the Assembly of Yahweh. [13522]

Mr. Raynsford: Guidance to returning officers on electoral procedures is now a matter for the Electoral Commission. In addition to voting at polling stations any elector may now vote by post and we are inviting local authorities at the May 2002 local elections to pilot such innovations as voting by telephone or on line.

Homelessness (West Wiltshire)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on homelessness in west Wiltshire. [13680]

Ms Keeble: 332 households in west Wiltshire were accepted as being homeless in 2000–01. As at 31 March 2001, there were 90 households in temporary accommodation and 15 households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to give local people stronger powers to block the inappropriate siting of mobile phone masts. [13862]

Ms Keeble: The changes to the planning procedures and guidance for telecommunications mast development which we introduced on 22 August this year greatly strengthen public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below (subject to a process of prior approval by Local Planning Authorities) so that they are the same as for planning applications. This gives local people a much better opportunity to have a say on mast proposals. Local Planning Authorities already have the ability to turn down mast applications where the do not consider amenity aspects have been adequately addressed. Our guidance also advises telecommunications operators to consult local people and Local Planning Authorities before submitting applications for masts of any size.

Formby Fire Station

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the implications of the findings of the National Joint Council on Formby Fire Station for that at Heswall. [13871]

Dr. Whitehead: The Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority's application for my right hon. Friend's approval, under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947, to change the duty system at Heswall Fire Station remains under consideration. He will not grant approval unless he is satisfied that the Authority has consulted and, on advice from HM Fire Service Inspectorate, that national standards of fire cover will be maintained.

The National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades' Scheme of Conditions of Service provides for consideration of proposed changes in duty systems at fire stations. This is a separate procedure, but my right hon. Friend will wish to consider the implications of the recent adjudication in respect of Formby Fire Station.

Rail Services (North Kent)

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when work will begin to improve the electricity supply to allow 12-car trains to run on the North Kent rail lines. [13982]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack is undertaking a review of Power Supply capability for the Southern Region and is in discussions with the Strategic Rail Authority to address the issue in relation to Mark 1 replacement.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the railway stations in the North Kent lines that need to be lengthened to accommodate 12 car trains; and when this work will be carried out. [13981]

Mr. Jamieson: Stations on the North Kent line which would require platform lengthening include Abbey Wood, Deptford, Erith, Gravesend, Greenhithe, Greenwich, Higham, Maze Hill, Northfleet, Plumpstead Rochester, Slade Green, Strood, Swanscombe, Westcombe Park, Woolwich Arsenal, and Woolwich Dockyard. The work to lengthen platforms is primarily dependent on the implementation of Thameslink 2000 and discussions with the incumbent franchisee.

Motorways

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will arrange for every registered keeper of a motor vehicle to be invited to take part in consultations in respect of future motorway building, improvement and widening schemes. [14045]

Mr. Jamieson: There are a number of opportunities for registered keepers of vehicles and other road users and interested parties to take part in consultations on motorway building, improvement and widening. Public consultation takes place during studies such as the multi-modal and road-based studies, and prior to a preferred route announcement, and on the publication of draft orders. We do not propose to consult on a national scale with registered keepers of vehicles as this would not be cost effective.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost is of the consultation taking place on the future of the M1 motorway; who is carrying out the consultation process; and what safeguards are in place to ensure that the views of road-users are heard. [14044]

Mr. Jamieson: A number of Multi-Modal Studies and Roads-Based Studies are currently being carried out which include sections of the M1 motorway within their remit. Consultation is undertaken at key stages of the studies to ensure that the views of road users, local public, businesses, environmental interests, transport users, operators and other regional interests are taken into account. The consultation process is overseen by the

Study Steering Groups and carried out by the appointed consultants for each study. These arrangements ensure that road users and other interests have the opportunity to express their views.

Final figures for the costs of consultation will not be available until the studies are completed. However, the average total cost of a study, including the cost of consultation, is approximately £1.5 million.

Departmental Service Standards

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that his Department and its agencies give prompt and proper attention to inquiries received from members of the public. [14047]

Dr. Whitehead: The centre of the Department and each of its agencies have set targets for each of the "Six Service Standards for Central Government". Performance against these targets is monitored annually and published in a Cabinet Office report (copies are available in the Libraries of the House).

Additionally, a quarterly report is presented to the Board of the Department detailing performance in handling correspondence.

Travellers

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish the results of research by Heriot-Watt University into the effectiveness of the Government office guidance on managing unauthorised camping by travellers; and when he will publish revised guidance. [13864]

Ms Keeble: My Department published a summary of the research findings on 2 November. A copy has been placed in the Libraries of the House. We plan to publish a revision of the current Good Practice Guide on Managing Unauthorised Camping by Gypsies and Travellers early next year.

Overcrowding (Trains)

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the safety risks posed by overcrowding on trains. [13917]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Department's advisers on railways safety matters, have advised that all rolling stock is designed to operate safely even when fully loaded, and passenger loading does not affect the train's stopping performance or its structural integrity.

Train Crime

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many offences were recorded on trains from Preston to Blackpool in the most recent year for which figures are available; and how many of those were alcohol related. [13919]

Mr. Jamieson: The British Transport Police, who are responsible for policing the railways, have provided me with the following figures. In the period between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, a total of 354 offences were recorded on the railway routes between Preston and Blackpool and at least 19 of these were alcohol related. These figures include offences committed on the trains and at the stations.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the need to control drunkenness on trains. [13918]

Mr. Jamieson: We recognise the effect that anti-social behaviour, including drunkenness, can have on both train staff and other passengers' perceptions of their personal security. We are working with transport operators, local authorities, the police and others to improve personal security on transport, through such means as publishing good practice guidance and improving the ability of the British Transport Police (BTP) and train operators to deal with crime and anti-social behaviour. The BTP work closely with the train operators to identify hot spots of disorder. If necessary measures such as increased patrolling and special operations will be undertaken to control the problem.

Road Clearance

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce a mandatory requirement for highway authorities to publish a winter plan listing the roads it intends to keep clear of ice and snow. [13992]

Mr. Spellar: The Code of Practice for Maintenance Management "Delivering Best Practice in Highway Maintenance" published on 10 July already strongly recommends that highway authorities should publish a winter service operational plan after consultation with users and key stakeholders.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether highway authorities in England and Wales will continue to hold responsibility for keeping roads safe in winter through pre-salting and snow clearance. [13995]

Mr. Spellar: The House of Lords judgment last year in the case of Goodes *v.* East Sussex was that there was no duty on local highway authorities under the Highways Act 1980 to prevent ice from forming on highways. Nevertheless, we strongly recommend highway authorities in England to implement winter service provisions on their roads in accordance with the Code of Practice for Maintenance Management "Delivering Best Practice in Highway Maintenance" published on 10 July.

Guidance to highway authorities in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will issue guidance to highway authorities in England and Wales on the importance of pre-salting roads in winter. [13991]

Mr. Spellar: Guidance on pre-salting roads in winter is contained in the Code of Practice for Maintenance Management "Delivering Best Practice in Highway Maintenance" published on 10 July.

Guidance to highway authorities in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with highway authorities to take reasonable steps to pre-salt roads in winter and clear snow. [13993]

Mr. Spellar: Highway authorities throughout the United Kingdom participated in producing the guidance on winter service contained in the Code of Practice for Maintenance Management "Delivering Best Practice in Highway Maintenance" published on 10 July.

Railtrack

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when Ernst and Young LLP was approached about the possibility of giving advice on Railtrack; [13996]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* discussions and *(b)* meetings between Ernst and Young LLP and his Department on the rail industry prior to 24 August; [13990]

(3) what terms of reference were given to Ernst and Young LLP on their engagement by his Department to advise on possible options for Railtrack. [13997]

Mr. Spellar: The possibility of Ernst and Young LLP giving advice on Railtrack was first discussed at a meeting on 23 August. They were appointed on 24 August. On engagement, their remit was to provide advice on the general process of administration; and accountancy advice on possible options for Railtrack.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will deposit in the Library a list of all the stations owned by Railtrack and their estimated value. [14783]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not hold this information.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he ordered the drafting of legislation *(a)* prior to and *(b)* following his meeting with the Rail Regulator on 5 October to remove the power from the Regulator to hold an interim financial review. [14785]

Mr. Jamieson: Details of internal communications are exempt from disclosure under section 2 of Part II of the code of practice on access to government information.

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when, after 1 August, his Department received advice from the Treasury that it was unlikely that additional public funding for Railtrack would be approved. [13471]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 723–35.

No-fly Zones

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many instances there have been in each year since 1991 of (i) commercial and (ii) privately operated aircraft accidentally breaching no-fly zones over *(a)* nuclear power plants, *(b)* nuclear reprocessing plants, *(c)* nuclear fuel production plants, *(d)* uranium enrichment plants and *(e)* military nuclear plants. [14262]

Mr. Jamieson: Since 1991, there have been four reported breaches of the restricted airspace around military nuclear plants (one in each of 1993, 1995, 1996 and 2000). There have been also two reported breaches of the restrictions around Sellafield (one in 1993 and 1999), which is both a nuclear reprocessing and fuel production plant.

Car Registration Revenue

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much has been raised in each year since 1998 from the first licence fee payable at the first registration of a new car. [14014]

Mr. Jamieson: The fee for the first registration of vehicles in the UK was introduced on 1 April 1998. The amounts raised each year since 1998 are £67,654k, £68,573k and 70,503k respectively.

Fire Services (Merseyside)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will call for a report from Her Majesty's Fire Services Inspectorate on management practices in the Merseyside Fire Authority and their impact on the delivery of fire services. [14274]

Dr. Whitehead: HM Fire Service Inspectorate has recently conducted an inspection of the Merseyside Fire Service. The report will be published in due course.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the recommendations in the National Joint Council report on the staffing arrangements proposals put forward by Merseyside Fire Authority. [14273]

Dr. Whitehead: The National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades' Scheme of Conditions of Service provides for consideration of proposed changes in duty systems at fire stations. This is a separate procedure to the requirements of section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947 in respect of variations to a fire authority's establishment. My right hon. Friend will, however, wish to consider the implications of the recent adjudication in respect of Formby Fire Station.

Central Railway

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the report he received from the Strategic Rail Authority on the proposed lorries-on-trains freight railway put forward by Central Railway plc. [14707]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 200W.

Terrorism

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the events of 11 September on insurance premiums to be paid by local authorities. [13898]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* We are working with local government in assessing all new and increasing pressures on local authorities as part of SR2002. The LGA has identified insurance premiums as an area which it wants, to look at during the review.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if London Underground is a member of the COMET international metro benchmarking network; and what are the rules under which information the network collects can be published. [14598]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* I understand that London Underground is a member of the COMET international metro benchmarking network. The rules under which it collects and publishes information are a matter for COMET.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the average rate of staff absenteeism among London Underground *(a)* drivers and *(b)* station staff in each year from 1991. [14605]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* London Underground has provided the following information showing the percentage absenteeism rate:

Calendar year	*Train staff*[1]	*Station staff*
1991	5.39	10.13
1992	5.09	7.94
1993	6.60	7.23
1994	5.61	6.36
1995	5.41	7.16
1996	5.16	6.15
1997	5.64	6.71
1998	5.22	6.43
1999	5.83	6.39
2000	7.23	7.17

[1] Includes guards

Bus Services

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the next issue of the Bus Quality Indicators Bulletin will be published. [14547]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* My Department intends to publish the next issue of the Bus Quality Indicators Bulletin in January 2002.

Departmental Public Relations

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what are the terms of the brief given to the Finsbury Public Relations firm in relation to his Department's relations with the City; [14460]

(2) when he decided to employ Roland Rudd of Finsbury Public Relations to advise on his Department's relations with the City; [14463]

(3) what the expected monthly cost is to his Department of the cost of employing Finsbury Public Relations. [14459]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* Finsbury Public Relations are not employed by DTLR.

Council Tenants (Cash Incentive Scheme)

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council tenants in England have taken advantage of cash incentive scheme payments in order to buy a home in the private sector in 2000–01; what restrictions there are on the amount of grant that may be made available in *(a)* Poole and *(b)* London and the South East; and what the maximum amount of grant allowed is, as a proportion of average house prices in *(a)* and (b). [14375]

Ms Keeble: 827 Cash Incentive Scheme grants have been made to council tenants in England in 2000–01 to buy their own home.

The maximum grant in Poole is £10,000 which equates to around 7 per cent. of average house prices in the area.

The maximum grant payable in London and the south east is 80 per cent. of the average Right to Buy Discount in the authority in question. The limit on the overall RTB discount in those regions is £38,000. 80 per cent. of the £38,000 is £30,400. This equates to around 20 per cent. of average house prices in London and the south east.

Planning Guidance (Flooding)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with the Environment Agency regarding planning policy guidance on building in areas subject to flooding. [14839]

Ms Keeble: The Chairman and Chief Executive of the Environment Agency have had three recent meetings with Ministers in this Department that included discussion of a range of issues, including planning and flooding.

In addition, officials meet and discuss regularly with their colleagues in the Environment Agency the implementation and effectiveness of the planning policy guidance on "Development and flood risk" published in July 2001.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria he uses to determine the calling in of planning applications, with specific reference to development in the flood plains. [14838]

Ms Keeble: My right hon. Friend's policy on calling in planning applications remains as stated by the then Minister for Planning on 16 June 1999, *Official Report*, column 138W. His policy is to be very selective about calling in planning applications. He will, in general, only take this step if planning issues of more than local importance are involved.

With specific reference to development on flood plains, such cases could include, for example, those which, in his opinion:

significantly conflict with national policies as expressed in Planning Policy Guidance Note 25 on "Development and flood risk";

could have significant effects on flooding beyond their immediate locality; or

give rise to substantial regional or national controversy.

Each case will continue to be treated on its merits. However, the maintenance by the Environment Agency of an objection on a flood-risk ground to significant development proposals in flood plains would clearly influence the decision whether or not to call in an application. Call-in would be more likely if there was any evidence that the Agency's objection was likely to be over-ruled by the local planning authority without sufficient counter-balancing reasons having been taken into account.

Ebley Wharf

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the reasons for the decision not to call in the planning application of Ebley Wharf in Stroud. [14840]

Ms Keeble: No. The Government's policy is not to give reasons for decisions in cases where the Secretary of State has declined to intervene in particular planning applications.

Social Housing Provision

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what level of social housing provision there was in each of the last 10 years. [14837]

Ms Keeble: Estimates of the stock of social housing in England in the latest 10 years for which data are available are given in the table. Social dwellings include houses and flats owned by registered social landlords and by council.

Numbers of social dwellings

Thousand

Year	*Social dwellings*
1 April 1991	4,507
1 April 1992	4,490
1 April 1993	4,474
1 April 1994	4,445
1 April 1995	4,421
1 April 1996	4,412
1 April 1997	4,390
1 April 1998	4,358
1 April 1999	4,340
1 April 2000	4,290

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the minutes of his meeting with the Rail Regulator on 5 October. [14784]

Mr. Jamieson: Details of internal communications are exempt from disclosure under section 2 of Part II of the code of practice on access to government information.

Electoral Commission

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made on the transfer of the functions of the Local Government Commission for England to the Electoral Commission; and if he will make a statement. [15463]

Mr. Raynsford: I have today laid a draft of an Order which, subject to parliamentary approval, I intend to make under section 18 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act to provide for the transfer of functions of the Local Government Commission for England, together with the associated functions of the Secretary of State on electoral arrangements, to the Electoral Commission with effect from 1 April 2002. Our aim is to secure a well, planned transfer which avoids any disruption to the current programme of periodic electoral reviews being undertaken by the LGC or to the work programme of the Electoral Commission.

DEFENCE

Departmental Spending

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total expenditure was on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* polling, *(c)* focus groups, *(d)* design consultants, *(e)* caterers, *(f)* production of departmental publications and *(g)* photographs/photographers by his Department for each year since 1995 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; what was (A) the annual percentage increase in spending on each category and (B) spending on each category as a percentage of the total departmental running costs; and if he will make a statement. [6938]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am therefore unable to provide a substantive answer under the terms of exemption 9 (voluminous and vexatious requests) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

However, a breakdown of the Ministry of Defence's public relations' expenditure is published in the annual Departmental Performance Report, broken down into categories of RN, Army, RAF and civilian recruitment, PR, marketing and business support services, Chief of PR, sales promotion, scholarships and National Employers' Liaison Committee.

The Government are committed to using only whatever channel is judged to be the most cost-effective way to deliver the publicity necessary to support the implementation of policy. Paid advertising is resorted to only after careful consideration of the cost benefits.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make statement on the quinquennial review of Defence Medical Services. [13701]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1224W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright). A quinquennial review of the Defence Medical Agencies and some other aspects of defence medical arrangements is currently under way. The first phase of the review has been completed and a summary has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Brigadier Tim Taylor's report on Deployable Medical Capability will be complete; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [13702]

Mr. Ingram: We are currently, as part of our normal routine, undertaking work to develop options on how to provide and deliver an effective and efficient future medical capability required to deploy in support of operations. A report on this work will be produced for internal planning purposes during autumn next year.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a copy of the report, "Defence Medical Services, Strategy for the Future", in the Library. [13703]

Dr. Moonie: The work undertaken, in the wake of the Strategic Defence Review, on a strategy for resolving problems facing the Defence Medical Services, constitutes internal discussion and advice and is withheld from publication under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. A summary of the findings entitled "The Defence Medical Services—A Strategy for the Future" was placed in the Library of the House in December 1998.

Gibraltar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the strategic role of Gibraltar. [14293]

Mr. Ingram: Gibraltar has been and continues to be an important overseas base for the British Armed Forces, and contains valuable support, logistic, communications and training facilities.

Nuclear Bunker, Cotswolds

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with English Heritage over conferring listed status to the former Government's nuclear control and operations bunker in the Cotswolds. [14681]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Eurofighter

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he made of the effect of the removal of the cannon from the Eurofighter on the RAF's future capability to deter civilian aircraft from hazardous flight paths; and if he will make a statement. [14821]

Mr. Ingram: Eurofighter will be equipped with highly capable air-to-air missiles. We do not consider that the absence of a cannon from Eurofighter will have any material effect on the ability of the RAF to deter civilian aircraft from hazardous flight paths.

Afghanistan

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military airlift provision is directed to delivering aid to Afghanistan. [14624]

Mr. Ingram: Three coalition C-17 aircraft are directed to delivering aid to Afghanistan. They have been flying nightly since the start of the campaign and, so far, have delivered approximately 1.3 million humanitarian daily rations.

Search and Rescue Helicopters

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to provide search and rescue services through a private finance initiative when the helicopters used in SAR operations are replaced. [14623]

Mr. Ingram: The existing Sea King fleet (which includes the Search and Rescue aircraft) is due to be replaced in 2010–15. A full range of potential strategies are being evaluated to meet the search and rescue requirement, one of which is the potential for Public-Private Partnership/Private Finance Initiative.

Arms Trafficking

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the annual report on the implementation of the EU joint action, of 17 December 1998, on the European Union's contribution to combating the destabilising accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons (199/34/CFSP) and the EU programme on illicit trafficking in conventional arms of June 1997. [14259]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

The Government had an opportunity to comment on the draft of the annual report on the implementation of the EU joint action, of 17 December 1998, on the European Union's contribution to combating the destabilising accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons (1999/34/CFSP) and the EU programme on illicit trafficking in conventional arms of June 1997, as did all other EU member states. The report is entirely consistent with the Government's policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons. It provides a detailed account of action taken by EU member states at the national level and in international forums to combat the dangerous proliferation of small arms. The report also sets out priorities for a more systematic approach to EU assistance in this crucial area of work. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office submitted the report for parliamentary scrutiny on 14 June.

The Government are committed to tackling the scourge of small arms proliferation. The need to eradicate the illicit trade in small arms has a particular urgency in the context of the war against terrorism. The annual report predates the first ever UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in New York in July 2001. The Conference adopted a Programme of Action which commits States politically to put in place export control mechanisms, measures to ensure small arms traceability and to control brokers, and to destroy surplus weapons. There will be a Review Conference in 2006. It is vital that countries sustain the political momentum built up at the Conference to

implement the programme of Action. The UK will continue to co-operate with our EU partners, within the framework of the EU's Joint Action on Small Arms and the EU Programme on Illicit Trafficking, to address these issues as a matter of priority.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Zimbabwe

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Zimbabwe about terrorist acts against landowners. [13400]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regularly raise our concerns with the Government of Zimbabwe on continuing rural violence and the breakdown in the rule of law. At Abuja on 6 September, the Government of Zimbabwe made a commitment to end occupations of farm land and to remove illegal occupiers. My noble Friend Baroness Amos accompanied Commonwealth partners to Zimbabwe on 25–26 October, to assess implementation of the Abuja Agreement and to urge the Government to abide by their commitments.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of sanctions which could be imposed by *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the Commonwealth against the Zimbabwe Government. [13398]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK introduced a national arms embargo on Zimbabwe in May 2000. The UK is working closely with EU partners on Zimbabwe. At the 29 October General Affairs Council, EU Ministers decided to open Article 96 consultations with the Government of Zimbabwe. This gives Zimbabwe 60 days to address EU concerns. Any action by the Commonwealth is a matter for the Commonwealth as a whole.

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department has given to the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague in connection with the recent trials of Bosnian Serbs. [13401]

Peter Hain: The Government are committed to assisting the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in its aim of bringing justice and stability to the peoples of the region. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office contributes through the United Nations to the running expenses of the Tribunal and, together with other Government Departments, provides practical assistance in personnel and expertise. Where we provide material or witnesses in connection with a trial, this is done in accordance with established standards and practices agreed between the Government and the Tribunal.

The Government provide assistance to the Tribunal in all cases, regardless of the ethnicity of the accused.

Israel (British-made Military Components)

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether British-made components are being used in the Israeli-occupied territories by the Israeli Defence Force on *(a)* Apache helicopters, *(b)* Merkava tanks, *(c)* Huey helicopters, *(d)* armoured personnel carriers and *(e)* F16 jets; and if he will make a statement. [13669]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have no evidence that equipment or components manufactured in the UK and licensed for export by this Government have been used by Israeli forces against civilians in the occupied territories during the recent and continuing violence. We would be concerned if such evidence came to light.

We look at all export licence applications to Israel on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated National and EU criteria, taking careful account in each case of the nature of the equipment and the proposed end-use and end-user in light of the circumstance prevailing at the time. This means inter alia we will not issue licences where there is a clear risk that the equipment might be used in internal repression, international aggression, adversely affect regional stability or prolong internal conflict. We are keeping the situation under close review.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the system for monitoring the end-use of British-made military components and equipment exported to Israel. [13668]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are keeping the situation under close review. We have no evidence that equipment manufactured in the UK and licensed for export by this Government has been used by Israeli forces against civilians in the occupied territories during the recent and continuing violence. We would be concerned if such evidence came to light.

We use information supplied by a number of sources to check that British equipment is not being used against Palestinians in the occupied territories, including information gathered by our embassy and non-Governmental organisations, among others. We have received an assurance from the Israeli Government that no UK manufactured equipment or components are used against Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories.

Overseas Territories (Reciprocal Rights)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which overseas territories have agreed to offer reciprocal rights for UK citizens to work and reside in UK territories. [13915]

Mr. Bradshaw: None. The grant of British citizenship to British Dependent Territories citizens from qualifying Territories who do not already enjoy it, will be on a non-reciprocal basis.

Overseas Prisoner Repatriated

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK nationals detained in overseas prisons have been repatriated to the UK in the last 12 months. [13928]

Mr. Bradshaw: Since 1 November 2000, 38 British nationals detained in prisons overseas have been repatriated to the United Kingdom.

Afghanistan

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to provide economic compensation to surviving family members of non-combatant civilians killed by accident by allied munitions used in the conflict in Afghanistan. [14260]

Mr. Bradshaw: UK military operations are conducted in accordance with international law. Compensation for any casualties as a result of action undertaken in accordance with those requirements would be inappropriate.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what resolution he proposed on Afghanistan at the session of the UN Security Council on Tuesday 13 November. [14858]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 13 November, a UK/French draft Security Council resolution on the future of Afghanistan was circulated among Security Council members. The draft will be discussed in informal consultations of the Security Council today. We hope the resolution will be adopted by the Security Council as soon as possible. A copy of the agreed resolution will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent decision by the EU to lift the arms embargo on the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. [14415]

Peter Hain: The EU (Common Position 96/746/CFSP) imposed an embargo on the export of arms to Afghanistan. In December 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1333, which imposed a mandatory arms embargo only on the territory of Afghanistan under Taliban control. On 5 November the EU embargo was brought into line with the mandatory UN embargo (Common Position 2001/771/CFSP).

Vietnam

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the case of Miss Truong Vy Pham, Hanoi (Ref. P402281). [13904]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not our policy to comment on individual visa cases in a public forum. I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Biological Weapons Convention

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what his Department's policy is on the establishment of national oversight mechanisms for *(a)* security and *(b)* genetic engineering of pathogenic organisms; [13947]

(2) what plans he has with regard to the development of a code of ethical conduct for bioscientists; [13946]

(3) what United Nations procedures exist for investigating *(a)* suspicious outbreaks and *(b)* allegations of biological weapons use; [13949]

(4) what plans he has for the promotion of responsible conduct in the *(a)* study, *(b)* use, *(c)* modification and *(d)* shipment of pathogenic organisms; [13953]

(5) what proposals his Department has *(a)* to improve international disease control and *(b)* to enhance mechanisms for sending expert response teams to cope with outbreaks. [13948]

Mr. Bradshaw: These are among a number of new ideas intended to complement the implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). We have been discussing these and other options with other States Parties since the end of the negotiations on a BWC Protocol in August. All are at an early stage of development. We expect them to be further discussed at the 5th Review Conference of the BWC in Geneva (19 November to 7 December). We welcome proposals that have been made for practical and effective measures to meet the biological weapons threat. We hope that these can be agreed at the Conference.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with its United States counterparts with regard to the United States' recent proposals to strengthen the biological and toxic weapons convention. [13945]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are in frequent contact with the United States, and other States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, on our respective ideas for strengthening the Convention. The Foreign Secretary discussed the subject with the US Secretary of State during his visit to Washington in October.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on his Department's policy at the forthcoming biological and toxic weapons convention Review Conference; [13951]

(2) what steps he will take to ensure that international progress towards the strengthening of the biological and toxic weapons convention is sustained following the BTWC Review Conference. [13950]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham Deptford (Joan Ruddock) on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 668W.

Government Wine Cellar

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the number of bottles of *(a)* wine and *(b)* other alcoholic beverages contained within the Government wine cellar, managed by his Department; what his estimate is of the value of the Government wine cellar; and if he will make a statement. [13517]

Mr. MacShane: The Government Wine Cellar contains a mixture of fine wines, reception or drinking wines and spirits and liqueurs. Stock levels vary according to the number of Government functions at any given time. Generally the cellar contains approximately 37,000 bottles, the majority of which are wine. The value of the stock is subjective, depending on the vagaries on the wine

market, and bears no relation to the purchase costs. The current value is estimated to be in the region of £1.5 million.

SCOTLAND

Prestwick Air Traffic Control Centre

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the most recent projection of the number of jobs that would be created by the completion of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick airport is. [9200]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* NATS staff will transfer from the existing centre at Prestwick to the new centre when it is completed. It is not anticipated that any new jobs will be created by the completion of the project. There will be some additional short-term employment opportunities during the construction and commissioning phase.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the projected capital cost of the proposed new air traffic control centre at Prestwick airport is; and how much of this budget had been spent as at 16 October. [9201]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Although construction of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick is being deferred, contracts for the design of the building and initial site works are in progress and will be completed. The value of these contracts is a commercial matter between NATS and the contractors. Construction of the building and the design and installation of equipment systems will be subject to a competitive procurement process, which will determine the total costs of the new centre.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial assistance the Government allocated for the building of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick airport *(a)* before and *(b)* following the confirmation of a delay. [11243]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government have not made any allocation of financial assistance for the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent assessment the Government have made of the delay in building the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick on *(a)* Ayrshire's economy and *(b)* local unemployment. [11247]

Mrs. Liddell: Recent changes to airline operations and consequent reductions in air traffic has led to temporary deferral of work to create the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick. Air traffic control services for Scottish and North Atlantic airspace will continue to be provided by NATS staff from the existing centre at Prestwick. The main effect on the local economy of deferring work on the new centre will be to delay creation of short-term employment opportunities on the construction and commissioning of the new centre. The Government remain closely in touch with the industry with a view to securing the shortest possible delay.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many meetings she has had with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions regarding the delay in building of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick. [11244]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on a wide range of transport issues which affect Scotland, including matters relating to the new air traffic centre at Prestwick.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scotland Office will shortly meet the Minister for Transport to discuss a number of items including the new NATS centre at Prestwick.

Scottish Executive

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her policy is regarding consultations prior to the publication of proposals involving the transfer of powers to the Scottish Executive by *(a)* primary legislation and *(b)* order in Council. [13818]

Mrs. Liddell: Any transfer of powers to the Scottish Executive takes place following agreement between the Administrations. If conferred by primary legislation, by convention the Scottish Executive first seeks the approval of the Scottish Parliament. If by secondary legislation, the order follows the procedures set out in the Scotland Act, such orders require approval by both Houses of Parliament and also the Scottish Parliament.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Al-Jazeera

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what arrangements are in place for the al-Jazeera television station to be broadcast in this country with English subtitles; and if she will make a statement. [12257]

Tessa Jowell: Al-Jazeera is an Arabic language channel aimed at Arab-speaking communities across a wide geographic area. English subtitling would be an editorial matter for the channel to consider.

Lottery Grants (Morley and Rothwell)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many applications for lottery grants have been made, in each year since 1997, by organisations and individuals based in Morley and Rothwell constituency. [14337]

Mr. Caborn: Comprehensive information on applications for lottery grants is not centrally held at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Football Dispute

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with *(a)* the Premier League and *(b)* the Professional Footballers

Association regarding the dispute between the two bodies; what role her Department can play in resolving the dispute; and if she will make a statement. [14292]

Mr. Caborn: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I have discussed this issue with the Premier League or the Professional Footballers Association (PFA). Although the Government hope that a satisfactory settlement may be reached without the need for industrial action, the dispute must be resolved through a free process of negotiation. My Department has no plans to intervene.

Football Clubs (Financial Support)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many football clubs have received financial support from Sport UK in the last 12 months. [14290]

Mr. Caborn: None. UK Sport does not provide funding for football. UK Sport's support for training, competition and coaching facilities for elite sports people is, in the main, provided to UK-wide governing bodies. In view of the administrative structure of football in the UK, applications for lottery funding from the sport's clubs and governing bodies are made to Sport England, or to its equivalents in the other home nations.

Elite Sports Funding Review

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to implement the findings of the Cunningham report; and if she will make a statement. [14286]

Mr. Caborn: The Elite Sports Funding Review chaired by Dr. Cunningham identified over 40 recommendations, many of which are for the Sports Councils and National Governing Bodies of sport to take forward. The current position of the Sports Councils in respect of the recommendations was presented at the recent Sports Cabinet meeting. They have accepted and are implementing the overwhelming majority of the recommendations. The Government will provide their detailed response to the report in due course.

Sport England

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the funding and role for Sport England within the regions. [14846]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England's future role in the regions, which will include arrangements for the distributions of funding, is one of the issues being considered in the current quinquennial review of Sport England.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what resources were available to Sport England from *(a)* the Exchequer and *(b)* the lottery in each region in each of the last two years. [14851]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England's allocation of grant in aid for 2000–01 was £38 million and for 2001–02 is £43.2 million. The budget for each region is set out in the table.

£000

Region	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
North East	886	1,169
Yorkshire	1,105	1,528
East Midlands	1,096	1,340
East	1,180	1,314
London	1,301	1,694
South East	2,014	2,215
South West	1,139	1,413
West Midlands	1,161	1,537
North West	1,365	1,801

Sport England's income from the National Lottery for 2000–01 was £223.5 million and the forecast income for 2001–02 is £214,233 million. The total amounts awarded in each region are set out in the table:

£000

Region	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
North East	11,853	5,573
Yorkshire	30,048	3,920
East Midlands	21,606	12,484
East	9,750	6,696
London	16,880	16,056
South East	28,227	7,962
South West	18,561	8,658
West Midlands	14,612	3,132
North West	21,168	7,093

[1] At November 2001

Sports Schools and Colleges

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the role of her Department in the development of specialist sports schools and colleges; and what help it is giving to the development of the Sports Co-ordinator Programme. [14850]

Mr. Caborn: The Department works in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) on aspects of the development of Specialist Sports Colleges. The Department sits on the management board of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme which is run by our sponsored body, Sport England.

Sports (Community Development)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she plans to take and with which other Government Departments she is co-operating in order to enhance community development in relation to sport. [14848]

Mr. Caborn: I chair monthly meetings bringing together Ministerial colleagues from the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health with Sport England to make sure that the potential of sport to drive forward the wider Government agenda is realised. My officials and I are working closely with our colleagues in DLTR on sports planning and regeneration issues, most notably the redrafting of PPG 17, which will be the strengthened framework in which the provision of sports facilities will be delivered. Because we recognise the potential of sport as a means of improving health, diverting young people from crime, drugs and antisocial behaviour and engaging disaffected learners in education and employment we are working jointly with the

Department for Education and Skills, the Department of Health, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Home Office to ensure that people of all ages in our communities benefit fully from sport development opportunities and initiatives.

Sports (Participation)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how her Department measures participation rates in sport; and what information she collates on *(a)* an age related and *(b)* a regional basis. [14847]

Mr. Caborn: Adult (aged 16+) rates of sports participation are measured through the General Household Survey (GHS), a continuous survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics across Great Britain. Questions relating to sport are included on the survey once every three years, the last being 1996 and the next being due 2002 (in 1999, the GHS was not carried out).

Sport England has also measured participation rates for adults with disabilities (carried out in 2000–01) and for people from Black and Ethnic minority communities (carried out in 1999) through specially commissioned large-scale surveys using the same methodology and questions used in the GHS.

Ages of participants can be analysed in a variety of ways, as respondents are asked their actual age. Overall participation rates can also be reported at a regional level.

Participation by young people is measured in Sport England's Survey of Young People which has now been carried out twice (1994 and 1999). The survey, which in 1999 was carried out by MORI on behalf of Sport England, is school based and involves a representative sample of around 4,000 young people aged six to 16 across England. This survey also enables analysis by age. Sport England has also undertaken a large scale survey of young people with disabilities using the same sports participation questions as in the wider 1999 survey (carried out in 2000).

Sports (Co-ordination)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had to ensure that there is greater co-ordination within different sports at *(a)* international, *(b)* national, *(c)* regional and *(d)* local levels. [14849]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no recent discussions to ensure greater co-ordination within different sports at the various levels. However, she is aware that the Sports Councils work closely with the national governing bodies of sport continually to examine improved methods of co-ordination across all sports and all levels.

Sports (Rural Regeneration)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the role of sport in regeneration, with specific reference to rural areas. [14845]

Mr. Caborn: The Government fully recognise the important role that sport can play in the regeneration of both urban and rural areas and in addressing a whole range of social issues such as better health, reduced crime and social inclusion. Both the report of Policy Action Team 10 and the Government's Plan for Sport highlight how sport can be used to tackle neighbourhood renewal, social exclusion and community development. Among the initiatives included in the plan are the creation of the Community Sport Alliance which brings together key stakeholders of all levels to identify the key challenges facing sport in the community; the promotion of sport in regional policy making through contributions to the work of regional agencies such as the Regional Cultural Consortiums; and ensuring that equity principles are at the heart of all the Government's and Sport England's policies for the promotion and development of sport. In particular the Policy Directions issued to Sport England in respect of the distribution of the Lottery Sports Fund require it, in deciding applications for funding, to have regard to the scope for reducing economic and social deprivation, the need to promote access to sport for people from all sections of society and the need to further the objectives of sustainable development taking into account social and community progress and employment opportunities created by sports projects. Sport England has also introduced a number of other specific initiatives aimed at the regeneration of deprived areas including Sport Action Zones, one of which is Cornwall, its Priority Areas Initiative and the establishment of a Regeneration Policy Advisory Group.

Playing Fields

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Minister for Sport's answer to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 4, what was the basis of the analysis her Department used for the calculation of numbers of playing fields disposed of during the period 1992 to 1997. [14844]

Mr. Caborn: Public concern about the loss of school playing fields led directly to the introduction in October 1998 of section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Before section 77 was introduced, only grant-maintained schools were required to seek consent from the Secretary of State before selling land, including areas of their playing fields. Local authorities and other schools that owned their own playing fields were free to sell without restriction. The then Department for Education and Employment estimated that an average of 40 playing fields a month were sold in this way before October 1998. Their estimate is based on the number of playing field disposals at grant-maintained schools between April 1996, when the previous Government further encouraged the disposal of playing fields by relaxing the Local Authority Capital Finance Regulations which governed the use of sale proceeds, and 1 October 1998, when section 77 took effect. During this 30-month period, some 64 grant-maintained schools were given approval to dispose of areas of playing field, which is an average of over two a month. Using the proportion of grant-maintained schools at that time compared with the number of other schools, the Department for Education and Skills estimate the total number of playing field disposals each month to have been around 40.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fireworks

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has to heighten public awareness of *(a)* the dangers of fireworks and *(b)* the effects of fireworks on animals; [9240]

(2) what plans she has to restrict the decibel level of fireworks; [9242]

(3) what plans she has to review firework legislation; and if she will make a statement; [9243]

(4) what control the Government have over fireworks bought on the internet; and if she will make a statement; [9244]

(5) what plans she has to restrict the use of fireworks to a limited time period. [9241]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The Department has recently launched this year's fireworks safety campaign informing the public of the dangers posed by fireworks. The theme of this year's campaign, is to urge children and young people to take care when using or being near fireworks. As part of the campaign, around 2,000 information packs to help mount local safety campaigns have been distributed to trading standards, fire brigades, health promotion units, environmental health officers and police forces. In addition over 25,000 special information packs have been distributed for use in schools.

The public is warned of the effects of fireworks on animals through the fireworks code, which advises pet owners to keep pets indoors. Each pack of fireworks on sale contains a copy of the code.

Fireworks on sale in the United Kingdom are required under the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 to adhere to British Standards BS 7114 which restrict the size and weight of fireworks. I have no plans to change this at present, although we are involved in the proposed European Standard which is likely to specify sound levels for certain fireworks.

We have no plans to restrict the use of fireworks to a limited time period. The working of regulations safeguards is kept under regular review.

United Kingdom based firework companies selling over the internet are subject to the provisions of the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997.

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department has taken to reduce accidents from fireworks. [10473]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The comprehensive measures introduced under the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 are again being supplemented by a robust, targeted firework safety campaign. The measures include controls on the types and size of fireworks which can be sold to the public, and prohibiting sales to those under 18 years of age.

The emphasis of this year's campaign, is that children and young people should take care when using or being near fireworks. As part of the campaign, around 2,000 information packs to help mount local safety campaigns have been distributed to trading standards, fire brigades, health promotion units, environmental health officers and police forces. In addition over 25,000 special information packs have been distributed for use in schools.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many reported incidents involving injuries with fireworks in each of the last five years have involved *(a)* minors and *(b)* adults as the alleged perpetrators of the incidents in (i) Scotland and (ii) the UK; [13164]

(2) how many reported incidents involving injuries with fireworks in each of the last five years have involved *(a)* minors and *(b)* adults as victims of the incidents in (i) Scotland and (ii) the UK. [13165]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* The following data were collected from Accident and Emergency Departments in Great Britain over the firework season. Data are collected separately by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland. These figures are recorded cases of accidental injury involving fireworks. We have no statistics relating to alleged perpetrators of incidents.

	Scotland		*England and Wales*	
Year	*Under 18*	*Over 18*	*Under 18*	*Over 18*
2000	49	19	508	396
1999	45	37	549	425
1998	47	13	414	353
1997	35	22	439	412
1996	61	24	647	501

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further plans she has to regulate the sale and use of fireworks for purposes other than organised displays. [13984]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We have no plans further to regulate the sale and use of fireworks.

Coal

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the circumstances in which she will accept continued state aid from the EU for the UK coal industry. [10376]

Mr. Wilson: The EU must approve state aid paid by the Government to the UK coal industry, but it does not itself pay such aid.

The DTI is currently reviewing the rationale for the business support it gives, and so it would be premature to give a definitive view on the circumstances in which we would continue to subsidise the UK coal industry. However, as a general principle we would need to be convinced that the benefits of continued subsidy (for example in energy supply, economic or social terms) would outweigh the costs of that subsidy.

Manufacturing

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has taken to support the competitiveness of British manufacturing since 7 June. [10991]

Mr. Wilson: We are strengthening assistance to manufacturing industry through our increased support for the regional development agencies to raise innovation, enterprise and skills. We are taking forward the announced initiative to provide a manufacturing advisory service, based on provision of services on a regional basis. We are also introducing measures to help workers develop their skills and increase their prospects of finding new, better employment if they lose their jobs. These and other issues will be discussed at the manufacturing summit in Birmingham on 5 December.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures have been undertaken by her Department since 1997 to assist British manufacturing. [13502]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* Since 1997 we have established a favourable macro-economic framework to ensure the future competitiveness of British manufacturing. We have built on this support with policies to foster productivity and help firms innovate and grow. We have established regional development agencies to raise innovation, enterprise and skills in every region. We are improving university and industry links to bring new products and processes in key industrial sectors to market. We are helping established industries to modernise through adopting best practice in production and supply chain management. We have strengthened the knowledge base for manufacturing through increased investment in the science infrastructure. We are creating a manufacturing advisory service, based on a centre for excellence in every region to help firms to innovate and improve their productivity. We are also introducing measures to help workers develop their skills and increase their prospects of finding new, better employment if they lose their jobs.

Electricity Trading Arrangements

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the new electricity trading arrangements. [10646]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* Ofgem published on 31 August a review of NETA's performance over the first three months. Their key findings were that:

> Wholesale electricity prices are 20–25 per cent. below prices that would have been produced under the pool.
>
> Market liquidity has been established with a threefold increase in the volume of trades, and a doubling of the number of contracts struck compared to this time last year under the pool.
>
> The National Grid Company is working well to keep the electricity system in balance. Its daily costs of balancing the system have halved, which will also benefit customers.

In a competitive market, we expect changes in wholesale prices to feed through to final customers. Domestic customers are seeing lower electricity prices with prices down by around three per cent. as are industrial customers with prices down around 11 per cent. We expect that further prices reductions will take place as wholesale prices feed through fully.

The impact of NETA on smaller generators continues to be a concern. Ofgem also published a report on the impact of NETA on smaller generators in the first two months of its operation. This report highlighted the areas where further action was needed to assist smaller generators. A consultation document was issued on 1 November 2001 aimed at addressing these concerns.

BSkyB

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the initial findings of the Office of Fair Trading's inquiry into BSkyB's position in the pay TV market will be made public. [12091]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The conduct of Competition Act inquiries and the publication of their findings are a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading.

Gas Prices

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effect of increased gas prices on *(a)* the expansion of combined heat and power plants and *(b)* future emissions targets. [12442]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI's energy projections published in November 2000 included projections of CHP capacity based on assumptions about future oil and gas prices. Those assumptions are still reasonable in the longer term but the Government recognise that high gas prices this year have reduced substantially the attractiveness of investment in new CHP plant in the short term. The Government remain committed to their CHP target of at least 10,000 MWe capacity by 2010, as well as their emission targets. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be issuing a draft CHP strategy in the coming months that will set out how the target will be achieved.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total level of Government financial support to the nuclear industry in each year since 1990, including *(a)* research grants, *(b)* transfer of debt from privatised utilities, *(c)* non-fossil fuel levy, *(d)* investment in BNFL facilities, *(e)* running costs of UKAEA and NIREX and *(f)* other sources. [12789]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* Funding to the UK nuclear industry has been provided primarily in the form of grant and grant-in-aid to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA). This funding has been primarily to enable the UKAEA to discharge historic nuclear liabilities arising form past civil nuclear research programmes and to decommission those research facilities and restore sites to normal use—with the exception of funding in respect of the UKAEA nuclear fusion research programme at Culham which complements the UK's participation in the European Union's Framework Programme V.

In the period 1999–2000, the DTI (Department of Energy prior to May 1992) provided grant/grant-in-aid to the UKAEA as follows:

£ million

Year	*Grant and grant in aid*[1]	*Fusion*	*Other nuclear*
1990–91	94.3	26.9	—
1991–92	68.7	20.7	—
1992–93	[2]126.2	16.3	—
1993–94	[2]128.7	16.3	—
1994–95	[2]131.3	15.7	—
1995–96[3]	199.3	15.9	—
1996–97	166.5	12.1	—
1997–98	174.5	16.6	8.5
1998–99	285	12.6	5
1999–2000	194.4	14.4	3.3
2000–01	223.4	14.3	3.5

[1] Grant in aid to the UKAEA includes provision for its running costs
[2] Grant payment
[3] Prior to 1995 the UKAEA was a trading fund with a negative external financing requirement
Note:
Figures are from Government Expenditure Plan Reports

As regards the privatisation of the nuclear industry (which included both AEA Technology, and British Energy respectively) arrangements at the time included provision for debts to be included in the privatised companies balance sheets and for those debts to be paid back to the Government at fixed periods.

Turning to the non-fossil fuel obligation (NFFO), this obliged electricity suppliers to buy a certain proportion of their electricity from non-fossil sources (nuclear and renewables). Nuclear Electric plc received a premium over and above the market price for electricity in the period 1990–96, as follows:

£ million

Year	*Premium income*
1990–91	1,265
1991–92	798
1992–93	864
1993–94	895
1994–95	892
1995–96	699

These additional costs incurred by electricity suppliers in meeting their NFFO obligations were reimbursed through the fossil fuel levy on electricity supplied in England and Wales.

BNFL, as a commercial company, does not receive investment capital from Government, although Ministers have provided assurances from time to time in respect of the Government's willingness to accept responsibility for any future liabilities which might arise.

The costs of UK NIREX are met by subscriptions from its members (UKAEA, BNFL, British Energy).

Financial Aid

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the total amount of public money given to support *(a)* farming, *(b)* the steel industry and *(c)* all manufacturing industries in each of the last 10 years. [13718]

Mr. Wilson: The primary responsibility for farming support rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I understand from colleagues that information on public expenditure under the Common Agricultural Policy and on national grants and subsidies is contained in the publication "Agriculture in the UK", and that copies of this publication are available in the Library of the House. My Department provides support for farming under the small firms loan guarantee scheme. The amounts paid against claims relating to farming under the guarantee since 1991 are as follows:

Year	*Amount paid (£)*
1991	nil
1992	37,336.41
1993	15,671.86
1994	94,179.59
1995	219,391.52
1996	242,017.49
1997	228,727.59
1998	131,508.71
1999	19,947.17
2000	39,647.41
2001	nil to date
Total	1,028,427.75

The provision of state aid to steel companies which produce products covered by the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) treaty is governed by the Steel Aid Code of the treaty. This code permits aid, only in limited circumstances, for research and development, environmental protection and the permanent closure (not rescue) of a steel company. The only instance of aid to a company covered by the treaty was in the mid-nineties when British Steel was provided with aid of around £180,000 towards a research and development project under the Link programme. Further details on aid to this industry could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Department currently spends around £1 billion a year in support for business of which a very significant proportion directly and indirectly benefits manufacturing industry. Because of the wide-ranging nature of DTI support quantifying the exact proportion of public money given to support particular industries (e.g. manufacturing or farming) in each of the last 10 years would raise problems of definition and would also incur disproportionate cost.

End of Life Vehicles Directive

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the cost implications of the End of Life Vehicles Directive for car manufacturers; and if she will make a statement. [13884]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 159W.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the implications of the End of Life Vehicles Directive; and if she will make a statement. [13883]

Mr. Wilson: The Directive is complex, with implications for car and component manufacturers, importers, dismantlers, shredders, materials reprocessors,

and car owners. The DTI consultation paper on options for implementing the Directive, which included a partial regulatory impact assessment, had resulted in around 100 responses by the closing date of 2 November. These responses are now being assessed, and will be taken into account when deciding on the precise method of implementation.

Structural Funding

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* amount and *(b)* proportion of overall EU objective 1 budget for the UK has been (i) committed and (ii) spent according to the latest records in each of the four objective 1 regions. [14452]

Alan Johnson: The figures in the table are the latest available commitments and payments made under the EU structural funds for each of the objective 1 regions. Payments under the programmes lag behind commitments because the fund regulations require ERDF expenditure to be defrayed before it is claimed. ESF projects may receive an advance payment at the beginning of the project but subsequent ESF payments take place after expenditure has been defrayed.

The management of the objective 1 programme for West Wales and the Valleys is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. However, I understand from the National Assembly that the figures for this region are as set out in the table.

Region	*Committed grant (£ million)*	*Spent grant (£ million)*	*Proportion of regional objective 1 budget (Percentage)*
Cornwall and the Scilly Isles	60	5.98	19.53/1.95
Merseyside	164.73	30.68	20.14/3.75
South Yorkshire	92.5	13.046	12.86/1.81
West Wales and the Valleys	260	30.4	24/2.7

Equal Pay

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many equal value claims have failed for being over the six-month time limit rule since the Equal Pay Act 1963 became law. [14287]

Alan Johnson: It would not be possible to provide the number of equal value claims that have failed for being over the six month time limit rule since the Equal Pay Act became law.

Such information is not available from the Employment Tribunals Service database, which only records the outcome of each case and not the reasons for the outcome.

Source:

Employment Tribunals Service

Photovoltaic Energy

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement about the sale price of photovoltaic energy for national grid purposes; and how this price compares with those in other EU member states. [14372]

Mr. Wilson: In our liberalised energy market, the price paid to generators for electricity, including electricity from photovoltaics (PV), is a matter for negotiation between the generator and the supplier, and is subject to market fluctuation. We therefore have only limited and anecdotal information about prices paid to generators for PV energy. The best price recently mentioned to the Department has been 6.5p per kilowatt hour paid by a company offering a "net metering" deal, that is a deal in which the supplier buys PV energy from generators at the same price that they would charge them for electricity purchases. The best price obtainable at any time will vary with the market.

Some European countries have taken steps to encourage net metering, and some, notably Germany and Spain, have gone further by legislating for the utilities to pay renewable generators a premium price for all the electricity they wish to export to the network. In the case of PV, this is about 33p per kilowatt hour in Germany and 25p per kilowatt hour in Spain.

The Government are encouraging the uptake of PV in the UK through both domestic and large-scale field trials, soon to be followed by a major PV demonstration programme to rival the German and Japanese PV roofs programme. It is also working to overcome infrastructural barriers through simplified grid-connection, fairer tariffs and more positive planning guidance.

Employment Tribunal Claims

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the number of employment tribunal claims in the last five years; and what steps her Department is taking to reduce the extent of non-compliance with regulations by employers. [14374]

Alan Johnson: The number of applications were:

1996–97: 88,961

1997–98: 80,435

1998–99: 91,913

1999–2000: 103,935

2000–01: 130,408.

The Employment Bill, introduced in Parliament on 7 November 2001, aims to reduce recourse to employment tribunals through a better understanding of employment rights and responsibilities. In particular, the Bill will set new minimum standards for dealing with workplace disputes and a penalty on employers for failure to comply with the requirement to provide a written statement of employment particulars. The changes will be supported by advice and guidance to help employers meet the requirements of the law.

Routes to Resolution

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the responses received to her consultation document, "Routes to Resolution". [14373]

Alan Johnson: The respondents to the "Routes to Resolution: Improving Dispute Resolution in Britain" consultation are listed in Annexe B of "Routes to Resolution—the Government Response" issued on 8 November 2001. A copy is lodged in the House of

Commons Library. The text is also available on the DTI website at www.dti.gov.uk/er/individual/etresponse.pdf. Copies of individual responses are held in the DTI and House of Commons Libraries. I am grateful to those who responded.

WALES

Bus Travel

8. **Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about co-ordinating measures to facilitate bus travel for pensioners and the disabled. [12474]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Secretary on a regular basis and discuss a range of issues, including transport.

As the Prime Minister stated during his address to the Assembly, policy on concessionary travel was made in Wales and is now being extended to England.

27. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about measures to facilitate bus travel for pensioners and the disabled. [12495]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend meets the First Secretary on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues, including transport.

As the Prime Minister stated during his address to the Assembly, policy on concessionary travel was made in Wales and is now being extended to England.

From 1 April this year free passes have been available to pensioners and disabled passengers guaranteeing at least 50 per cent. concessions on local buses, a move estimated to have benefited some 600,000 pensioners and disabled passengers. From 1 April 2002 these passes will guarantee free local bus travel for pensioners and disabled people.

A Bill is currently progressing in the House of Commons to equalise the entitlement to concessionary travel for men and women at the age of 60. It is estimated it will bring to some 8 million nationwide the number of people who benefit from the Government's statutory requirements for travel concessions, including some 75,000 men in Wales. It is currently planned to introduce these measures in England in April 2003. The Assembly will have its own commencement powers and could introduce earlier if it wished.

Special Educational Needs

10. **Patrick Mercer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales concerning the influx from English border areas of pupils with special needs into north Wales schools. [12476]

Mr. Touhig: Although my right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with the First Secretary to discuss a range of issues relating to educational provision in Wales, the influx from English border areas of pupils with special needs into north Wales schools has not been raised.

I am, however, aware that the National Assembly for Wales places a high priority on achieving the best possible opportunities for children with special educational needs in order to give them a rewarding school life and to equip them for adult life.

Manufacturing Employment

11. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about levels of manufacturing employment in Wales. [12477]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Secretary regularly to discuss a range of issues, including manufacturing employment in Wales. Some 7,500 jobs have been announced in the manufacturing sector in Wales in the past 12 months. This is particularly welcome in the context of severe losses in the steel sector.

Objective 1

12. **Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Treasury with regard to the Government's policy on the provision of investment aid in the west Wales and the valleys objective 1 programme area; and if he will make a statement. [12478]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet Treasury colleagues regularly to discuss a variety of issues.

All representations in advance of the 2002 Budget will be considered carefully in the normal way.

Health (Waiting Lists)

13. **Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary for Health and Social Services in the National Assembly regarding the number of people waiting for treatment in Wales. [12479]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet regularly with the National Assembly First Minister and Health Minister to discuss a range of issues including the number of people waiting for treatment.

Crime

15. **Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the measures taken by the Government to tackle crime in Wales. [12482]

16. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the measures taken by the Government to tackle crime in Wales. [12483]

26. **Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the measures taken by Government to tackle crime in Wales. [12494]

Mr. Touhig: The Government's partnership approach to fighting crime is making a significant difference in communities across Wales. With funding running into millions of pounds, local crime and disorder reduction partnerships are implementing projects targeted at crime hotspots, domestic violence and drug related crime. Much

of this funding is being channelled specifically into the most deprived communities and is going a long way towards building safer and more inclusive communities.

QinetiQ (Aberporth)

17. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with Government and National Assembly Secretaries regarding the future of QinetiQ, Aberporth. [12484]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet both Government and Assembly Ministers regularly to discuss a range of issues.

The Government have provided funding for the September 2001 apprentice intake at Aberporth. Future arrangements for apprentices at QinetiQ sites depend on the Ministry of Defence review of Ranges and Test Evaluation provision. The MOD expects to have agreed a procurement strategy for this business by the end of the year.

Wrexham Incinerator

18. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with members of the Assembly about the proposed Wrexham incinerator and its potential cross-border effect on English constituencies. [12485]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have had no direct discussion on this subject with Assembly Members as any planning proposal is a matter for the relevant local authority and the National Assembly for Wales.

I understand that the Assembly has received a number of requests for the planning application to be called in and consideration is currently being given to these requests. The Assembly's approach is not to interfere with a local planning authority's jurisdiction unless an application involves planning issues of more than local importance.

Livestock Movements

19. **Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the operation of the autumn movement of livestock scheme in Wales. [12486]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular meetings with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on a wide range of issues, which have of course included matters related to foot and mouth disease. I understand that in respect of this scheme there is close and effective operational liaison between the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the National Assembly.

Manufacturing Industry

20. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received concerning the future of manufacturing industry in Wales. [12487]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet, visit and correspond regularly with representatives of the Welsh manufacturing industry. Some 7,500 jobs have been announced in the manufacturing sector in Wales in the past 12 months. This is particularly welcome in the context of severe losses in the steel sector.

New Deal

21. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the operation of the new deal in Wales. [12488]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The new deal has been a success story in Wales. 81,500 people in Wales have benefited from the scheme so far and 42 per cent. of those have now found jobs. Since the launch of the scheme in Wales there has been a 68 per cent. fall in the number of 18 to 24-year-olds claiming jobseeker's allowance for six months or more and the number of people over 25 claiming jobseeker's allowance for two years or more has fallen by 45 per cent.

Further and Higher Education

22. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary concerning further and higher education in north-east Wales. [12489]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have had a number of meetings and discussions recently to discuss education in Wales. These discussions have included the provision of higher education.

The Assembly's Education and Lifelong Learning Committee is conducting a comprehensive policy review of higher education in Wales, to inform a 10-year strategy for the sector. The review's findings are expected later this year.

Barnett Formula

23. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the operation of the Barnett formula relating to health provision. [12490]

Mr. Touhig: The operation of the Barnett formula has no direct effect on health provision in Wales. Therefore, I have not discussed this with the First Minister.

Farmers Assistance

24. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding extra funds for the National Assembly for Wales to assist those farmers in Wales suffering losses resulting from animal movement restrictions and poor trading conditions. [R] [12491]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a number of issues.

I welcome the re-establishment of Welsh lamb and beef in domestic markets, and the recent announcement that the export of sheep and goat meat can resume from parts of Wales. The Government have extended the Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme in order to pre-empt problems arising this winter for lambs that would, under normal trading conditions, be sold and moved off farms.

I understand that the Assembly is making strenuous efforts to deal with both long-term issues in Welsh agriculture and the current difficulties affecting the market and farmers' incomes this autumn. Both the Assembly and

the Welsh Development Agency stand ready to assist the livestock industry with marketing and processing grants for viable projects.

School Transport

25. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the First Secretary of the National Assembly to discuss the legal obligations placed on local authorities relating to home-to-school transport. [12492]

Mr. Touhig: I have written to the Assembly Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning on this matter, with particular reference to the issues raised by my hon. Friend in the debate on Transport to School, on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 243–50WH. Local education authorities (LEAs) have a statutory duty to decide how best to meet their home to school transport obligations. LEAs are obliged to provide free transport to the nearest school for pupils under eight-years-old who live more than two miles from the school, and for pupils above the age of eight who live more than three miles from the school.

Small Businesses

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent meetings he has had with UK Government Departments to represent the interests of small businesses in Wales. [12469]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet my colleagues in UK Government Departments regularly to discuss a range of issues, including small businesses in Wales.

Violent Crime

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary about tackling violent crime in Wales. [12480]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend meets regularly with the Home Secretary to discuss a range of issues affecting Wales.

The Government are committed to increasing the reporting and recording of violent crime. Violent crime represents a relatively small proportion of crime, but it is recognised that it includes those crimes that cause people most concern.

We have put in place a comprehensive package of measures to combat violent crime which is set out in "Fighting Violent Crime Together", published earlier this year.

TREASURY

Departmental Spending (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the expenditure by his Department in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02 and *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) was allocated with reference to the index of multiple deprivation; which expenditure programmes are allocated with respect to this index and other measures of relative geographic deprivation; and if he will make a statement. [8935]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* HM Treasury has had a modest programme budget, none of which is allocated with reference to the indices of multiple deprivation.

Impounded Vehicles

Mr. Heath: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance is given to Customs and Excise officials on the *(a)* impounding and *(b)* disposal of impounded vehicles used to breach personal allowances for tobacco and alcohol; and if he will make a statement. [14076]

Mr. Boateng: The Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, section 141(1)(a), allows Customs to seize vehicles that have been used for the transport of anything liable to seizure. As part of the tackling tobacco strategy, and following recommendations from Martin Taylor, the independent tobacco evaluator, Customs strengthened their approach to anyone using vehicles to smuggle goods including alcohol and tobacco.

Seized vehicles are stored until condemnation proceedings are completed giving Customs the legal right to dispose of them as they see fit. Customs will dispose of the vehicles in a cost-effective manner most beneficial to the UK Exchequer.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sites are used to store vehicles impounded by Customs and Excise officials on the grounds that they were being used to breach personal allowances for the importation of tobacco and alcohol; and if he will make a statement. [14075]

Mr. Boateng: A number of sites are used around the UK. These are made available as part of the contract arrangements Customs has in place to provide storage facilities for both vehicles and goods. For security reasons the specific details of these sites cannot be disclosed.

Staff Shortages

Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 202W, how many instances have been brought to his attention by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise where appeals and reviews have been cancelled owing to staff shortages. [14276]

Mr. Boateng: Customs endeavour to complete all reviews within the statutory period of 45 days. Where for any reason they cannot do so, such as at particularly busy periods, section 15(2) of the Finance Act 1994 states that if Customs do not carry out the review within the 45 days from when the review was required they shall be assumed to have confirmed the decision. Where Customs cannot complete a review within the statutory period, the appellant still has the right to go to a tribunal.

Automotive Fuel

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax was raised in each year since 1997 from the retail sale of automotive fuel. [14011]

Mr. Boateng: The information is not available.

Motor Vehicles (Tax Income)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax was raised in each year since 1997 from *(a)* the sale, maintenance and repair of motorcycles and related parts and accessories, *(b)* the sale of motor vehicle parts and accessories, *(c)* the maintenance and repair of motor vehicles and *(d)* the sale of motor vehicles. [14012]

Mr. Boateng: The estimated amount of VAT raised from the maintenance and repair, including parts and accessories, of motor vehicles and motorcycles since 1997 is:

Year	*£ billion*
1997	1.7
1998	1.9
1999	2.0
2000	2.0

It is not possible to estimate the Government's income from VAT on the sale of motor vehicles and motorcycles except at disproportionate cost.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the growth of public sector pay in 2001 on the level of public expenditure. [14212]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Public sector pay costs have been accommodated within the agreed public spending totals, in accordance with normal prices.

Civil Service Pay Negotiations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on *(a)* public expenditure and *(b)* recruitment and retention within the civil service of the devolution to individual Government Departments and agencies of responsibility for pay negotiations. [14213]

Mr. Andrew Smith: On public expenditure, the position continues to be that Departments are expected to meet pay costs from within their public spending allocations. The flexibilities under the delegations allow Departments to structure their pay arrangements to meet their own particular circumstances and requirements, including dealing more effectively with recruitment and retention issues.

Afghanistan

Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact on public expenditure on non-military priorities of the commitment to military expenditure in the conflict in Afghanistan. [14257]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Chancellor has made it clear that the Government will meet the costs of measures related to our response to international terrorism, while continuing to deliver our spending plans within the fiscal rules.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Watts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Treasury is taking to monitor the impact of the climate change levy on *(a)* manufacturing industry and *(b)* the service sector; and if he will publish the results. [14333]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy package is broadly revenue neutral for services and manufacturing but the impact on any specific sector will depend on a number of factors, including:

- The future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support.
- Employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded reductions in employers' National Insurance Contributions.
- The number of energy intensive firms in that sector that are eligible to receive a discount on the main rates of the levy by signing up to an energy efficiency agreement.
- What use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy exempt sources such as new renewables and combined heat and power.

As with all taxation, we will monitor revenue and sectoral impacts. Revenue receipts are published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to exclude the nuclear power industry from the climate change levy. [14138]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy is designed to encourage energy efficiency across the business and public sectors and to increase the use of sustainable forms of energy. The Government have no plans to exclude the nuclear power industry from the levy.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of the climate change levy is paid by engineering; and if he will estimate the percentage of economic output produced by engineering; [14431]

(2) if the climate change levy is revenue neutral for the engineering sector. [14424]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy is designed to be broadly revenue neutral across both the manufacturing and service sectors. The impact of the levy on any particular sector will be determined by a number of factors, including

- The future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support.
- Employment levels in the sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded National Insurance contribution cuts.
- The number of energy intensive firms in the sector that are eligible to receive a discount on the main rates of the levy by signing up to an energy efficiency agreement.
- What use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy exempt "new" renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power.

On the most recently available figures, engineering represents an estimated 6 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many firms have paid corporation tax at no more than the 10p rate in each year since its introduction. [14421]

Dawn Primarolo: It is too early to say. The 10p rate was introduced from the 2000–01 tax year, and small companies do not have to pay their corporation tax until nine months after the end of their accounting periods. But we estimate that about 150,000 corporation tax payers will be at 10 per cent. (with a further 150,000 paying at an average rate between 10 per cent. and 20 per cent.).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to simplify the administration of corporation tax. [14422]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keep the whole tax system under review, acting where possible to change tax rules to minimise burdens on business, while still meeting the Government's objectives for a fair and efficient tax system. The administration of corporation tax is one of a number of areas covered by current or recent reviews.

Regulation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce targets for reducing the number of regulations issued by his Department over the next four years. [14429]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's policy is to regulate only when necessary, ensuring that regulations are fair and effective, so that they protect the vulnerable but do not stifle competitiveness or productivity.

New processes including the Regulatory Reform Act give us powerful tools to help cut down over-complex, over-lapping and over-burdensome regulatory regimes.

The Prime Minister has asked all Whitehall Departments to identify by the end of this year areas of legislation that are ripe for reform under this and other procedures. A Government-wide action plan will then be published containing firm commitments to specific reforms and initiatives which will aid both business and the public sector.

The Chancellor's Departments (along with Department's across Government) continue to explore ways of reducing regulatory burdens. There are no plans to introduce targets for reducing the number of regulations issued.

Income Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the level of higher rate taxation as a factor in attracting senior management to the UK *(a)* public and *(b)* private sectors. [14426]

Dawn Primarolo: We are pledged not to raise the top rate of tax in this Parliament. It is 40 per cent. and compares favourably with our competitors' equivalent rates.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce new anti-avoidance measures in respect of stamp duty. [14439]

Ruth Kelly: The Government regularly review the adequacy of legislation to counter avoidance of all taxes, including stamp duty.

Pension Credit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from interest groups representing the elderly regarding *(a)* the marginal tax rate in the pension credit and *(b)* the pension credit savings limit. [14445]

Dawn Primarolo: Treasury Ministers receive a wide range of representations on a variety of issues.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions regarding pre-Budget representations received from interest groups representing the elderly concerning the pension credit. [14446]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor of the Exchequer meets regularly with Cabinet colleagues to discuss a wide range of issues.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been raised on insurance premium tax in each year since May 1997. [14394]

Ruth Kelly: Figures for receipts of insurance premium tax are shown in the Office for National Statistics publication "Financial Statistics".

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been raised by the abolition of tax relief on private medical insurance in each year since its abolition. [14393]

Ruth Kelly: Annual estimates of the yield from the abolition of tax relief on premiums for private medical insurance for the over-60s were given in the July 1997 Financial Statement and Budget Report (FSBR). No further estimates have been made.

Employee Share Ownership

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was raised in the last financial year from penalties imposed on firms where employees have cashed in employee share ownership schemes too early. [14442]

Ruth Kelly: No penalties are imposed on firms, but employees may be liable to tax and national insurance contributions on shares granted under the share incentive plan if they withdraw from the plan early. Returns have only just been received from companies reflecting their first year's operation of the plan, so it is too early to estimate the amounts which may be involved.

Prospectus Directive

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has made to the European Commission regarding the proposed Prospectus Directive. [14405]

Ruth Kelly: The Economic and Finance Council of Ministers discussed the risk capital action plan, of which the proposed Prospectus Directive is a part, on 6 November. The United Kingdom argued that substantial

work on the directive is required to deliver the risk capital action plan's objectives to increase the availability of risk capital in the EU.

HM Treasury is in regular contact with all levels of the Commission, and has communicated the United Kingdom Government's reservations about the directive, as currently drafted, on many occasions.

Hawala

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action is being taken to bring the Hawala exchange system within the scope of his new arrangements to combat the funding of international terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [14382]

Ruth Kelly: On Monday 12 November, regulations came into force to give Customs new powers to enter and inspect money service businesses, including Hawala, Hundi and other alternative remittance agents, to ensure that they are compliant with the 1993 Money Laundering Regulations. Where they find a breach of these regulations, Customs will be able to prosecute.

Share Incentive Plan

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of how employee share ownership can be encouraged in sectors of the economy with relatively high employee turnover. [14441]

Ruth Kelly: The share incentive plan and enterprise management incentives introduced in Finance Act 2000 were developed on the basis of extensive consultation. This ensured the design of both was flexible to enable companies in all sectors, including those with relatively high employee turnover, to adapt the schemes to suit their particular needs. For the share incentive plan companies can set a qualifying period of service for employees to benefit from the plan. They can also include forfeiture and pre-emption conditions if they wish.

The new plans are being closely monitored to assess how far they are meeting the needs of companies of all sizes and sectors.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on, and what plans he has to reduce, the qualifying period for SIPs. [14440]

Ruth Kelly: The share incentive plan was introduced to encourage greater share ownership among employees. Employees must retain their shares in the plan for five years to earn full exemption from tax and national insurance contributions. We have received one representation to reduce this period from five to three years. This would work against the aim of encouraging employees to retain shares in the company they work for over the long term, and it would be costly in terms of tax forgone.

There is no requirement for companies to set a qualifying period of service before employees may benefit from the plan although they may do so if they wish, up to a maximum of 18 months.

Occupational Pension Funds Directive

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has made to the European Commission regarding the proposed directive on occupational pension funds. [14404]

Ruth Kelly: The Economic and Finance Council of Ministers discussed the proposed directive on the activities of institutions for occupational retirement provision on 6 May, *Official Report*, 10 May 2001, column 284W. Ministers agreed that further work was required. Ecofin on 16 October noted a Presidency report on progress on the draft directive, *Official Report*, 24 October 2001, column 260W.

Labour Supply

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects of national insurance rates on the supply of labour. [14388]

Dawn Primarolo: Reducing national insurance contributions for those on low incomes forms part of the Government's strategy to make work pay. As a result of reforms since 1997, around 1 million lower paid employees have been taken out of having to pay NICs altogether. Cautious estimates show that labour supply has increased by around 160,000 people as a result of the entire package of measures to make work pay since 1997, including the reductions in income tax and national insurance contributions as well as working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit.

Taxation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of the combined burden of taxation on motoring is borne by industry; [14418]

(2) what percentage of the total tax burden was borne by business in each year since May 1997. [14433]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested is not available.

Manufacturing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many manufacturing jobs have been lost since April. [14392]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated 14 November 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the reduction in the number of manufacturing jobs since April (14392).

The table below shows the number of employee jobs in manufacturing for April and August 2001 for comparative purposes.

UK	*Thousand*[1]
April 2001	3,864
August 2001	3,805
Change between April and August 2001	[2]–59

[1] Seasonally adjusted
[2] –1.5 per cent.

These estimates are based on the results of regular sample surveys of employers which count the number of employee jobs. The data are published in Statbase on the National Statistics website www.statistics.gov.uk./statbase/tsdataset.asp?vlnk=342 under series identifier YEJL.

Mortality Statistics

Helen Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people died from *(a)* meningitis and *(b)* carbon monoxide poisoning, excluding suicides, in each of the last four years. [14407]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Helen Jackson, dated 14 November 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent about the number of people died from (a) meningitis and (b) carbon monoxide poisoning, excluding suicides in each of the last four years (14407).

The data are included in the table below.

Number of deaths in England and Wales from meningitis and carbon monoxide poisoning (excluding suicides), persons, all ages, 1997–2000[1]

Calendar year	*Meningitis*	*Carbon monoxide poisoning (excluding suicide)*
1997	466	156
1998	426	150
1999	399	135
2000	405	118

[1] Cause of death in these years was coded to the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision (ICD9)

Notes:

The codes used to define the terms used in the table are as follows:
Meningitis—ICD9 underlying cause codes 036, 320–322
Carbon monoxide poisoning—ICD9 nature of injury code 986
Suicide—ICD9 underlying cause codes E950-E959, E980-E989 excluding E988.8

Source:

ONS

Freedom of Information Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date his Department established a working group of officials to prepare his Department for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and on what dates this committee has met since it was set up. [14777]

Ruth Kelly: A working group was set up in October to co-ordinate preparations for the Freedom of Information Act. The first meeting of the group will be on 30 November.

Working Hours

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 154W, on excessive working hours, if he will place in the Library the results from the aggregated data for every sub annual period since the data was first collected; if he will place a greater level of detail on his methodology in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [14833]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested by the hon. Member has been deposited in the Library.

Pensions

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met trade union representatives to discuss *(a)* miners' pension issues and *(b)* pension funds surpluses; and if he will make a statement. [13514]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* Treasury Ministers meet regularly with a wide range of groups of people to discuss a variety of topics.

Professional Contractors Group

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many meetings he has had with the Professional Contractors Group in the last 12 months. [14852]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 128W.

IR35 (Training Provision)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on how IR35 will affect training provision for IT contractors; and what new incentives are available to increase this training; [14855]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on IT contractors' training provision of *(a)* the introduction of IR35 and *(b)* the ending of individual learning accounts. [14854]

Dawn Primarolo: Employees who pay for their own training are not in general entitled to a tax deduction for this expense. Individuals affected by the 'service company' legislation are in a similar position. However they are entitled to an additional 5 per cent. flat rate deduction for expenses on top of all the other expenses normally available to an employee, which they can use to provide for their training needs if they so wish. The withdrawal of individual learning accounts has had the same effect on all individuals previously eligible for them, and service company workers are not affected any differently from anybody else.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the DFES regarding the decision to end individual learning accounts, with specific reference to training for IT contractors. [14853]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor of the Exchequer meets regularly with his Cabinet colleagues to discuss a wide range of issues.

Income Tax (Pensioners)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people over the age of 65 years pay income tax. [14944]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to "Inland Revenue Statistics", table 2.1. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats.

Double Taxation Conventions

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will submit to the House the double taxation conventions that the Government recently concluded with Jordan and Lithuania; and if he will make a statement. [15464]

Dawn Primarolo: The conventions with Jordan and Lithuania were signed on 22 July and 19 March respectively. The texts of the conventions with Jordan and Lithuania have each been published today as a schedule to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House. After signature the texts were deposited in the Library of the House and made available on the Inland Revenue's website.

National Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures indicating the effective upper earnings limit on the equivalent of national insurance contributions for each EU member state in the latest year for which figures are available. [14390]

Dawn Primarolo: Information and details about the social security contributions systems of other EU member states, and more generally about other OECD member countries, is published annually in the OECD publication "Taxing Wages". A copy of this publication is available from the House of Commons Library.

Tax/National Insurance Receipts

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the receipts of *(a)* income tax, *(b)* corporation tax and *(c)* national insurance for November and December and January 2002. [14300]

Dawn Primarolo: Forecasts of receipts on a monthly basis are not published.

Smuggling (Motor Fuel Products)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the fuel duty and VAT lost in each year since 1997 through the smuggling of motor fuel products into Northern Ireland. [14013]

Mr. Boateng: Updated estimates will be presented in the forthcoming pre-Budget report.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ministerial Visit (Pakistan)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whom she met and what discussions she had during her recent visit to Pakistan. [12908]

Clare Short: I visited Pakistan from 17 to 19 October. My statement on 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 284–85, reported on the discussions I had there.

I met President Musharraf, Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz and the Ministers of Health, Education, Northern Areas and Women's Affairs. I met the Governor of the North West Frontier Province and some of his ministers and senior officials. I had informal discussions with local representatives of NGOs, including SCF, Oxfam, CARE and the Iranian Red Cross; and with representatives of the UN agencies. I also had a meeting with the US Ambassador. In Peshawar, I visited the World Food Programme office and food distribution depot.

Caribbean

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will set out the conclusions her Department reached in its examination of further support to the CARICOM-sponsored regional plan for tackling HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean; and if she will make a statement. [14412]

Clare Short: We have confirmed our readiness to provide additional support to the regional HIV/AIDS action plan for the Caribbean, particularly in the key area of policy and advocacy support. CARICOM will be convening a meeting of all interested donors in St. Lucia this month to examine the most effective process for turning the action plan into reality.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will set out how the funding for the second phase of the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre Project has been allocated and itemise the purposes to which it has been applied, by island or territory. [14416]

Clare Short: DFID support for the second Phase of the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) project is geared towards the Prevention and Control of AIDS and Sexually transmitted diseases in the Caribbean (£713,564). Specific outputs include:

(a) improved HIV/AIDS/CSTD case management in Caribbean member countries which aims to improve the quality of STD diagnosis and treatment;

(b) the development and implementation of information, education and communication (IEC) interventions aimed at target groups;

(c) improved management of National AIDS programmes in participating Caribbean member countries; and

(d) implementation of sentinel surveillance for HIV, Syphilis and Hepatitis B in six Caribbean member countries.

We are considering a further project with CAREC designed to strengthen its effectiveness as an organisation to respond to the growing incidence of HIV/AIDS in the region.

Ivory Coast

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which *(a)* non-Governmental organisations and *(b)* charities the Government support in the Ivory Coast. [14073]

Clare Short: We are currently supporting the work of four non-governmental organisations in Côte d'Ivoire. Through our Small Grants Scheme we are helping to support the work of the World Wide Fund for Nature, Côte d'Ivoire Ecology, and Afrique Nature International. We are also supporting the work of Action on Disability and Development through the Civil Society Challenge Fund (CSCF).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ethnic Minority Staff

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the second annual report on progress on his race equality employment targets for ethnic minority staff in his Department and its service areas. [15465]

Angela Eagle: I have today published a report entitled "Race Equality—The Home Secretary's Employment Targets—The Second Annual Report on Progress". Copies have been placed in the Library. The targets cover recruitment, retention and career progression for minority ethnic staff in the Home Office, the prison, the police, the fire and the probation services.

Amarjit Singh

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the case of Mr. Amarjit Singh, stating for what reason he has been detained. [12297]

Angela Eagle: I wrote to my hon. Friend about this matter on 14 November.

Downview Prison

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners there were at HMP Downview on 26 October; and, of these, how many were *(a)* UK and *(b)* Jamaican citizens convicted of trafficking in illegal drugs. [11935]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* On the morning of 26 October 2001, there were 130 female prisoners at Downview prison, rising to 140 by the end of the day. A breakdown of nationality and drug offence for that date is not held centrally. However, provisional data for the morning of 13 November 2001 show that there were 180 female prisoners in Downview prison. Of these, 13 United Kingdom (including prisoners from the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) and 28 Jamaican nationals were imprisoned for importing/exporting or conspiring to import/export drugs. The population of each prison is shown in the monthly prison population brief available on http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds.

Government Bunkers

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the former Government bunkers sold to private purchasers since 1990. [13413]

Mr. Blunkett: Following the decision of the then Home Secretary in 1992, the Home Office has sold Regional Government Headquarters (RGHQ) bunkers at the following addresses to private purchasers:

1. Shipton by Beningbrough, Near York, North Yorkshire
2. Alemouth Road, Hexham, Northumberland
3. Skendleby, Near Spilsby, Lincolnshire
4. Buder Street, Loughborough, Leicestershire
5. Watton Road, Bawburgh, Near Norwich, Norfolk
6. Day's Lane, Biddenham, Bedford, Bedfordshire
7. Keveldon Hall Lane, Keveldon Hatch, Near Brentwood, Essex
8. RAF Chilmark, Near Salisbury, Wiltshire
9. Crown Building, Soar Gull Perch, Hope Cove, Devon
10. Borras Park Road, Wrexham, North Wales
11. Brackla Tunnels, Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan
12. Longly Lane, Goosnargh, Preston, Lancashire
13. French Lane, Hack Green, Near Nantwich, Cheshire.

Correspondence

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Putney will receive a substantive reply to his letter of 8 October, for which he received an acknowledgement on 7 November, on behalf of his constituent Ms Karen Devlin. [14371]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend Lord Rooker has now replied to my hon. Friend.

Nationality Applications

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for British nationality are under consideration by his Department. [13931]

Angela Eagle: I regret that statistics on the number of British nationality applications under consideration are not available.

Since April this year, all new cases are initiated as soon as they arrive. The vast majority of cases awaiting a decision are already in progress, and we aim to start all remaining cases by March 2002. This means that the queue of applications waiting to be considered is getting shorter.

Security Service

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the extra cost to the Security Service of activities in connection with events following the 11 September terrorist attacks; and if this cost will be met from the existing Security Service budget. [14078]

Mr. Blunkett: It has long been the policy of this and previous Governments not to comment on the individual budgets of the Security and Intelligence agencies. The impact of the terrorist attacks on 11 September is being taken into account in considering the Security Service budget.

Prison Education

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison education departments have obtained a Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark. [13958]

Beverley Hughes: Forty-eight prison education departments have obtained the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark to date.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners have achieved *(a)* Entry Level Wordpower and Numberpower and *(b)* Level One Wordpower and Numberpower since December 1996; [13959]

(2) how many prisoners have successfully completed the *(a)* Basic Skills Test in Life Skills, *(b)* Social and Life Skills Programme and *(c)* Oxford and Cambridge Board Diploma in Achievement. [13956]

Beverley Hughes: The table shows the number of individual qualifications achieved in various categories since April 2000. Statistical returns allow some desegregation but do not contain separate figures for the Oxford and Cambridge Diploma. We do not recognise Basic Skills Test in Life Skills as a "qualification".

Subject type and the number of qualifications achieved

Subject type and level	*Qualifications achieved*
Entry level—WordPower	621
Level 1—WordPower	1,007
Entry level—NumberPower	359
Level 1—NumberPower	653
Basic skills test in life skills	—
Social and life skills programme	2,644
Oxford and Cambridge board diploma in achievement	—

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will state the names of contractors *(a)* providing prison education and *(b)* who have failed to reach the minimum standard required by the quality monitoring and assessment procedure; and what the grades obtained by each of them were; [13961]

(2) how many contracts for providing prison education have been withdrawn because contractors failed to reach the standards required for consideration in the re-tendering process since 1997. [13955]

Beverley Hughes: December 1988 marked the end of the first five-year tendering period. In April 1997, there were 45 prison education providers. Following completion of the re-tendering exercise the number was reduced to 28 in 1999. The existing contractors are set out in the table. No contracts have been withdrawn since the re-tendering exercise.

The newly founded Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit located in Department for Education and Skills will be reviewing the funding, procurement and delivery of prison education. The review will draw up a comprehensive improvement strategy which will include the dissemination of existing good practice. It will also challenge and support establishments where education provision gives cause for concern. The unit is leading a review of the present contracting arrangements for that provision.

Education providers/contractors and prison establishments

Company	*Establishments*
Amersham and Wycombe College	Aylesbury, Belmarsh, Brixton, Cookham Wood, Elmley Grendon/Spring Hill, Holloway, Pentonville, Rochester, Standford Hill, Swaleside, Wandsworth, Wormwood Scrubs
Beverley College	Full Sutton, Wakefield
Blackpool and The Fylde College	Kirkham, Preston
City College, Manchester	Ashwell, Askham Grange, Hatfield, Haverigg, Leeds, Lindholme, Liverpool, Manchester, Moorland, New Hall, Risley, Stocken, Stoke Heath, Styal, Wealstun, Werrington, Wetherby
CfBT Education Services	Huntercombe, Reading
Derby Tertiary College (Wilmorton)	Foston Hall, Sudbury
Dudley College	Birmingham, Brinsford, Brockhill, Featherstone, Hewell Grange, Nottingham, Ranby, Shrewsbury, Whatton
Evesham College	Long Lartin
Filton College	Eastwood Park, Gloucester
Gwent Tertiary College	Cardiff, Swansea, Usk/Prescoed
Highbury College	Haslar, Kingston, Winchester
Isle of Wight College	Albany, Camp Hill, Parkhurst
Kent Adult Education Service	Aldington, Blantyre House, Canterbury, Dover, East Sutton Park, Maidstone
Kingston Upon Hull Community Education Services	Everthorpe, Hull
Lancaster and Morecambe College	Lancaster, Lancaster Farms
Lewes Tertiary College	Lewes
Matthew Boulton College	Bedford, Gartree, Glen Parva, Leicester, Lincoln, Littlehey, Morton Hall, North Sea Camp, Onley, Wellingborough
Milton Keynes College	Bullingdon, The Mount, Woodhill
North East Surrey College of Training (NESCOT)	Coldingley, Downview, Feltham, Highdown, Send
New College, Durham	Acklington, Castington, Deerbolt, Durham, Frankland, Holme House, Low Newton, Northallerton
Northbrook College	Ford
Norwich City Centre	Blundeston, Bullwood Hall, Chelmsford, Highpoint, Hollesley Bay, Norwich, Wayland, Whitemoor
Richmond Upon Thames College	Latchmere House
Runshaw College	Garth, Wymott
Strode College	Bristol, Channings Wood, Dartmoor, Dorchester, Exeter, Portland, Shepton Mallet, The Verne, Weare
Tamworth and Lichfield College	Drake Hall, Stafford, Swinfen Hall
Trowbridge College	Erlestoke, Guys Marsh
Wigan and Leigh College	Hindley, Thorn Cross, Thorn Cross HIT

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners assessed as having literacy and numeracy skills below level two on entry to prison have achieved nationally accredited qualifications up to level two, since April 2000. [13957]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not available in the form requested. Data on prison education do not enable the tracking of individual prisoners. Figures do show that 21,319 prisoners have achieved nationally accredited basic skills qualifications up to level two, since

April 2000. The Prisoners' Learning and Skills unit located in the Department for Education and Skills is looking into ways of improving the collection of data on prison assessments, participation and achievement.

Prison Welfare-to-Work Programme

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisons operate welfare-to-work programmes. [13963]

Beverley Hughes: Currently, 11 establishments are delivering the Prison Service's welfare-to-work programme. They are: Cardiff, Deerbolt, Glen Parva, Guys Marsh, Lancaster Farms, Moorland, New Hall, Onley, Portland, Stoke Heath and Usk.

A number of other establishments provide similar pre-release programmes, often in partnership with voluntary sector organisations. For example, the Foundation Training Company delivers an employment training programme at Feltham, Chelmsford, Hollesley Bay, Highpoint and Norwich. The New Bridge provides a careers advice and jobfinding service in 17 establishments. The Headstart pre-release programme operates at Thorn Cross, Hindley and Risley. All of these programmes are geared to helping more prisoners into employment or the new deal on release as a contribution of reducing re-offending.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners have successfully completed the welfare to work programme in each year since its introduction. [13962]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service welfare-to-work programme began in April 1998. The available information on prisoners starting and successfully completing the programme is shown in the table.

	Number of prisoners:		
Period	*Starting the programme*	*Successfully completing the programme*	*Percentage of prisoners successfully completing the programme*
April 1998 to March 1999	2,428	1,625	67
April 1999 to March 2000	2,475	1,944	79
April 2000 to March 2001	1,766	1,476	84
April 2001 to September 2001	1,151	712	62

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the backlog of cases is in each division at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate; and what the waiting time is for naturalisation, from application to determination. [13632]

Angela Eagle: Statistics on the number of cases awaiting an initial decision in each division of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate are not currently available, with the exception of asylum applications, as these are subject to rigorous quality checks. The result of a physical count on 31 August 2001 showed that there were 43,100 asylum cases awaiting an initial decision.

Information on the average waiting time for naturalisations are not routinely published. The most recent published information relates to March 2001, when the average waiting time was 11.6 months.

One of the Government's Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets is to reduce the average time taken to grant citizenship (naturalisations and registrations) to six months by the end of 2001–02. It is expected that performance on this target will be reported on in due course after the end of this financial year.

Prison IT Systems

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prisons and *(b)* young offenders institutions use IT systems which have not been networked. [13960]

Beverley Hughes: All prisons have a varying degree of Information Technology (IT) provision. The existing provision has been driven by local policy and local, internal networking is quite common. Currently, across the Prison Service as a whole, there is basic e-mail provision. It has been recognised that the Prison Service needs a modern infrastructure with interlinkings. To this end, Her Majesty's Prison Service has entered into a contract, part of which has the requirement to provide the Service with a new infrastructure that will provide common services on a Service-wide network and enable Her Majesty's Prison Service to build an electronic interface with the wider Criminal Justice System. We are on the verge of beginning the implementation of this new infrastructure.

Consultation Documents

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many consultation documents were issued by his Department from *(a)* 15 October to 14 January, *(b)* 15 January to 14 April, *(c)* 15 April to 14 July and *(d)* 15 July to 14 October in each year from 1996. [12901]

Mr. Blunkett: My Department holds central records on issued consultations from 1997 for the Home Office, its non-departmental bodies and agencies. Between 1997 and 2000 the information is held by year of publication only. Determining all the details contained in the question would require access to archived records at a disproportionate cost. However in order to give the fullest reply I have listed the number of consultations published each year from 1997 to date.

Year	*Number of consultations issued*
1997	14
1998	23
1999	19
2000	28
2001	20

Details of all Home Office published consultations can be found on the website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/consultpapers.htm. Consultations published after January 2001 are also on the national register of consultations on http://www.ukonline.gov.uk.

PRIME MINISTER

Travel Costs (Concorde)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what was the cost of his travel on Concorde on 7 November; and if this was at a reduced rate. [13974]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* Since 1999 this Government have published a list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The information requested will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

All travel was undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code on Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Library.

US Visit

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister what is his estimate of the cost of his visit to the United States on 7 November; which officials and Ministers accompanied him; and if he will make a statement. [14140]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) today *Official Report*, column 783W.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

People's Panel

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the evaluation of the People's Panel will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* published. [15042]

Mr. Leslie: A first draft has been received. The final evaluation report will be completed in December and published in January 2002.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the People's Panel's contract with MORI expires. [15043]

Mr. Leslie: The contract with MORI expires at the end of January 2002.

Scottish Devolution

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is regarding consultations prior to the publication of proposals involving the transfer of powers to the Scottish Executive by *(a)* primary legislation and *(b)* Order in Council. [13819]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell) on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 91–94.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his most recent estimate is of the value of benefit fraud; and how much fraudulently obtained benefit has been repaid following detection in each year since 1997. [7470]

Malcolm Wicks: Our most recent estimate is that £2 billion is lost annually through benefit fraud. It is not possible to separate the total amount of overpaid benefit recovered into overpayments due to fraud and those due to other reasons.

Widows' Payments

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has better to publicise the time limit for making applications for widows' payments; [10825]

(2) what plans he has for relaxing the time limit for applications for widows' payments in circumstances where the applicant may be unable to make the application within the normal time limit because of ill health; and if he will make a statement. [10827]

Malcolm Wicks: We are sympathetic to the needs of the recently bereaved and understand that making a claim for bereavement benefits will not be the first priority for people in these circumstances. We believe the three month time limit for claiming bereavement benefits strikes the right balance between allowing people time to grieve and setting a reasonable and appropriate limit on the length of time within which a claim to benefit should be made. The three month time limit for making a claim was introduced in 1997 for the majority of Social Security benefits and we have no plans to change it.

Since March 2000 the Department has issued leaflets on the new bereavement benefits to doctors' surgeries, Post Offices and benefit advisers. Articles explaining the new benefits were placed in a variety of magazines prior to their introduction in April 2001. Claim forms for bereavement benefits also include a clear explanation that claims must be made within three months. In addition, the Registrar of Deaths automatically issues a form to the person registering the death which gives them the opportunity to make a claim for bereavement benefits.

Benefit Services (Performance Standards)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on how many occasions he has used his statutory powers to direct improved standards of performance following persistent failures to deliver acceptable benefit services; and in which local authority areas those powers have been exercised in the last three years. [12940]

Malcolm Wicks: Powers under the Social Security Administration Act 1992 were used to give directions to Northampton borough council in August 2000. In addition, powers under the Local Government Act 1999 were used to give directions in the London borough of Hackney in October 2001.

Employment Advisory Panel

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what projects will be undertaken by the Employment Advisory Panel; what its budget is; how many support staff it will have; to whom it will report; and when. [12942]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The National Employment Panel is an employer-led body which provides independent advice to Ministers on the design, delivery and performance of the UK Government's labour market policies and programmes. Its remit encompasses all the new deals and other welfare-to-work activities delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus and partner organisations at the national and local levels.

Projects will include a review to examine how effectively welfare-to-work programmes are addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged across the new deal programmes; a new skills sub-group to advise on links between welfare-to-work initiatives and work force development; and work to promote equal access to employment for ethnic minorities through a standing Minority Ethnic Advisory Group.

The National Employment Panel is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. It has a budget of £603,000 per annum. It is supported by 15 staff of whom two are funded by private employers.

The National Employment Panel reports on a regular basis to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The skills sub-group will report to the Minister responsible for adult skills, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey).

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much unpaid benefit is due in areas where Jobcentre Plus staff are undertaking strike action; and what his Department's estimate is of the amount of benefit that will be owed to claimants if strike action continues for *(a)* one week, *(b)* two weeks, *(c)* a month and *(d)* more than a month. [14225]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* Detailed contingency plans are in place to ensure that customers continue to receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

Performance Framework

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the principles which underlie the Performance Framework; in what ways it differs from the system of Best Value; and whether it will be piloted in local authority areas. [12939]

Malcolm Wicks: We are committed to a performance framework for the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB), aimed at driving up standards of administration and counter-fraud activity in all types of local authority. The proposed performance framework will include: national standards which make clear what local authorities are expected to deliver; measurement and inspection, so we know whether local authorities are delivering; and consideration of subsidy incentives that reward improved performance.

As a first step, we are defining national performance standards which build on and go beyond the measures established by Best Value but do not replace them. The standards are based on Benefit Fraud Inspectorate findings, Audit Commission observations and reports, National Audit Office reports and academic research. They define an effective and secure HB/CTB service—addressing strategic management; customer service; speed, accuracy and security in the processing of claims; work with landlords; internal security; counter fraud; and overpayments.

The standards have already been tested in a pilot exercise over the summer in 14 local authorities. We are formally consulting the local authority associations on performance standards as part of the performance framework, and a copy of the consultation paper has been placed in the Library.

We recognise that working to meet these standards will be a gradual process and that effective implementation of the performance framework means phased implementation.

ONE Pilots (Benefits)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what lessons he has drawn from the ONE pilots about the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit; and what new guidance to local authorities is being proposed. [12941]

Malcolm Wicks: The ONE evaluation did not focus on the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. This would have been impractical as there are wide variations in practices among local authorities in ONE pilot and control areas. However, research from the ONE pilots did show improvements to customer service arising from working in close partnership with local authorities. These partnerships will be a key requirement of Jobcentre Plus, and we will be discussing with local authorities how we can jointly guide and support our staff to deliver a cohesive, responsive service to our customers.

Benefit Systems

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what representations he has received from local government ombudsmen in England, Wales and Scotland about the administrative complexity of the housing benefit and council tax benefit systems; [12947]

(2) what plans he has to discuss with local government ombudsmen in England, Wales or Scotland the administrative complexity of the housing benefit/council tax system. [12948]

Malcolm Wicks: In the last year, the Department has received two reports from the Local Government Ombudsman in England. One concerned Housing Benefit claim form NHB1 which is produced by the Department; the other referred to an apparent ambiguity in the Department's guidance to local authorities on operating the Verification Framework. No representations have been received in respect of Wales or Scotland.

Ministers and officials regularly meet with stakeholders in the Housing Benefit scheme and other interested parties to discuss issues of interest or concern. Such a meeting between one of our officials and one of the three Local Government Ombudsmen for England took place in April this year.

Appeals Service (Housing Benefit)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of the transition from housing benefit review boards to the Appeals Service. [12957]

Malcolm Wicks: The Appeals Service took over responsibility for hearing Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit appeals on 2 July 2001. By the end of September, local authorities had submitted 1,484 appeals to our Appeals Service.

Many local authorities have welcomed the introduction of tribunals. However, as the number of appeals which have passed through the new system is still low it is too early to reach any firm conclusion on the impact of the transition from review boards.

Source:
100 per cent. download of the Generic Appeals Processing System. Figures are provisional.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to fix housing benefit awards for set periods. [12949]

Malcolm Wicks: As with all benefits, we keep all aspects of Housing Benefit claims under review.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has made to simplify the non-dependent deduction scheme; [12950]

(2) what plans he has to reform the rate at which housing benefit is withdrawn as earnings rise; [12954]

(3) what plans he has about increasing earnings disregards for housing benefit. [12953]

Malcolm Wicks: We keep all matters relating to benefit under review. Our proposals in respect of Housing Benefit were set out in our policy statement "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all—The way forward for housing" (December 2000).

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the reform of the housing benefit extended payment scheme. [12952]

Malcolm Wicks: The reformed Housing Benefit extended payment scheme was introduced on 9 April 2001 and it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the new scheme. However, work in progress includes interviews with clients who have received extended payments since April 2001 and with staff responsible for administering and promoting the reformed scheme.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to simplify the rent limitations mechanism in the private rented sector; [12951]

(2) what plans he has to reduce the number of transitional protection schemes that different housing benefit recipients are on. [12959]

Malcolm Wicks: From 2 July 2001 the definition of the Single Room Rent was broadened to reflect better the type of accommodation available in the market to young single people.

Our response to consultation on the Housing Green Paper—"Quality and Choice: A decent home for all—The way forward for housing" (December 2000)—explained that we would look further at the scope for simplifying the different protection schemes which restrict Housing Benefit in the private rented sector. We have commissioned a research project to inform this work, which is now starting its fieldwork stage.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effect of the introduction of the housing benefit verification framework on the increase in formal complaints of maladministration. [12956]

Malcolm Wicks: Formal complaints about maladministration of the Housing Benefit scheme are made to the Local Government Ombudsman. Information from the Local Government Ombudsman on the number of complaints where the Verification Framework has been cited as a contributory factor is not available.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to divide the housing benefit caseload into age-related client groups. [12958]

Malcolm Wicks: We are reforming the welfare system so that welfare services will meet the different needs of our client groups: pensioners, people of working age and children.

We will ensure that the Housing Benefit scheme supports our strategy to transform the services we provide through the development of Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service. For those of working age, we intend to streamline the claims process to enable people to claim Housing Benefit at the same time as other benefits, without having to give the same information twice.

And we are considering how Housing Benefit for pensioners should fit into the new, simplified framework of the Pension Credit from 2003.

Integrated Inquiry Service

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the reasons for abandoning the Integrated Inquiry Service. [12943]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 242W.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what level of fees he expects to have to spend to commission alternative proposals to the Integrated Inquiry Service; and who has been commissioned to produce these proposals. [12955]

Malcolm Wicks: Affinity, the Department's lead IT service provider, has been commissioned at a cost of approximately £4,000 to explore the options for an alternative to the Integrated Inquiry Service.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Inquests

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) when the Legal

Service Commission will publish its guidance on the circumstances in which legal aid funding may be made available for representation at inquests; and if he will make a statement; [12737]

(2) when he plans to issue his consultation paper on the funding for representation at inquests; and if he will make a statement. [12738]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor recently authorised the Legal Services Commission to decide applications for exceptional funding in inquests without reference to Ministers. At the same time, new guidance has taken effect in which the Lord Chancellor slightly amended the way applications in inquests would be dealt with. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 856W. The Commission is preparing additional guidance for practitioners on the making of applications, which it intends to publish on 15 November in the next issue of "Focus". The text is already available on the Commission's website, www.legalservices.gov.uk. In the circumstances, we have no plans to issue a consultation document in the near future.

Translation Services

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what translation services the Lord Chancellor ensures are available to courts in *(a)* England and *(b)* Staffordshire. [13499]

Mr. Wills: The Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) books and pays for interpreters where necessary for people attending IAA hearings. Within the criminal justice system, a national agreement for obtaining foreign language interpreters exists and applies equally to the Crown court, Court of Appeal and the magistrates courts. The agreement requires the courts to arrange and pay for an interpreter for the defendant.

In the Supreme Court and county court, foreign language interpreters are provided free of charge for civil committal hearings and for hearings in cases involving children or domestic violence. Interpreters will be provided for other types of hearings if it can be shown that a failure to do so would interfere with the individual's rights under the European Convention on Human Rights.

The county courts also use a national telephone interpreting service. Sign language interpreters and other forms of communication support are provided free of charge to any party that requires it. A number of different agencies, national and local, are used to arrange this support.

All these arrangements apply equally to England and Wales. There is no regional breakdown of the service provided.

In all courts it is the responsibility of the parties involved in the case to arrange for the translation of documents.

Departmental Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the projects in his Department which have been considered as potential public-private partnerships since 1997 which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public-private partnership proposed; and if he will make a statement. [13434]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The Lord Chancellor's Department has not rejected any proposed public-private partnership for the reason stated in the hon. Member's question.

HEALTH

Biological Agents

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contingency plans he has developed to protect the public against anthrax, botulism and attacks with other biological agents; and if he will make a statement. [11894]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has extensive contingency planning in place. This includes arrangements to mitigate the effects of a terrorist act and to ensure response and recovery in conjunction with other Government Departments, the National Health Service and key public health agencies. Stocks of vaccine and antibiotics are available.

The Public Health Laboratory Service has issued interim guidance, for healthcare professionals and the public, on the deliberate release of a number of biological agents including anthrax, smallpox, botulism and plague and this is available on their website.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public health measures there are to deal with large-scale anthrax contamination in the UK; and what consideration has been given to the use of a vaccination. [13483]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* Plans are in place to enable appropriate measures to be taken to protect the health of the United Kingdom population, should such an attack occur, or be suspected. These plans are under constant development and review. Interim guidelines for action in the event of a deliberate release of anthrax can be found on the website of the Public Health Laboratory Service.

Anthrax vaccine is currently only given to the public for protection against occupational exposure where this is considered likely to occur.

Breast Screening

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measure she is taking to assess the efficacy of the breast screening programme. [12863]

Mr. Hutton: It is the role of the Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer Screening (ACBCS) to consider all research papers published on the subject of breast cancer screening. The national health service breast screening programme is kept under constant re-examination and vigilance. The ACBCS met on 31 October 2001, and in light of recent publications in the medical journals, agreed

to review the evidence in the Forrest Report[1], on which the NHS breast screening programme was based. The committee last reviewed this evidence formally in 1991.

The review will be led by Professor Valerie Beral, Chair of the committee, in conjunction with the Institute of Cancer Research and the NHS cancer screening programmes. A first draft of the report will be presented at the committee's next meeting on 15 May 2002.

[1] Breast Cancer Screening Report to the Health Ministers of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland by a working group chaired by Professor Sir Patrick Forrest (HMSO 2986).

Waiting Times (Bath)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on trends in waiting times for *(a)* orthopaedic out patient appointments and *(b)* orthopaedic operations at the Royal United hospital, Bath in the last 12 months. [12856]

Ms Blears: The latest published information shows that in the year to the end of September 2001 the percentage of patients waiting for orthopaedic inpatient and day case treatment who were seen in under 12 months remained the same. The proportion of orthopaedic outpatients who have waited over 26 weeks has increased over the same period.

The Royal United hospital, Bath national health service trust is taking a number of measures to ensure that the number of patients who have to wait for an outpatient appointment or for treatment is reduced. The number of orthopaedic clinics is being increased and an additional 1,000 new patients will be seen between now and the end of March 2002. This action is designed to ensure that no patients are waiting over 26 weeks for an outpatient appointment by the end of March 2002.

The trust is also taking measures to ensure that the number of patients waiting over 12 months for inpatient or day case treatment is reduced in line with the Government's target. An additional orthopaedic consultant will be appointed shortly. An additional three orthopaedic recovery beds opened at the end of October providing high care for patients following major surgery. Eighteen extra beds have also been opened on a temporary basis at St. Martin's hospital for the rehabilitation of orthopaedic patients. Additional weekend elective orthopaedic operating lists have been running throughout this year. The trust has already commissioned 100 orthopaedic cases at the local private hospital and is making arrangements with the private sector for an additional 400 patients to be seen this year.

Nurses

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were *(a)* employed by the NHS, *(b)* recruited and *(c)* left the NHS in (i) 1993, (ii) 1997 and (iii) 2001. [13379]

Mr. Hutton: The number of nurses employed by the National Health Service in 1993, 1997 and 2000 is shown in the table.

A new system of classification of the non-medical workforce was introduced in 1995. Therefore, the figure given for 1993 is not comparable with those collected after this date.

Information regarding the number of nurses recruited into and leaving the NHS is not collected centrally.

Hospital and community health service qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff including practice nurses as at 30 September

Year	*Headcount*
1993	310,900
1997	318,860
2000	335,950

Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest ten
A new classification of the non-medical workforce was introduced in 1995. Information based on this classification is not directly comparable with earlier years
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Waiting Lists

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the in-patient waiting list is, expressed as per 1,000 head of weighted population, for *(a)* each health authority and *(b)* in total in England for the last two years for which figures are available. [13617]

Mr. Hutton: The number of in-patients waiting at end March 2001 and March 2000 are shown in the table, (March 2001 data are the most recent data available).

In-patient waiting list per 1,000 head of weighted population

Health authority	*March 2001*	*March 2000*
Avon	20.7	20.9
Barking and Havering	24.8	25.8
Barnet	15.8	15.8
Barnsley	17.2	16.9
Bedfordshire	19.8	18.5
Berkshire	18.9	18.8
Bexley and Greenwich	17.0	19.0
Birmingham	12.8	12.7
Bradford	19.3	19.9
Brent and Harrow	17.1	17.6
Bromley	20.8	22.0
Buckinghamshire	21.8	20.7
Bury and Rochdale	22.1	22.9
Calderdale and Kirklees	16.8	18.9
Cambridgeshire	21.0	21.5
Camden and Islington	10.5	12.1
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	24.6	25.1
County Durham and Darlington	16.5	17.4
Coventry	13.3	12.8
Croydon	20.0	19.3
Doncaster	12.1	12.5
Dorset	12.7	13.3
Dudley	16.5	14.5
East and North Hertfordshire	24.4	26.3
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	16.6	18.0
East Kent	26.6	27.0
East Lancashire	21.2	22.0
East London and City	14.4	14.4
East Riding and Hull	20.1	20.4
East Surrey	22.9	24.4
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	23.2	23.7
Enfield and Haringey	19.9	19.7
Gateshead and South Tyneside	18.5	19.8
Gloucestershire	15.1	16.0
Herefordshire	16.9	19.1
Hillingdon	15.5	15.2
Isle of Wight	24.8	25.7
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	8.5	9.2
Kingston and Richmond	20.7	18.6

In-patient waiting list per 1,000 head of weighted population

Health authority	*March 2001*	*March 2000*
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	17.9	19.2
Leeds	18.4	19.1
Leicestershire	18.8	18.5
Lincolnshire	24.3	25.4
Liverpool	20.1	20.9
Manchester	20.4	21.2
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	15.1	15.3
Morecambe Bay	20.3	20.0
Newcastle and North Tyneside	13.9	15.0
Norfolk	25.8	25.4
North and East Devon	23.7	23.3
North and Mid Hampshire	22.3	22.3
North Cheshire	28.4	27.4
North Cumbria	22.5	23.1
North Derbyshire	22.1	23.1
North Essex	25.6	27.3
North Nottinghamshire	19.2	19.8
North Staffordshire	10.7	13.4
North West Lancashire	22.2	22.9
North Yorkshire	18.7	21.1
Northamptonshire	25.9	25.7
Northumberland	15.4	15.9
Nottingham	16.7	18.1
Oxfordshire	19.2	19.1
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	20.6	19.7
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	22.5	23.8
Rotherham	14.4	14.3
Salford and Trafford	24.0	25.8
Sandwell	13.2	13.6
Sefton	24.9	25.2
Sheffield	17.8	18.0
Shropshire	16.9	17.1
Solihull	17.6	17.8
Somerset	24.2	24.7
South and West Devon	21.8	23.1
South Cheshire	21.7	21.7
South Essex	24.1	24.1
South Humber	24.0	27.6
South Lancashire	28.2	29.3
South Staffordshire	24.6	25.3
Southampton and South West Hamptonshire	26.4	28.1
Southern Derbyshire	21.9	22.4
St. Helens and Knowsley	23.3	23.6
Stockport	23.8	24.0
Suffolk	24.2	24.0
Sunderland	18.3	18.4
Tees	17.6	17.0
Wakefield	19.7	21.2
Walsall	9.7	9.5
Warwickshire	22.2	22.4
West Hertfordshire	20.0	20.6
West Kent	26.5	28.3
West Pennine	25.2	25.3
West Surrey	25.7	27.1
West Sussex	25.1	26.2
Wigan and Bolton	21.2	22.7
Wiltshire	22.0	24.8
Wirral	14.0	14.0
Wolverhampton	13.9	14.3
Worcestershire	20.0	20.6
England	20.0	20.6

Note:
Population is weighted for age, additional need (over and above that accounted for by age) and variations in the unavoidable cost of providing healthcare (market forces factor etc.)
Source:
QF01 waiting times returns/FD Resource Allocation 2 population data

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* cancelled operations in total, *(b)* operations cancelled on the day of operation and *(c)* operations cancelled and not readmitted within one month there were in each health authority in England in each quarter during the last two years for which figures are available. [13611]

Mr. Hutton: The latest published figures are for quarter one 2001–02. Copies of quarterly statistics on cancelled operations by health authority for the last two years are available in the Library.

Data are collected on the number of operations cancelled at the last minute. Data are not broken down into whether the operation was cancelled on the day of surgery or the day of admission to hospital.

Rural Recruitment (Consultants)

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to recruit *(a)* general consultants and *(b)* consultants in neurology in rural areas. [13492]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS plan states there will be 7,500 more consultants in post in 2004 than in 1999. By September 2000 the number of consultants in post had already increased by 1,100 to around 24,300. The national health service is currently drawing up plans by specialty to deliver the rest of the increase, a further 6,400 posts by 2004. We will ensure that these plans target areas of the country which are under-doctored relative to their weighted population.

In 2000 the number of consultant neurologists was 688, an increase of 31 (4.7 per cent.) over 1999. As well as the NHS plan consultant increases we aim to achieve a 54 per cent. expansion in training neurology specialists by 2010.

Private Treatment

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many private beds were available in each of the last five years; [13602]

(2) how many private hospitals there were in each of the last five years. [13601]

Mr. Hutton: The table sets out the number of independent acute medical and surgical hospitals and beds in the United Kingdom from 1997 to 2001.

	Hospitals	*Beds*
1997	227	11,100
1998	229	10,852
1999	228	10,565
2000	225	9,980
2001	222	9,834

Source:
Laing's Healthcare Market Review 2001–2001, Laing and Buisson

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been admitted to NHS hospitals from non-NHS hospitals in the last five years. [13604]

Mr. Hutton: The table sets out the number of admissions from non-national health service run hospitals to NHS trusts in England, 1995–96 to 1999–2000.

Year	Admissions
1995–96	[1]21,160
1996–97	5,153
1997–98	7,050
1998–99	7,241
1999–2000	6,934

[1] A breakdown by type of non-NHS institution was not available prior to 1996–97, so the figure for 1995–96 is for total admissions to NHS trusts from non-NHS institutions, including, but not exclusively, hospitals.

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Chiropodists and Podiatrists

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if chiropodists and podiatrists in private practice will be represented on the Health Professions Council; and if he will make a statement. [13729]

Mr. Hutton: All registered professionals, whether they work in the private sector or not, will be represented on the new council. The council will also be able to recruit additional members to its committees including its professional advisory panels, and will be encouraged to cover all sectors of the professions.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if podiatrists and chiropodists in private practice will be recognised for the purposes of state registration; and if he will make a statement. [13730]

Mr. Hutton: The new Health Professions Council will determine arrangements for the admission to its register for each of the professions it regulates. Chiropodists and podiatrists who meet the council's standards for registration will be recognised as state registered.

Special transitional arrangements will enable those whose training and competence do not meet the council's standards to be recognised for registration purposes.

Contaminated Blood Transfusions

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the recommendations of the Scottish Executive's Health and Community Care Committee regarding financial assistance to haemophilia sufferers infected with hepatitis C as a result of receiving contaminated blood transfusions. [13700]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* The devolved Administration in Scotland is considering these recommendations. We currently have no plans to compensate haemophiliacs who become infected with hepatitis C through national health service blood products.

NHS (Overseas Staff)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of how many *(a)* refugees and *(b)* those with special immigration status with medical qualifications have been prevented from working in the national health service by their inability to speak English to an adequate level in the last five years. [14315]

Mr. Hutton: All doctors from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) need to pass the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) test before they can be registered with the General Medical Council (GMC). The majority of doctors who took their primary medical qualification outside the EEA also need to pass the Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB) test of medical and linguistic competence before registration is granted.

Passing the PLAB test is a pre-condition of registration for those doctors required to take it. Doctors are entitled to five attempts at the test. Those who fail it five times are prevented from registering with the GMC, and thus prevented from practising medicine in the national health service.

The GMC's records do not show how many of the doctors who fail the PLAB test five times are, in fact, from the refugee community. There is therefore no way of telling whether any refugee doctor has been prevented from getting work in the NHS by his or her ability to speak English.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the contribution that could be made to the national health service by *(a)* refugees and *(b)* those with special immigration status holding medical qualifications. [14314]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS plan holds a commitment to provide extra doctors to the national health service, and we believe it makes moral and economic sense to use the skills of doctors in the refugee community to the best advantage of the NHS.

A Government funded database, developed and run by the Refugee Council and the British Medical Association, shows that there are nearly 400 refugee doctors who want information about retraining to work in the United Kingdom. More are expected to come forward as word gets around about the availability of Government funded counselling and training to help those wanting careers in the NHS becomes more widely understood.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Education Rights

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which categories of person having regard to age, marital status, duration of residence in the UK, immigration status, nationality and other characteristics, are eligible for *(a)* free statutory-age schooling, *(b)* free nursery education, *(c)* free education in colleges of further education and *(d)* education in higher education institutions, free other than through contributions to home students' tuition fees. [7951]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 16 October 2001]:* Any child of compulsory school age living in England is entitled to free education. All four-year-olds are entitled to three terms of free, good quality, part-time nursery education before they reach compulsory school age regardless of duration of residence in the UK, immigration status, nationality or any other characteristics.

Three-year-olds are entitled to a free, good quality, part-time nursery education place depending on their age and their local early years development and childcare partnership's allocation criteria. Early years development and childcare partnerships must allocate places based on social need.

The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for determining when tuition fees are to be charged for further education courses. Advice to institutions for the current academic year is that, subject to residency requirements, tuition fees should not be charged to any learner aged 16 to 18 on either a full-time or part-time course. Other groups not charged tuition fees include: those receiving jobseekers' allowance (JSA); those receiving a means-tested state benefit; unwaged dependants (as defined by the Benefits Agency) of those listed above; people on adult basic education or English for speakers of other languages programmes; asylum seekers in receipt of the equivalent of a means-tested benefit (assistance under the terms of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act), and their dependants; and, certain learners participating in Council funded projects (only where identified in the project specification).

Higher education institutions, as independent, self-governing bodies, decide whether to charge students tuition fees at the 'home' rate or the higher 'overseas' rate using the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations 1997, (as amended). To be eligible for home fee status, students usually need to have 'settled status' in the UK and have been ordinarily resident here for three years before their course starts, except where this was solely or mainly to receive full-time education. Students meeting these requirements will be classed as "home" students for tuition fee purposes. Broadly speaking, these will include, in most cases, UK and other European Union students, students with recognised refugee status, other students granted the right to enter or remain and who meet the UK residence requirement, and migrant workers from the European Economic Area. Students not meeting these requirements may be charged fees at the 'overseas' rate.

Early Excellence Centres

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the location of the early excellence centres which *(a)* are in operation, *(b)* are in the process of implementation and *(c)* are planned, and what are the criteria for locations to be included in each element of the programme. [14132]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* The Early Excellence Centre (EEC) programme is at the forefront of our policies to develop practice in integrated care, education and family services.

(a) The early excellence centres which are in operation are in:

Bath and North East Somerset
Bolton
Bradford
Bristol
Camden
Coventry
Cumbria
Cornwall
Derbyshire
Gateshead
Greenwich
Hammersmith and Fulham
Hampshire
Haringey
Hertfordshire
Kirklees
Leeds
Liverpool
Manchester
Newham
North Tyneside
North East Lincolnshire
Northamptonshire
Northumberland
Oxfordshire
Portsmouth
Richmond-upon-Thames
Rotherham
Sheffield (2)
Somerset
Stockport
South Tyneside
St. Helens
Westminster
Wirral.

(b) On 1 October we announced 14 new centres in Birmingham, Cornwall, Derby, Hackney, Herefordshire, Hillingdon, Islington, Kingston-upon-Thames, Lewisham, Rotherham, Surrey, Wirral and two projects working with the NHS, newborn hearing screening programme (NHSP) in Stockport and Waltham Forest. We are working with these centres to implement their proposals. At the same time we are continuing to receive further expressions of interest in joining the programme and to discuss with a number of individual centres how their plans could be developed further.

(c) Working closely with sure start and neighbourhood nurseries, we plan to have up to 100 centres across the country by 2004. The criteria for joining the programme are set out in the latest invitation to join the programme sent to all local authorities, early years development and childcare partnerships and other partners on 1 October. Location is not the prime criterion: quality of provision is, but our plans for the programme do include achieving good geographic spread.

Teachers (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 5 November 2001, to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, *Official Report*, column 54W, on teachers from ethnic minorities, how many teachers from ethnic minorities have *(a)* started training, *(b)* completed training and *(c)* started teaching, for the last two years for which figures are available. [14616]

Mr. Timms: The Teacher Training Agency's (TTA) performance profiles collects information about initial teacher trainees at institutions in England. The most recent figures relate to the academic year 1999–2000. The following table shows the numbers and relevant proportions of first year trainees from an ethnic minority in the years 1998–99 and 1999–2000.

Number of first year trainees

Year	From an ethnic minority	Ethnicity undisclosed
1998–99	1,634 (6%)	1,951 (7%)
1999–2000	1,701 (7%)	934 (4%)

Source:
Teacher Training Agency, Performance Profiles

The TTA's Performance Profiles also collect information relating to final year trainees. The most recent figures relate to final year trainees in academic year 1999–2000. The following table shows the numbers and relevant proportions of trainees awarded qualified teacher status (QTS) that are from an ethnic minority for final year trainees in 1998–99 and 1999–2000.

Number of final year trainees awarded QTS

Year	From an ethnic minority	Ethnicity undisclosed
1998–99	1,388 (6%)	1,940 (8%)
1999–2000	1,260 (6%)	901 (4%)

Note:
Figures relate to the numbers of trainees that gained QTS by 31 July of their final year of training (i.e July 2000 for final year trainees in 1999–2000)
Source:
Teacher Training Agency, Performance Profiles

The TTA's performance profiles also collects information about the movements of final year trainees that gain QTS into the teaching profession. The following table shows the numbers and relevant proportions of trainees that were awarded QTS and were subsequently recorded as entering a teaching post in England, that are from an ethnic minority.

Number of final year trainees awarded QTS and entered teaching

Year	From an ethnic minority	Ethnicity undisclosed
1998–99	1,027 (6%)	1,509 (8%)
1999–2000	959 (5%)	692 (4%)

Note:
Figures relate to the numbers of qualified trainees that were in a teaching post by 3 January following their final year of training (i.e. January 2001 for final year trainees in 1999–2000).
Source:
Teacher Training Agency, Performance Profiles

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the teacher vacancy rate was in *(a)* nursery/primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* all schools in (i) the constituency of South Suffolk, (ii) the constituency of West Suffolk (iii) the constituency of Ipswich, (iv) the constituency of Suffolk, Coastal, (v) the constituency of Central Suffolk and Ipswich, North, (vi) the constituency of Bury St. Edmunds, (vii) Suffolk local education authority, (viii) East Anglia and (ix) England in (A) 1997–98, (B) 1998–99, (C) 1999–2000 and (D) 2000–01. [11575]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Information on teacher vacancies by constituency is not collected centrally. Teacher vacancy rates in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools sector from 1998 to 2001, in Suffolk, the east of England government office region and England were as follows:

Percentage

	January 1998	January 1999	January 2000	January 2001
Nursery and primary				
Suffolk	0.4	0.7	0.4	2.2
East of England	0.7	0.8	0.9	1.7
England	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.2
Secondary				
Suffolk	0.5	0.6	0.4	1.6
East of England	0.7	0.7	0.8	1.7
England	0.6	0.5	0.7	1.4
Maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special sector				
Suffolk	0.5	0.8	0.5	1.8
East of England	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.7
England	0.7	0.7	0.8	1.4

Foreign National Teachers (Surrey)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many foreign nationals were employed as *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school teachers in Surrey during the (i) 2000–01 academic year and (ii) previous four academic years. [11193]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The information is not held centrally.

Teacher Vacancies (Surrey)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary teacher vacancies there were in Surrey on 1 September in each year since 1997. [11191]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 October 2001]:* The information is not available in the form requested. Nursery, primary and secondary full-time teacher vacancies in Surrey in January of each year since 1997, reported by the local education authority, were as follows:

Year	*Nursery and primary*	*Secondary*
1997	18	19
1998	27	14
1999	11	9
2000	13	24
2001	25	62

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has issued to schools regarding assessment of teachers for the upper spine of performance-related pay. [14565]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* The Department's guidance on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions of Employment 2001 includes a section entitled "Threshold and Upper Pay Scale" and Annexe A includes a section entitled "Handling Performance Pay". The Secretary of State will soon launch a consultation on the mechanism for specific funding to contribute towards the cost to schools of awarding performance pay points to teachers.

Teachers (Maintained Schools)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of permanent teaching posts in maintained schools which were not filled on the first day of the current term; and what percentage this is of the total number of permanent teaching posts. [7490]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* It is estimated, based on a telephone survey conducted on 6–7 September 2001, that there were about 2,000 full-time vacancies (0.6 per cent. of posts) in nursery, primary and secondary schools.

These figures were obtained from a telephone survey of nearly 1,500 schools conducted by DfES. Teacher vacancies are measured using the standard DfES definition, which excludes posts filled by a full-time teacher on a contract of one term or more.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her written answer of 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 245–46W, on ministerial travel, what was the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* duration and *(c)* cost of each of the ministerial visits. [14569]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* The purpose, duration and cost of each of the ministerial visits since 1 May 1997 are set out in the following tables. Recurrent meetings are given in the first table; one off trips in the second.

Purpose	*Average duration (days)*	*Average cost (£)*
Attending Social Affairs Council Meeting x 25	1	1,600
Attending Education Council Meeting x 7	2	1,000
Attending OECD Conference Meeting x 6	1	1,400
Attending G8 Conference x 5	4	6,350
Attending ILO Conference x 4	2	1,100
Attending Youth Council Meeting x 4	1	800
Attending Higher Education Conference x 4	3	1,050
Attending UNESCO Conference x 2	1	1,000
Promoting Higher Education and Vocational Education x 2	8	10,600
Attending Skills Olympics x 2	4	4,400
Promoting Education Exports x 2	8	10,900
Attending European Higher Education Meeting x 2	2	925
Attending Meeting of Employment and Social Policy Council x 2	2	1,600

Purpose	*Duration (days)*	*Cost (£)*
Attending Commonwealth Ministers Conference	8	15,600
Meeting to discuss Disability and New Deal Schemes	4	11,000
Attending Meeting with French Minister	1	850
Promoting Apprenticeship Schemes (BMW)	1	1,200
Attending European Employment Week Conference	1	550
Attending Meeting with Swedish Labour Minister	1	1,050
Attending Meeting with Dutch Minister	1	850
Attending European Policy Conference	2	550
Attending Meetings with Representatives of the European Parliament	1	950
Attending Meeting with European Ministers	1	2,400
Attending Labour Standards Symposium	1	900
Attending Meeting with Spanish Ministers of Education and Employment	1	1,650
Attending Equal Opportunities Conference	4	2,050
Attending EU Employment Ministers Conference	3	2,000
Attending School Reform Conference	4	8,450
Attending Disability Conference	1	750
Delivering Speech to Quandt Foundation	1	750
Attending Meeting to Discuss National Parliaments Action Plans	1	700
Attending Joint EC and Eastern Europe Education Council	3	1,150

Purpose	Duration (days)	Cost (£)
Meeting to Discuss European Voluntary Service Conciliation	1	1,200
Attending Anglo-Italian Seminar	1	1,250
Attending European Commission Annual Forum	1	1,450
Attending Human Rights Conference	10	23,450
Attending Bilaterals with Education and Employment Ministers	1	2,300
Attendance at Lifelong Learning Conference	3	8,950
Attending Anglo-Spanish Employment Conference	2	1,300
Attending Education Conference	2	650
Attending BTI Conference	1	5,500
Attending Education and Employment Conference	1	3,200
Participating in Education Bilateral	1	1,550
Promoting Education and Training	7	7,700
Attending Meeting with EU Labour Ministers	2	0
Attending People and Politics Seminar	1	750
Attending Head Teachers Conference	1	450
Visiting Centre for Income and Work	1	950
Attending Conference and Undertaking School Visits	11	9,900
Attending Meeting with Finnish Ministers	1	1,550
Attending Meeting with Polish Employment Ministers	1	1,400
Attending Meeting of Social Affairs Ministers	2	1,850
Attending Meetings on Disability, Childcare and Equal Opportunities	7	11,900
Attending Meetings with EU and Central and Eastern European Ministers	2	650
Promoting Modern Apprenticeships	2	1,800
Attending CERI Governing Board Meeting and Conference on Harnessing the Potential	1	1,100
Attending Welfare to Work Conference	8	12,600
Attending Meeting for Portuguese Presidency	2	650
Attending "One" Workshop	1	900
Attending Europe Globalisation and Future of Social Policy Conference	1	1,450
Attending European School Net Conference	1	250
Attending World Social Summit	1	1,400
Attending Work, Culture and Identity Conference	1	1,250
Attending Meeting with Swedish Employment Ministers	1	1,050
Attending Ageism Conference	1	950
Attending Conference for Finnish Presidency	2	650
Attending European Diversity in the Workplace Conference	4	1,050
Attending NAHT Annual Conference	1	850
Attending Meeting to Discuss Anglo-Sino Education Agreement	7	20,300
Attending Meeting with Russian Education Ministers	4	4,050
Meeting with British Council and Undertaking School Visits	6	11,350
Meeting to Discuss Article 13	1	750
Promoting Early Years Providers	4	2,400
Attending Ministers Conference in France	1	500
Attending Learning Communities Conference	8	6,600
Attending Middle East Education and Labour Conference	4	4,800
Promoting Early Years and Employment Programme	2	2,600
Attending EU Education and Employment Conference	2	850
Attending Education Conference	6	9,850
Attending EU, Latin American and Caribbean Conference	1	950
Attending Mobility Meeting	1	450
Undertaking Visit to Institute of Florence	2	600
Forum on Education and Employment	1	350
Promoting British Education System	8	12,050
Attending Meeting with British Council	2	700
Attending Work Life Balance Conference	1	1,500
Promoting Education, Employment and Training	1	3,950
Attending Meeting with EU Education Ministers	2	900
Attending Meetings of Ministers for Telecommunications and Employment	1	2,600
Attending Meeting with Higher Education Ministers	1	700
Attending Club 3 Conference	2	500
Attending NASUWT Conference	1	650
Attending EU Education and Youth Conference	1	500
Attending Meeting to Discuss the Delivery of Employment Services	1	550
Attending EU Education Ministers Conference	2	2,950
Attending ICT Conference	4	250

Note:

All travel complied with the requirements of the "Ministerial Code" and "Travel by Ministers".

Staff Retention (Secondary Schools)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the rates of staff retention in *(a)* secondary schools with sixth forms and *(b)* secondary schools without sixth forms. [14559]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* This information is not held centrally.

Qualified Teacher Status

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her written answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 714W, how many full-time equivalent teachers there were without qualified teacher status in maintained schools in each of the last five years, broken down by *(a)* those on the graduate teacher programme, *(b)* those on the registered teacher programme, *(c)* those on the licensed teacher programme, *(d)* those on the overseas trained teacher scheme, *(e)* instructors and *(f)* other teachers without QTS. [12424]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The number of teachers on each of the programmes specified are not identified separately. Numbers of teachers without qualified teacher status (QTS) working in the maintained schools sector in England between January 1997 and January 2001 were as follows:

(full-time equivalents)

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Teachers on routes to QTS[1]	460	570	470	580	1,280
Instructors and other teachers without QTS[2]	2,480	2,640	3,070	3,240	4,340
Total	2,940	3,220	3,540	3,820	5,620

[1] Those on the graduate teacher programme, registered teacher programme, licensed teacher scheme and overseas trained teacher scheme
[2] Includes overseas-trained teachers employed on contracts of at least one month and not currently seeking QTS.
Note:
Totals may not equal the sum of their component parts due to rounding. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

When deciding whether to employ an instructor without QTS, headteachers take into account the fact that they can often bring valuable skills and experience to the classroom, particularly in subjects that have a high practical content. Instructors also include teachers without qualifications obtained overseas who are not currently seeking QTS.

There were 410,200 regular teachers in maintained schools in England in January 2001, 11,000 more than in January 1997.

Overseas Teachers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimates she has made of the number of teachers in maintained schools who were not British citizens in each term of the last four years. [7271]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Information on teachers who are not British citizens is not collected centrally.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many overseas teachers employed in maintained schools are not covered by the overseas trained teacher scheme. [12364]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Teachers (Huntingdon)

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary teacher vacancies there were in Huntingdon (i) on 31 March and (ii) in each year since 1996. [6163]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 16 October 2001]:* The information requested for Huntingdon is not held centrally.

Full-time vacancies for teachers in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in the former Cambridgeshire local authority area were as follows:

	Nursery/primary		*Secondary*		*Total*	
	Number of vacancies	*Vacancy rate (percentage)*[1]	*Number of vacancies*	*Vacancy rate (percentage)*[1]	*Number of vacancies*	*Vacancy rate (percentage)*[1]
Cambridgeshire						
January[2]						
1996[3]	3	0.1	10	0.4	13	0.3
1997[3]	2	0.1	4	0.2	6	0.1
1998[3]	1	0.0	6	0.3	7	0.1
1999	1	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.0
2000	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2001	2	0.1	1	0.1	3	0.1
Peterborough						
January[2]						
1996[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1997[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1998[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1999	0	0.0	2	0.3	2	0.1
2000	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2001	3	0.5	4	0.6	7	0.5

	Nursery/primary		Secondary		Total	
	Number of vacancies	Vacancy rate (percentage)[1]	Number of vacancies	Vacancy rate (percentage)[1]	Number of vacancies	Vacancy rate (percentage)[1]
Total						
January[2]						
1996[3]	3	0.1	10	0.4	13	0.3
1997[3]	2	0.1	4	0.2	6	0.1
1998[3]	1	0.0	6	0.3	7	0.1
1999	1	0.0	2	0.1	3	0.1
2000	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2001	5	0.2	5	0.2	10	0.2

[1] The vacancy rate is calculated by dividing the number of vacancies by the sum of full-time qualified regular teachers plus teachers on full-time secondment for a term or more

[2] Details of teacher vacancies at 31 March of each year are not available

[3] Cambridgeshire local authority was affected by the local government re-organisation (LGR) on 1 April 1998, when it became two authorities, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Figures for 1996 to 1998 are for the Cambridgeshire local authority prior to LGR

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school teachers were employed in Huntingdon (i) on 31 March and (ii) in each year since 1996. [6164]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 16 October 2001]:* The information requested for Huntingdon is not held centrally.

Full-time equivalents of regular teachers (excluding short term supply) employed in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in the former Cambridgeshire local authority area were as follows:

January[1]	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Cambridgeshire[2]						
Nursery/primary	2,740	2,690	2,600	1,950	1,990	2,040
Secondary	2,630	2,500	2,570	1,800	1,810	1,840
Total	5,360	5,190	5,170	3,740	3,790	3,880
Peterborough						
Nursery/primary	n/a	n/a	n/a	680	720	720
Secondary	n/a	n/a	n/a	810	820	730
Total	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,490	1,540	1,450

January[1]	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Total						
Nursery/primary	2,740	2,690	2,600	2,630	2,710	2,760
Secondary	2,630	2,500	2,570	2,600	2,630	2,570
Total	5,360	5,190	5,170	5,230	5,340	5,330

[1] Details of teachers in service at 31 March of each year are not available.

[2] Cambridgeshire local authority was affected by the local government re-organisation (LGR) on 1 April 1998, when it became two authorities, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Figures for 1996 to 1998 are for the Cambridgeshire local authority prior to LGR.

Teachers (Age Profile)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female teachers in each year between 1990 and 2001 were aged (i) under 25, (ii) 25 to 29, (iii) 30 to 34, (iv) 35 to 39, (v) 40 to 44, (vi) 45 to 49, (vii) 50 to 54, (viii) 55 to 59, (ix) 60 to 64, (x) 65 years plus and (xi) unknown. [7973]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* Full-time regular teachers in the maintained schools sector of England, excluding sixth form colleges, 1990 to 2000 (the last year for which data of teacher characteristics are available), by sex and age, are shown in the table[1]:

Thousand

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Men											
Under 25	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.9	2.3	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.0	2.9	2.7
25–29	9.3	9.0	8.9	8.8	9.2	9.9	10.6	11.4	12.3	12.5	12.6
30–34	16.1	14.2	12.9	12.2	12.0	11.9	12.0	12.2	12.4	12.7	13.0
35–39	29.3	26.2	23.3	20.8	18.6	16.9	15.3	14.3	13.6	13.2	13.2
40–44	33.5	34.5	33.3	31.9	30.6	28.3	25.8	23.3	20.9	18.5	16.8
45–49	21.1	22.0	25.0	27.5	29.1	30.6	32.0	31.1	29.8	28.4	26.1
49–54	14.2	13.8	13.9	14.3	14.4	15.2	15.6	17.2	18.3	21.1	23.3
55–59	7.7	7.2	7.1	6.8	6.3	6.1	5.7	5.3	5.1	6.1	7.2
60–64	2.4	2.2	2.0	2.0	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.1
65 and over	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
Women											
Under 25	10.1	9.3	9.1	9.5	10.6	11.9	12.4	13.3	14.0	13.6	13.8
25–29	26.8	27.5	28.5	29.5	30.6	31.9	33.4	35.8	38.5	40.5	42.2
30–34	27.6	25.0	23.4	22.5	22.7	24.0	25.4	26.9	27.8	28.5	29.2
35–39	41.9	40.4	38.2	35.5	32.6	29.7	27.0	24.9	23.4	22.9	23.3
40–44	48.3	51.1	52.0	52.0	51.5	50.0	47.7	44.9	41.8	37.7	34.0
45–49	35.7	36.6	40.7	44.2	47.1	50.4	53.5	54.2	53.8	53.2	51.1
49–54	28.5	27.4	27.0	27.3	27.4	28.4	29.1	31.6	33.2	37.4	41.1
55–59	15.7	15.1	14.9	14.7	13.9	13.6	12.8	11.8	11.3	12.9	14.5
60–64	3.0	3.0	2.9	2.8	2.6	2.4	2.2	2.1	1.9	1.9	1.9
65 and over	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1

Thousand

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Men and women											
Under 25	12.0	11.1	10.8	11.4	12.9	14.5	15.2	16.2	17.1	16.5	16.5
25–29	36.2	36.4	37.4	38.4	39.9	41.9	43.9	47.1	50.8	52.9	54.8
30–34	43.7	39.2	36.3	37.4	34.6	35.9	37.4	39.2	40.3	41.2	42.2
35–39	71.2	66.6	61.5	56.3	51.2	46.6	42.3	39.2	37.0	36.1	36.5
40–44	81.8	85.6	85.3	83.9	82.0	78.2	73.6	68.2	62.7	56.2	50.7
45–49	56.8	58.6	65.7	71.7	76.2	81.0	85.5	85.3	83.5	81.6	77.1
49–54	42.7	41.2	40.8	41.5	41.8	43.7	44.7	48.8	51.5	58.5	64.5
55–59	23.4	22.3	21.9	21.5	20.2	19.6	18.5	17.0	16.5	19.0	21.7
60–64	5.4	5.2	5.0	4.7	4.2	3.8	3.4	3.2	3.1	3.0	3.0
65 and over	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Age and sex not known[2]	0.0	2.8	1.8	4.0	5.5	4.3	4.3	3.5	3.2	2.6	2.9
Part-time (fte)[2,3]	24.2	25.5	27.2	27.5	28.5	29.9	30.8	31.2	32.0	33.3	34.7
Full-time and part-time (fte)	397.6	394.8	394.0	395.9	397.0	399.6	399.8	399.2	397.7	401.2	404.6

[1] Totals may not be the sum of the component parts because of rounding
[2] For 1990 to 1992 the not known and part-time figures are estimated
[3] Age and sex details of part-time teachers have not been given because about 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-timers are not recorded on the Teachers' Pension Scheme, from which the data are obtained

Pupil Funding

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the average revenue funding per pupil in *(a)* foundation and *(b)* voluntary aided schools in (i)1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999 and (iv) 2000. [14570]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* Data are not collected separately for foundation schools (this status has been in existence since September 1999) and voluntary aided schools.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will maintain funding for school sixth forms in real terms in 2003–04. [14571]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* This Government remain committed to the real terms guarantee for school sixth form funding.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to whom indicative budgets for individual school sixth forms in Worcestershire have been made available; and if she will publish them by 5 November. [12459]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The first provisional allocations for school sixth forms will be notified to LEAs and made public by the Learning and Skills Council in December 2001. The baseline data on which the real terms guarantee for sixth forms will be calculated was the subject of consultation between the DfES and local education authorities in August. Schools also received the relevant provisional baseline data on which the Department consulted in early September as part of a guidance pack published by the Learning and Skills Council.

Teachers' Salaries

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the average *(a)* starting and *(b)* top scale teachers' salaries in real terms in each of the last 20 years, in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools. [14413]

Mr. Timms: I will write to the hon. Member enclosing this information as soon as possible, and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish comparative figures for *(a)* starting and *(b)* top scale teacher salaries in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools. [14414]

Mr. Timms: The information requested, which is published in the OECD annual "Education at a Glance", is shown in the following table and refers to 1999, the latest year for which information is available.

Teacher statutory salaries by whether working in primary or secondary: 1999
Annual statutory pay, excluding bonuses converted to US dollars based on purchasing power parities

	Primary		*Lower secondary*		*Upper secondary*	
	Minimum	*Maximum*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
Australia	25,661	37,502	26,658	37,577	26,658	37,577
Austria	21,804	44,159	22,421	46,735	24,027	54,443
Belgium (Fl)	22,901	36,594	23,428	40,017	29,075	40,461
Belgium (Fr)	22,043	35,685	22,561	39,115	28,151	49,581
Czech Republic	6,806	12,103	6,806	12,103	8,052	14,316
Denmark	28,140	32,684	28,140	32,684	29,986	42,672
England	19,999	33,540	19,999	33,540	19,999	33,540
Finland	18,110	25,615	20,394	29,530	21,047	31,325
France	19,761	39,271	21,918	41,537	21,918	41,537
Germany	29,697	38,996	33,196	43,945	35,546	49,445

Teacher statutory salaries by whether working in primary or secondary: 1999
Annual statutory pay, excluding bonuses converted to US dollars based on purchasing power parities

	Primary		Lower secondary		Upper secondary	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Greece	19,327	28,027	19,650	28,987	19,650	28,987
Hungary	5,763	11,105	5,763	11,105	6,908	13,217
Iceland	19,939	25,377	19,939	25,377	20,775	30,954
Ireland	21,940	40,141	23,033	40,532	23,033	40,523
Italy	19,188	28,038	20,822	31,062	20,822	32,602
Korea	23,759	62,281	23,613	62,135	23,613	62,135
Mexico	10,465	22,345	13,357	27,643	n/a	n/a
Netherlands	25,896	37,381	26,874	41,066	27,133	54,720
New Zealand	16,678	32,573	16,678	32,573	16,678	32,573
Norway	22,194	27,453	22,194	27,453	22,194	27,453
Portugal	18,751	50,061	18,751	50,061	18,751	50,061
Scotland	19,765	32,858	19,765	32,858	19,765	32,858
Spain	24,464	37,317	26,669	40,082	29,058	43,100
Sweden	18,581	n/a	18,704	n/a	20,549	n/a
Switzerland	33,209	51,813	39,162	60,165	46,866	70,548
Turkey	9,116	11,541	8,144	10,568	8,144	10,568
USA	25,707	43,094	25,155	44,397	25,405	44,394

Notes:
1. The OECD asks for statutory salary scale points but, where these are not available, countries can use survey data on actual salary and use approximations to identify equivalents to bottom and top of the scale.
2. Some countries pay different salaries to teachers in primary and secondary schools although there is no such distinction in England. 'Lower secondary' is, broadly the 11–15 age range and upper secondary is 16–19.
3. These salary comparisons can be only broadly indicative. Thus, they exclude extra allowances and yet, in England, many teachers at the top of the scale would also get management allowances. The figures pre-date the introduction of performance related pay but the OECD definition would exclude that too. There are other differences, for example in the treatment of employer social security payments.
4. The time taken to get to the top of the scale varies markedly between countries and so, for example, a country with a high top scale point might require many years service to reach this and so the top point is not representative of the pay of most teachers.
5. 'Purchasing power parties' are different from currency exchange rates and aim to reflect differences in price levels between countries and are more appropriate for those comparisons. Teacher salaries will also reflect the overall levels of national incomes and wages in national economies which is one reason why the range of salaries is so wide. There will be other such factors such as the average age of entry to teaching of new qualifiers. Salary will also reflect non-pay elements of remuneration and features of the teaching job such as hours, workload, job security, status all of which might vary between countries.

Source:
Tables D1.1a-c, OECD "Education at a Glance" 2001, published by OECD, Paris.

Early Years Education

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of early years settings employ a qualified teacher; and what the cost would be of placing a qualified teacher in every early years setting. [14579]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* Approximately 35,000 early years settings are registered to deliver Government funded nursery education. Of these, around 50 per cent. are local education authority maintained primary schools and nursery schools, all of which directly employ qualified teachers.

We have asked local early years development and child care partnerships (EYDCPs), in association with their local education authorities, to ensure that a ratio of one teacher with qualified teacher status to every 10 early education settings in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector is achieved by 2004.

The approximate cost of placing a qualified teacher in every PVI sector setting would be £435 million per annum. We have no present plans to do this.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Haskins Report

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which hon. Members were given *(a)* notice of and *(b)* briefing on the content of Lord Haskins report prior to 12.30 pm on 18 October. [9951]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* I am not aware that any hon. Members were given advance notice of and briefing on the content of Lord Haskins report prior to 12.30 pm on 18 October. My noble Friend launched his report at 10.30 am on that day.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to claim agrimonetary compensation from the EU; and if she will make a statement. [12356]

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to claim further agrimonetary compensation. [12419]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Since 1997, a total of £785 million has been announced in agrimonetary compensation for farmers. Of this, £256 million has been optional. We have no plans to claim any agrimonetary compensation from the EU. Any future payments of agrimonetary compensation, to which the Exchequer would have to contribute at least 71p in every pound, must be balanced against the needs of other sectors and taxpayers.

Mink Farms

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many mink farms were operating in England and Wales on 28 February; and if she will list their locations by county. [13805]

Mr. Morley: As at 28 February 2001, there were the following licensed mink farms in England:

County	*Number*
Cornwall	1
Dorset	1
Hampshire	1
Isle of Wight	1
Lancashire	4
Northumberland	1
Staffordshire	1
South Yorkshire	1
West Yorkshire	1
Total	12

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list all movements of farmed mink that took place in England and Wales during *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [13802]

Mr. Morley: There is no requirement to inform the Department of the movement of mink. Under the Mink (Keeping) Regulations 1975 (as amended), such movements must be carried out in closed cages or other containers which prevent mink from escaping. The movement of farmed mink in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. However, I understand that there have been no licensed mink farms in Wales for some years.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what dates each of the mink farms operating in England and Wales were inspected during 2001; and what plans there are to inspect farms after 30 September. [13801]

Mr. Morley: Mink farms in England were inspected on the following dates in 2001:

County	*Date of security inspections*	*Date of welfare inspections*
Cornwall	—	30 January
Dorset	27 June	—
Hampshire	27 June	26 January
	16 July	2 February
	24 October	
Isle of Wight	14 June	—
Lancashire	3 April	—
	4 April	
Northumberland	22 February	—
South Yorkshire	1 May	—
West Yorkshire	13 September	—

Due to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, a number of planned mid-year security and welfare inspections could not be made. However, the usual programme of inspections will now continue for those mink farms still in operation.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* breeding female and *(b)* other mink were present at each of the mink farms operating on 28 February; and if she will show the figures by (i) farm and (ii) county. [13804]

Mr. Morley: We estimate, following visits by independent consultants engaged by the Department, that in February 2001 a total of 30,000 female and 6,000 male mink were being kept in England. I am unable to release details by farm because of commercial confidentiality.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many mink farms were operating and contained live mink in England and Wales on 1 October; and if she will list their locations by county. [13803]

Mr. Morley: As at 1 October 2001, three mink farms in England were licensed and contained live mink, two in Lancashire and one in Hampshire.

Energy Performance (Buildings)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many responses were received to the Government's consultation on the proposed EU directive on the energy performance of buildings; and how many of these responses welcomed the proposal. [12756]

Mr. Meacher: Approximately 150 written responses were received in response to the Government's consultation on the proposed EU directive on the energy performance of buildings. The consultation closed on 26 October and the responses are currently being analysed, but an initial review of the responses so far indicates that all but three were broadly supportive of the proposed directive. A summary of responses will be published on the DEFRA website in due course.

Foot and Mouth

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the percentage of FMD cases where transmission of the disease was *(a)* from animal to animal, *(b)* airborne, *(c)* from contact with persons who had handled infected animals, *(d)* from contact with persons who had no contact with infected animals and *(e)* due to other causes. [12293]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Investigations into the epidemiology of the outbreak are continuing and a number of publications are planned. The following interim results are minimum estimates for the single cause of infection.

	Number of cases	*Percentage of cases*
(a) Animal to animal	92	4.5
(b) Airborne	18	0.9
(c) and *(d)* Personal contact	73	3.6
(e) Other causes[1]	1,840	90.9
Total	2,023	—

[1] See breakdown in following table

Breakdown of (e) 'other causes'

	Number of cases	*Percentage of cases*
Local transmission	1,587	78.4
Dairy tanker	13	0.6
Other fomite	12	0.6
Other vehicles	29	1.4
Under investigation	199	9.9

Notes:

1. Figures do not distinguish between those persons who handled infected animals and those who did not.
2. Many infected premises had multiple possible sources of infection. If investigations reveal that there was more than one potential source within the appropriate time frame and the case falls within 3 kilometres of an earlier premises, the cause is recorded as 'local' transmission.
3. A fomite is defined as any inanimate object capable of carrying the virus.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what differences there are between the guidance given to Herefordshire council about grants to assist businesses affected by foot and mouth disease and that issued to Business Link and the Forest of Dean council and to Gloucestershire council. [6468]

Alun Michael: Within the guidelines it was left to individual regional development agencies to decide how to manage and prioritise the assistance given. Officials have looked at the way this has been dealt with by south-west regional development agency and Advantage West Midlands and are satisfied that although differing in detail both are consistent with the guidelines. I will write to my hon. Friend with further details.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of jobs lost in the agricultural sector as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. [7749]

Alun Michael: The Department does not have statistics which could accurately reflect any job losses in the agricultural sector resulting from foot and mouth disease. As part of our efforts to properly interpret the social and economic impact on rural areas we are currently running a telephone survey of a sample of farmers who have been directly or indirectly affected by foot and mouth disease. This survey includes questions relating to the employment effects of the outbreak.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what requirements farms must comply with in order to qualify for *(a)* cleansing and *(b)* restocking following a foot and mouth outbreak; [8147]

(2) if she will make a statement on her policy on *(a)* cleansing and *(b)* restocking of farms infected by foot and mouth; [8146]

(3) if she will make a statement on how the restocking procedure following the foot and mouth outbreak will be implemented and the criteria governing this programme. [8153]

Mr. Morley: Cleansing and disinfection and restocking are key stages in the FMD eradication process.

Our policy is to ensure that cleansing and disinfection is carried out thoroughly and efficiently while at the same time ensuring the best use of public funds. Preliminary cleansing and disinfection (C and D) is carried out during the slaughter and disposal stage on all premises known, or believed to be contaminated with foot and mouth disease in order to minimise the risk of the virus spreading to neighbouring farms. Twenty-four hours after this stage has been completed, secondary C and D can commence, the purpose of which is to reduce the risk of recrudescence and allow for restocking. Restocking can commence once the farmer has a certificate stating the C and D has been satisfactorily completed.

The Department will normally pay the costs of secondary C and D providing farms are (a) in a reasonable state of cleanliness and repair, (b) there are no health and safety implications for those involved in the cleansing operation and (c) that the costs incurred are proportionate to the individual farm situation. Since 5 August, contractual arrangements have been tightened and farmers encouraged to undertake secondary C and D themselves, wherever possible.

Restocking must be accomplished in such a way as to balance the needs of the livestock industry and the veterinary and scientific advice as to the disease control risks involved in this process. The key elements of our restocking policy are as follows:

Secondary C and D must take place and a period of 21 days allowed to elapse prior to restocking.

If secondary C and D does not take place, a period of 12 months must elapse prior to restocking.

Movements of stock on to the farm must be licensed by DEFRA.

The numbers of livestock permitted for initial restocking must be set out in the premises restocking plan, which must be approved by the divisional veterinary manager.

Depending on the origin of sheep, testing of the flock of origin and all the sheep to be moved may be required. This will give valuable surveillance data on the prevalence of disease in the national flock.

Animals are to be inspected regularly for four weeks. Sheep and goats will be blood tested after 28 days. If all clear, restrictions can be lifted.

Further advice on restocking is available to farmers on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/.

Sheep and Goats

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the National Farmers Union and *(b)* others about the National Farmers Union's proposals for individual identification of sheep and goats; and if he will make a statement. [13952]

Mr. Morley: The NFU has not put forward proposals for compulsory individual identification of sheep and goats.

My officials have had initial discussions with industry representatives, which included NFU, about the future identification requirements for sheep and goats. Individual identification was one of the options discussed and we are now considering the views expressed by industry before a final decision is taken.

Agriculture Revenue

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the income of the United Kingdom Agriculture industry was that derived from *(a)* EU common agricultural policy funds, including intervention sales, *(b)* UK funds and product sales, and *(c)* other sources, expressed in (i) cash and (ii) percentage terms, in the last 12 months. [12881]

Mr. Morley: Estimates of the revenue to the agricultural industry broken down by source for the calendar year 2000 are given in the table.

Revenue to the UK agricultural industry in the year 2000

	£ million	*Percentage*
Total revenue[1]	15,587	100
of which:		
CAP support—EU funded[2]	2,432	16
UK Exchequer funding[3]	144	1
Product sales[4]	11,613	75
Taxes	−103	−1
Other sources[5]	1,501	10

[1] Gross output at basic prices plus other subsidies less taxes on production

[2] Excludes indirect market support such as intervention purchases but includes payments for over-30-month scheme

[3] Includes CAP support measures funded by UK Exchequer

[4] Includes the effects of indirect market support which cost £497 million in 2000–01

[5] Includes transactions between farms and revenue from non-agricultural activities on the farm

Entrust

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when and how often Entrust provides financial reports to HM Customs and Excise. [13876]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Customs has direct online access to Entrust's accounting database which contains detailed reports from environmental bodies. In addition Entrust provides Customs with its annual audited company accounts and an annual report containing statistical information about the landfill tax credit scheme.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for the future role of Entrust, as a result of the proposed reform of the landfill tax credit scheme. [13875]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

As stated in Budget 2001, we are attracted to replacing all or part of the landfill tax credit scheme with a public spending programme to direct resources towards Government priorities on sustainable waste management. The Government, together with the devolved Administrations, are developing options for a spending programme for consideration as part of the spending review 2002. Maintaining the current scheme, potentially with minor modifications, will also be reviewed. The Government will consult with interested parties on the future of the scheme and the transition to any replacement. The role of Entrust will be determined by the outcome of this consultation.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are taken by Entrust to conduct audits into applications for grants for environmental projects as part of the landfill tax credit scheme; and if she will make a statement. [13877]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Entrust is responsible for enroling environmental bodies and checking that they meet qualifying criteria. It monitors the spending of these bodies through a risk based audit programme and notifies Customs where money has not been properly spent.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what remuneration packages are available to executives of Entrust; and if she will make a statement. [13878]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

As a private sector company, details of the salaries and benefits of its employees are a matter for Entrust.

Zoo Animals

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on *(a)* the conditions in which zoo animals are kept and *(b)* the consequences for the safety of their keepers. [13816]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice provide comprehensive guidance on best practice for keeping animals in zoos (this document can be obtained from DEFRAs website at www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/gwd/zooprac/index.htm). They set out the basic principles that zoos need to observe to secure the proper care and well-being of the animals in their care, and they form the basis on which zoo inspections are carried out on behalf of local authorities under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981.

The health and safety of zoo employees is provided for by a separate inspection process under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive. Although the inspection regimes are quite separate, the local authorities often co-ordinate the inspections as benefits can arise from conducting them together.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made in financial terms of abuse related to the landfill tax credit scheme. [13910]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Because of on-going investigations no accurate financial assessment of abuse in the landfill tax credit scheme is currently available.

Flooding

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assistance she is providing to the *(a)* London borough of Redbridge and *(b)* Environment Agency to protect properties at risk from flooding. [13976]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA provides grant aid for flood defence capital works, and associated studies, which meet essential technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score.

DEFRA has recently approved for grant aid two studies, the Seven Kings Water and Cran Brook Hydraulic Studies, being undertaken by the London borough of Redbridge. The estimated cost is £44,000 and the council has been awarded a grant rate of 45 per cent.

The Environment Agency has extended flood warning arrangements and are also undertaking studies and maintenance in the area, but have not sought DEFRA funding as yet.

Hunting

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to allow fox hunting to resume; and if she will make a statement. [12337]

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on when hunting will recommence in Wales following the foot and mouth outbreak. [12838]

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the veterinary risk of resuming hunting in Worcestershire; and if she will make a statement. [12678]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* The veterinary risk assessment raises a number of complex issues regarding the future of foot and mouth disease related restrictions on hunting and such matters involve a careful balance of risks. It will be published as soon as Ministers and DEFRA officials have completed their consideration of the document. An announcement on the future of foot and mouth disease controls on hunting will be made as soon as possible.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of the total UK volume of radioactive wastes has been produced by the nuclear power sector in the last five years. [13289]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* Approximately 93 per cent. of the total volume of radioactive wastes produced in the last five years has arisen from the nuclear power sector and its associated research and development activities.

Movement of Livestock Scheme

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at what dates and times the autumn movement of livestock scheme website has been unavailable; and if she will make a statement on the impact on applicants of the unavailability of that website. [12543]

Mr. Morley: Information on the livestock movement scheme is held on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk. This site has been continuously available since the scheme was introduced.

Fox Control

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what risk assessments have been completed on the recommencement of fox control in Wales following the foot and mouth outbreak; and if she will place copies of the risk assessments in the Library. [12839]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 735–36W.

Beef Consumption

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of beef consumption was *(a)* UK produced and *(b)* imported in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [14061]

Mr. Morley: Estimates of the breakdown of UK beef consumption between imported and UK produced beef are given in the table:

United Kingdom beef consumption

Unit[1]

Year	*Total available for UK consumption*	*Of which: imports*[2]	*As a percentage of total consumption*	*Of which: UK produced beef*	*As percentage of total consumption*
1991	995	204	20	791	80
1992	993	206	21	788	79
1993	921	209	23	712	77
1994	969	190	20	778	80
1995	903	212	24	691	76
1996	732	169	23	563	77
1997	857	217	25	640	75
1998	858	152	18	706	82
1999	934	183	20	751	80
2000[3]	915	197	21	718	79

[1] Thousand tonnes carcase weight equivalent

[2] Assumes all imports are consumed in the UK and all imports during a particular year are consumed in that year

[3] Provisional data

Source:

Prepared by: Statistics (Commodities and Food) Division, Economics and Statistics Directorate, DEFRA

Vets

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many vets were employed by the state veterinary service in each year since 1997. [14058]

Mr. Morley: The number of veterinary surgeons employed by the state veterinary service at 1 January each year since 1997 is given in the table.

Of the 286 full-time equivalent veterinarians employed by the state veterinary service, 220 are employed as field veterinary officers. The work of these officers is supplemented by about 100 temporary veterinary inspectors (TVIs) from the private sector in normal times.

Year	*Number of vets*
1997	289.5
1998	302.0
1999	283.0
2000	284.0
2001	286.0

Sheepmeat Exports

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects the commencement of sheepmeat exports; and if she will list those countries free from foot and mouth disease from which sheepmeat destined for export can be derived. [14060]

Mr. Morley: It is anticipated that the mechanisms for the recommencement of exports of sheepmeat will be in place by 19 November 2001. The areas where the sheep may be sourced are available in the Library of the House.

GM Crop Trials

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make it her policy that no new farmscale GM crop trials will be licensed within cross-pollination distance of Ryton Organic Gardens; [275]

(2) what powers the Government have to intervene in the licensing of the farmscale GM crop trials once they have been approved by SCIMAC and the Scientific Steering Committee. [289]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The crops grown in the programme of farmscale evaluations (FSEs) are at two different stages in the authorisation process. The powers to intervene in the licensing of the FSEs depend on the authorisation status of the GM crop concerned.

The oil seed rape and beet are authorised by my Department for growing in the evaluations under UK legislation implementing Part B of European directive 90/220 on deliberate release of GMOs. The consent is underpinned by a risk assessment and permits the GM crops to be grown in the evaluations on any arable land where rape or beet would normally be grown. The consent holder has to notify the Department of the locations of proposed sites prior to sowing together with a statement indicating whether the risk assessment remains valid for the new site and, if not, provide further evaluation. The consent holder may proceed to sow the crop unless he receives written indication from the Department that the new site does not comply on safety or other grounds with the conditions of the consent and the risk assessment.

The GM maize has Europe-wide approval for cultivation under Part C of Directive 90/220 granted in August 1998 by the French competent authority on behalf of the EC. However, this approval imposes no restrictions or conditions on the locations where the maize can be grown. For this crop, therefore, the Department has no statutory powers to intervene over the location of trial sites. However, before the GM maize could be grown commercially individual varieties will require listing on the National List of Seeds or the European Common Catalogue. In addition, under our voluntary agreement with the industry body SCIMAC, this GM crop will not be grown commercially in the UK until the completion of the evaluations and only then if it is assessed as causing no unacceptable effects on the environment.

The evaluations are being undertaken by an independent research consortium and overseen by the independent Scientific Steering Committee. SCIMAC provide the fields of crops for study. The steering committee has set overall criteria for the conduct of the evaluations and requires a representative distribution of sites. SCIMAC find farmers who may be willing to host an evaluation and draw up a list of potential farms from which the researchers select sites to meet the SSC criteria. Ministers are not involved in this process.

Given the public reaction to the proposal to locate an evaluation close to Ryton Organic Gardens last spring, the Government will use their influence to seek to ensure that no FSE site is chosen in future within cross-pollution distance of Ryton Organic Gardens.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 15 November 2001

DEFENCE

Territorial Army

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the role of the Territorial Army in guarding UK installations against terrorist attack. [13679]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 377W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of correspondence between his Department and the Medical Research Council prior to 21 November 2000, relating to the proposal to seek its advice on the feasibility of an epidemiological study into volunteers who took part in experiments at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down. [14743]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 13 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 163–64W. There is no such correspondence on this matter other than that which was placed in the Library of the House.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officials in his Department are employed to carry out the comprehensive survey of the service volunteer programme at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down announced on 1 May; what grade each of these officials is; and on what date each started work on the comprehensive survey. [14748]

Dr. Moonie: With effect from 28 February 2001 the historical survey has been undertaken by a Principal (Grade B2) working for the Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit. Additional support has been provided, as required, by staff based at Porton Down and within the Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will issue a press release announcing the winners of the contract to carry out the epidemiological study to explore the health of volunteers who took part in experiments at the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down; and when the winners will be chosen. [14749]

Dr. Moonie: At the request of the Ministry of Defence the Medical Research Council (MRC) invited proposals for such a study and these are now under consideration. Recommendations about which proposals are suitable for funding by the MOD are expected after the next meeting of the MRC's Physiological, Medicine and Infections Board in January. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement about which proposals will be taken forward shortly after that.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff are employed in his Department's Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit specifically to deal with issues relating to Porton Down volunteers. [14753]

Dr. Moonie: At present, four Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit staff deal full time with issues relating to Porton Down volunteers; a further six staff assist with these issues on a part-time basis as required.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel who took part in experiments at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down, have been referred to the medical assessment programme since 21 November 2000; and how many of these have been seen by the medical assessment programme. [14762]

Dr. Moonie: During the period 21 November 2000 to 8 November 2001, 94 former Porton Down volunteers have been referred to the MAP. Of this number 88 have been seen.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many teams of scientists and academics have expressed an interest in carrying out the epidemiological study to explore the health of volunteers who took part in experiments at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down, since 21 June; if he will list these teams; and if he will place in the Library copies of the submissions of interest of those teams which have now withdrawn from the competition to conduct this study. [14757]

Dr. Moonie: This is a matter for the Medical Research Council (MRC), which has invited research proposals on behalf of the Ministry of Defence and will make recommendations about which proposals merit funding early next year. The MRC treats competing applications for peer review in strict confidence and therefore details of the proposals may not be released. However, we have been advised by the MRC that they received 15 expressions of interest, of which seven were shortlisted. Subsequently five research proposals were received from four United Kingdom groups.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates officials in his Department have held meetings with the Medical Research Council since 5 April, to discuss the epidemiological study into volunteers who took part in experiments at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down. [14744]

Dr. Moonie: Meetings between Ministry of Defence staff and the Medical Research Council to discuss epidemiological research into Porton Down volunteers took place on 30 May, 2 August, and 3 August.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many questionnaires have been sent out to former service personnel by his Department's officials conducting the comprehensive survey of the service volunteer programme at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down; and how many questionnaires have been returned by former service personnel who took part in the experiments. [14755]

Dr. Moonie: Some 726 questionnaires seeking recollections from former participants of the Porton Down Service Volunteer programme have been distributed by the Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit via the Wiltshire police and the Medical Assessment Programme. As at 13 November 2001, 400 questionnaires had been returned.

Freedom of Information Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date his Department established a working group of officials to prepare his Department for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and on what dates this committee has met since it was set up. [14769]

Dr. Moonie: Following Royal Assent in November 2000, officials in the relevant Ministry of Defence policy branch began making initial preparations for implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This has involved an ad hoc programme of briefings, meetings and workshops to heighten awareness and improve understanding of the Act. As a result, the main defence management areas and policy branches were asked in August 2001 to nominate representatives to participate in the principal Freedom of Information (FOI) working group, which has responsibility for ensuring smooth implementation of the Act across the MOD. The FOI Working Group had its inaugural meeting on 17 October and it will meet again in mid-December.

Afghanistan

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what instructions have been given to service personnel engaged in Afghanistan in the event of them encountering UK citizens fighting for *(a)* the Taliban and *(b)* al-Qaeda; and if he will make a statement; [13629]

(2) what instructions have been issued to UK forces in Afghanistan in the event of them taking prisoner a UK citizen fighting for *(a)* the Taliban and *(b)* al-Qaeda; and if he will make a statement. [13623]

Mr. Hoon: Wherever they are engaged, British forces are required to act in accordance with national and international law. Any prisoners taken would be treated in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if cluster bomblets are defined as precision munitions in the conflict with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan. [14263]

Mr. Ingram: Cluster bombs rely on a ballistic delivery—for example, on the skill of the crew to ensure accuracy—and neither the bombs nor the bomblets that they release are laser guided. They are used with discretion and proportionality as international law requires, and against legitimate and appropriate terrorist and military targets that are selected with great care. Our targeting and weapons selection processes are rigorous with every effort made to avoid civilian casualties.

Ex-prisoners of War

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims for ex gratia payments for former captives of the Japanese have been refused; and what the circumstances of those applicants were. [13972]

Dr. Moonie: As at 12 November 2001, 3,741 claims for ex gratia payments for former captives of the Japanese have been refused. The circumstances of those applicants vary widely, but include civilian internees who did not meet the criteria of being a British subject either born in the UK or having a parent or grandparent born in the UK, those not interned and children of former prisoners of war of the Japanese.

Nuclear Submarines (Secondment)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the two nuclear submarines that may be allocated to the European Peacekeeping and Peacemaking Corps, include types capable of firing *(a)* tomahawks and *(b)* nuclear missiles. [14826]

Mr. Hoon: There is no European Peacekeeping and Peacemaking Corps. The UK has offered to provide two nuclear-powered attack submarines to the pool of forces and capabilities required to meet the EU's Helsinki Headline Goal. These submarines are capable of firing Tomahawk missiles. No nuclear forces have been offered.

MOD Police

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many redundancies have taken place within the MOD police in each of the last three years; and how many MOD police have been transferred to the police service. [15167]

Dr. Moonie: Eleven Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) officers, through a limited mobility waiver scheme, accepted voluntary redundancy on compulsory early retirement/compulsory early severance terms during financial year 1998–99. There were no such redundancies during financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01. The number of officers who have resigned from the MDP and joined Home or Scottish Office forces are shown in the table:

Year	*Number resigned*
1998–99	1
1999–2000	8
2000–01	34

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had on the merger of MOD police and the atomic energy police. [15168]

Dr. Moonie: The respective Quinquennial Reviews of the Ministry of Defence Police and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary are considering a range of options in regard to these organisations. The outcome of these reviews will be made known in due course.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of running the MOD police was in the last 12 months. [15170]

Dr. Moonie: The total net operating cost of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency for financial year 2000–01 was £151.869 million.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Chief Executive of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency met the First Minister to discuss the relocation of the fixed wing aircraft repair business from RAF St. Athan to Cardiff International Airport. [15157]

Mr. Ingram: Defence Aviation Repair Agency records show that the meeting with the First Minister took place on 28 March 2001.

Projects

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on projects *(a)* Connaught and *(b)* Allenby. [15070]

Dr. Moonie: The management of Project Allenby and Connaught has been combined. The project's feasibility studies into the Army's accommodation and support service requirements for garrisons around the Salisbury Plain and in Aldershot were completed in the summer and their recommendations are being considered by Ministers.

Churches

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to make funding available to carry out essential repairs to the Royal Garrison Church, Aldershot. [15068]

Dr. Moonie: A total of £18,000 will be spent on planned maintenance and unforeseen repairs to the Royal Garrison Church, Aldershot in this financial year. Of this, some £4,000 has already been spent.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many churches in the United Kingdom are maintained by his Department; and if he will list their locations by denomination. [15071]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Proposed Payment System

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposed Ministry of Defence payment system and the role of prime contractor EDS. [14629]

Mr. Ingram: The delivery of armed forces pay under the new arrangements introduced by Pay 2000 involved rebuilding the core of the three single service pay systems. Since 1 April 2001, 95 per cent. of our regular armed forces have been paid under these systems. The remainder will be transferred by April 2003. The Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency (AFPAA) has a PFI partnering arrangement with Electronic Data Systems (EDS) for the delivery of information systems and information technology in support of the personnel administration and pay of service personnel.

Reservists

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reservists, called up in the last month, have reported for duty; and if he will make a statement. [15185]

Mr. Ingram: During the past month 118 reservists were called out and all have reported for duty. This reflects the success of our policy of seeking volunteers to be called out. They are serving in a variety of locations including the former Yugoslavia and Sierra Leone and in support of operations resulting from the terrorist attacks in the United States of America on 11 September.

Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 434W, on ballistic missiles, when he will place a copy of the code of conduct in the Library. [15182]

Mr. Hoon: A copy of the draft International Code of Conduct on Ballistic Missiles was placed in the Library of the House today.

September 11 (Financial Consequences)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 435W, on the cost of Operation Veritas, for what reason he has referred the hon. Member for North Essex to an answer to a previous question, referring to a letter to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker), 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 114W, which has not been sent; and when he will *(a)* give and *(b)* publish in the *Official Report* a substantive answer to the question from the hon. Member for North Essex. [15275]

Mr. Hoon: The financial data required to provide a substantive answer on the costs to date of Operation Veritas are still being gathered. I hope to be able to provide the information requested in due course.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date he instructed officials to draw up draft legislation to prevent the Rail Regulator performing an interim financial review on Railtrack. [10404]

Mr. Spellar: Details of internal communications are exempt from disclosure under paragraph 2, part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he contacted *(a)* the Chairman and *(b)* directors of Railtrack plc on Saturday 6 October to ask whether the Board accepted that Railtrack plc was insolvent; [14461]

(2) if he will list the contacts made by *(a)* him and *(b)* his officials with the Board of Railtrack Group plc on Saturday 6 October. [14462]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* There were numerous contacts at various levels between my Department and Railtrack plc and our respective legal and financial advisers on Saturday 6 October.

Scottish Devolution

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is regarding consultations prior to the publication of proposals involving the transfer of powers to the Scottish Executive by *(a)* primary legislation and *(b)* Order in Council. [13826]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 748W.

Home Condition Inspections

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of *(a)* the number of home inspectors who will be needed to enforce the proposals in the seller's pack and *(b)* the cost to the taxpayer of policing compliance with the seller's pack. [13808]

Ms Keeble: Home condition inspection should not be confused with enforcement. The home condition report will be a standard mid-level survey that we propose should be a mandatory part of the seller's pack. This survey will be carried out by accredited professionals who may be surveyors, buildings inspectors or any other professional who satisfies the accreditation body that they have the necessary skills and knowledge.

We anticipate that some 7,000 to 9,000 people will need to have been accredited through the certification regime in order to provide home condition reports. The vast majority of these will be currently practising professionals.

The cost of enforcement would depend on the regime agreed by Parliament. But the assessment provided by L.A.C.O.T.S. of the costs arising from the proposals in the 2000 Homes Bill suggested an average of around £5,000 per annum for each local authority to meet the costs of enforcement work by trading standards officers.

Fire and Civil Defence Authorities

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to mitigate the reductions in the 2001–02 budgets of fire and civil defence authorities arising from the fire call element of the standard spending assessment. [13598]

Dr. Whitehead: All metropolitan fire authorities received an increase in grant in 2001–02 and will receive an increase in grant, as a result of the floor and ceiling mechanism, in the 2002–03 local government finance settlement.

We recognise that the fire calls element of the fire Standard Spending Assessment is a perverse incentive and are committed to removing this indicator as part of the current review of local government finance. That review, which is being undertaken in partnership with local government, is looking at a number of ways in which the fire calls indicator might be replaced from 2003–04.

Swimming Pools

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what financial support he gives for the construction of swimming pools in partnership with local and regional authorities. [14040]

Dr. Whitehead: This Department makes no specific financial provision available for construction of swimming pools. However local authorities may use their non ring-fenced basic credit approvals, which are issued by this Department, to support borrowing for any capital projects. The majority of capital funding for sport is channelled through the sports councils. Sport England is the distributor for the Lottery Sports Fund, to which local authorities may apply, which provides funding for a range of community sports facilities, including swimming pools.

Access Road (Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to provide a second access road to the new Norfolk and Norwich University hospital. [13863]

Mr. Jamieson: None. South Norfolk district council are currently considering an outline planning application for residential development at Cringleford together with a new link road between the A11 and Colney Lane. The new link road would have the potential to provide an alternative route to the new Norfolk and Norwich hospital.

It is for Norfolk county council, as the local highway authority, to consider the question of a second access for the hospital. The Highways Agency looked at the acceptability of allowing direct access to the hospital from the A47 and concluded that an additional junction between the B1108 Watton road and the A11 would affect the safe and efficient operation of this section of the A47. Subsequently a technical assessment of a direct link between the A47 and the hospital was commissioned by Norfolk county council and the Highways Agency is currently examining proposals received from the county council on 1 November.

Connex South Eastern

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what subsidies have been paid to Connex South Eastern to assist them with the purchase of new trains; when these payments were made; what Connex is required to do as a consequence of accepting these payments; how many confirmed orders for new trains Connex has informed his Department it has made; and how many trains Connex has accepted. [13874]

Mr. Jamieson: Between 13 October 1996 and 31 March 2001, the following amounts of franchise support were paid to Connex South Eastern by the franchising director and, since 1 February 2001, by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA).

Year	*Cash price (£ million)*
1996–97	58
1997–98	115
1998–99	86
1999–2000	64
2000–01	43

Franchise support for Connex South Eastern is the franchising director's and the SRA's contribution to funding all the company's expenditure under its franchise agreement, including expenditure on new trains. Under the agreement, the company is required to use all reasonable endeavours to introduce new trains on time. I understand that the company has ordered 210 vehicles, 16 of which are in passenger service.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what are London Underground's estimated *(a)* passengers, *(b)* passenger kilometres operated, *(c)* gross operating costs, *(d)* total income from fares and *(e)* gross operating margin for 2001–02. [14606]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* The budgeted information for 2001–02 for London Underground Ltd. (including the InfraCos) is as follows:

(a) Fare paying passenger journeys—975 million;

(b) Passenger kilometres operated—7,518 million;

(c) Gross operating costs—£1,387 million;

(d) Total fare income—£1,175 million; and

(e) Gross operating margin—(£122 million).

The actual figures for 2001–02 will be published in due course as part of the London Transport Annual Report 2001–02.

Brownfield Development

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on targets for development on brownfield sites, with specific reference on how to prevent town cramming. [14841]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* Our national target is that by 2008, 60 per cent. of additional housing should be provided on previously developed land and through conversions of existing buildings.

Regional planning bodies should propose land recycling targets to be set in regional planning guidance, drawing on the urban housing capacity studies undertaken by their constituent local authorities. These targets should contribute to achieving the national target. Local planning authorities should adopt their own land recycling targets in development plans which will contribute to attaining the regional target and which are consistent with data from their urban housing capacity studies.

Good design and layout of new development can help to achieve the Government's objectives of making the best use of previously developed land and improving the quality and attractiveness of residential areas.

Gayton Level Crossing

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when work to replace the Gayton level crossing on the West Coast Main Line with a bridge will be *(a)* initiated and *(b)* completed. [15008]

Mr. Jamieson: I am not aware of any proposal to replace this level crossing. This would be a matter for Railtrack in the first instance, who are responsible for maintaining the network infrastructure.

Homelessness

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people over retirement age were made homeless in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001 to date; and what proposals the Government have to counter this problem. [15199]

Ms Keeble: Homeless acceptances represent households in need who are helped by local authorities into accommodation. Information reported to the Department by local authorities for total acceptances and those where a member of the household is identified as vulnerable due to old age are as follows:

	1997	*2000*
Total	102,410	111,550
Of which vulnerable due to old age	4,220	4,050
Percentage	4	4

The Government have introduced the Homelessness Bill whose provisions will

require housing authorities to take a more strategic, multi-agency approach to the prevention of homelessness and the re-housing of homeless households;

ensure that everyone accepted by housing authorities as unintentionally homeless and in priority need must be provided with suitable accommodation until they obtain a settled housing solution; and

allow housing authorities greater flexibility to assist non-priority homeless households, principally through a new power for housing authorities to secure accommodation for such households where they have the scope to do so.

To support these provisions, investment in new affordable housing through the Housing Corporation will rise to over £1.2 billion by 2003–04—about double the current level.

Additionally, the Government have been consulting on their overall approach to tackling homelessness and are considering a number of constructive suggestions.

Fire Service Personnel

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the shortfall is in the number of Fire Service personnel in the UK; and what plans he has to encourage more people into the service. [12960]

Dr. Whitehead: Based on provisional figures taken from annual returns to HM Fire Service Inspectorate, the difference between establishment and actual strength of the fire service in England and Wales, as 31 March, was 3,582.

To help encourage people from all backgrounds to join the fire service, officials from my Department have been working in collaboration with stakeholders from all parts of the fire service to produce effective and informative national recruitment literature. This literature will be produced centrally for use by fire authorities in their recruitment activities. The production of this literature

forms part of a strategic approach to recruitment across the fire service which aims to raise awareness among under-represented groups of the fire service as a career choice.

We will be launching the first of the recruitment publications shortly.

Green Spaces

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in delivering the Government's proposals for improving the quality of urban parks and green spaces. [15791]

Ms Keeble: The Urban Green Spaces Taskforce was set up in January 2001 to advise the Government on its proposals for improving the quality of our urban parks, play areas and green spaces.

The taskforce has, today, published its interim report: "Green Spaces, Better Places". The report describes the taskforce's work, some preliminary findings, and how proposals are being developed. Copies of the report are available in the Libraries of the House.

The final report of the taskforce will be published in April 2002.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Cluster Bombs

Llew Smith: To ask the Solicitor-General, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) of 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1W, on cluster bombs, if she will make it her policy to change the convention covering advice given by the Law Officers; and if she will set out the reasons for the current policy of non disclosure of Law Officers' advice. [14691]

The Solicitor-General: The Ministerial Code provides that the fact and content of advice given by the Law Officers, either individually or collectively, must not be disclosed outside Government without their authority. This long-standing convention, observed by successive Governments, protects the confidentiality of the legal advice given to the Government. There are no plans to change Government policy on this matter but we keep under continuing review all arrangements relating to our work.

Internet Fraud

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Solicitor-General how many investigations were conducted by the Serious Fraud Office into alleged fraud on the internet in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [14383]

The Solicitor-General: The SFO is currently investigating one case where the internet was the principal medium through which the fraud was carried out. There are a number of other SFO cases where the internet has been used, but not as the principal medium for the fraud. The SFO does not record these separately.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Compensation Agency

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has made a decision about the future of the Compensation Agency. [15302]

Dr. John Reid: I have agreed that the executive agency status of the Compensation Agency should be continued until 31 March 2004. My decision follows the completion of stage 1 of a quinquennial review which examined the past performance of the agency and the other organisational arrangements available for the administration of compensation schemes. Stage 2 of the review will look at ways of improving the delivery of services.

Copies of the report of stage 1 have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Trial by Jury

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to set mechanisms in place for the re-introduction of trial by jury following the most recent report of General de Chastelain. [13913]

Jane Kennedy: The mechanism for reviewing trials without jury in Northern Ireland is already in place. The Northern Ireland specific emergency provisions as contained at part VII of the Terrorism Act 2000 (which came into force on 19 February 2001) are time-limited to five years and subject to annual renewal; its provisions can be phased out by order, individually if appropriate, as soon as the security situation allows. Section 75 of the Act relating to mode of trial on indictment which falls within part VII is therefore subject to this process.

Influencing factors relating to the re-introduction of trial by jury will be the risk of juror intimidation; the subsequent risk of perverse verdicts; and an assessment of the level of threat/security situation. The annual report(s) of the independent reviewer of the Terrorism Act 2000 will assist in informing future decisions and parliamentary debates on part VII of the Act.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the President of the Council how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and on how many occasions in those years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers (A) within and (B) outside his Department. [13139]

Mr. Robin Cook: None.

House of Lords Appointments Commission

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council when the House of Lords Appointments Commission will publish its annual report. [13870]

Mr. Robin Cook: My understanding is that the Commission will publish its annual report in the new year.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he was informed of the Russian submission to the United Nations Security Council in March on Al-Qaeda's infrastructure; and what action he took. [12180]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* We have no knowledge of any submission by Russia on the infrastructure of Al-Qaeda in March this year to either the Security Council or the Afghanistan sanctions committee.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received concerning the Shelter Now aid workers imprisoned by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan since August. [14786]

Mr. Bradshaw: We welcome the liberation of all the Shelter Now International (SNI) workers on 15 November.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visa applications refused by entry clearance officers were subsequently granted on appeal in each of the last five years. [13643]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Home Office has provided the following statistics. The outcome of entry clearance appeals to immigration adjudicators is:

	Total dealt with	*Outcome* *Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*
1996	7,320	1,790	4,200	1,330
1997	8,760	2,670	4,110	1,970
1998	7,600	2,200	4,100	1,200
1999	5,800	2,070	3,280	450
2000	6,650	2,360	3,690	600

The source of these statistics is the "Control of Immigration Statistics United Kingdom 2000" copies of which are available from the Libraries of the House.

Overseas Territories

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with representatives from overseas territories with regard to the reciprocal rights to reside and work in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* those territories of the citizens of both categories. [13914]

Mr. Bradshaw: Discussions have been held with the overseas territories on a regular basis since the preparation of the 1999 White Paper on the relationship with the overseas territories, "Partnership for Progress and Prosperity".

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the nature and extent of British military presence in British territories overseas. [13980]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are 5,132 British military personnel deployed in British overseas territories and sovereign base areas. They are deployed to maintain garrison facilities and provide on-going defence to the British overseas territories.

Human Rights

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what dates the *(a)* Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948, *(b)* International Labour Organisation Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), *(c)* Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, 1949, *(d)* Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951, and its 1967 Protocol, *(e)* International Labour Organisation Discrimination Convention (Employment and Occupation), 1958 (No. 111), *(f)* Convention against Discrimination in Education, adopted on 14 December 1960 by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, *(g)* Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979, with a view to achieving universal ratification within five years, and its Optional Protocol of 1999, *(h)* Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and its two Optional Protocols of 2000, and the International Labour Organisation Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), *(i)* International Labour Organisation Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), *(j)* International Labour Organisation Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, *(k)* International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990, *(l)* Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998, *(m)* United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the Convention and the Protocol against the smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the Convention, 2000 and *(n)* the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/55, of 25 November 1981 instruments were (i) signed and (ii) ratified; and what further progress he expects to make with these in the next 12 months. [13924]

Peter Hain: *(a)* The United Kingdom acceded to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948 on 30 January 1970.

(b) The UK signed the International Labour Organisation Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97) on 1 July 1949 and ratified on 22 January 1951.

*(c)*The UK is not party to the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, 1949.

(d) The UK signed the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 on 28 July 1951 and ratified on 11 March 1954. The UK acceded to the 1967 Protocol on 4 September 1968.

(e) The UK ratified the International Labour Organisation Discrimination Convention (Employment and Occupation), 1958 (No. 111) on 8 June 1999.

(f) The UK accepted the Convention against Discrimination in Education, adopted on 14 December 1960 by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, on 14 March 1962.

g) The UK signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979 in July 1981 and ratified on 7 April 1986. The UK is not party to the Optional Protocol of 1999.

(h) The UK signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 19 April 1980 and ratified on 16 December 1991. The UK signed the two Optional Protocols (2000) to the Convention on 7 September 2000. The UK ratified the International Labour Organisation Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) on 7 June 2000 and ratified the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) on 23 March 2000.

(i) The UK is not party to the International Labour Organisation Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143).

(j) The UK is not party to the International Labour Organisation Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). The UK signed the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992 on 12 June 1992 and ratified on 3 June 1994.

(k) The UK is not party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990.

(l) The UK signed the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on 30 November 1998 and ratified on 4 October 2001.

(m) The UK signed the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, on 14 December 2000.

(n) The UK supported the adoption by consensus of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/55, of 25 November 1981.

Over the next 12 months, the UK will be working for early ratification of the two Optional Protocols to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and the two Optional Protocols supplementing the Convention.

September 11

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest estimate is of the number of British subjects killed in the terrorist attacks on 11 September. [14199]

Mr. Bradshaw: To date, four British nationals have been positively identified as among the dead. A further 74 people are identified as missing. This number includes 56 British nationals, four dual nationals and 14 foreign nationals with close links to the United Kingdom.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the Zimbabwean Government's plans for foreign and independent monitoring of the upcoming presidential elections; and what plans he has to help ensure free and fair elections in that country. [14395]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are following the Zimbabwean Government's plans for monitoring and observation of the forthcoming presidential elections closely. We have made clear repeatedly to the Government of Zimbabwe our view that the presence of international election observers is a key element in creating a climate conducive to free and fair elections. We support the initiative of President Obasanjo of Nigeria to seek agreement from President Mugabe to allow access for international election observers. We shall work with our partners in the EU, the Commonwealth, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the US to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to admit international observers.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what attempts he is making to ensure that foreign observers will be present to monitor the lead up to the elections in Zimbabwe. [14522]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to admit international election observers in the lead up to, and during the forthcoming Presidential elections. Most recently my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised this matter with the Zimbabwean Minister of Foreign affairs, Mr. Mudenge, in New York on 10 November. We shall also work with our EU partners to press for early access for international observers in the pre-election period, in particular during forthcoming consultations with the Government of Zimbabwe under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts he is making to ensure that foreign observers are present to monitor the registration of voters in Zimbabwe. [14523]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to admit international observers and to create a climate conducive to free and fair elections. Most recently my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reiterated this when he met Zimbabwe's Foreign Minister, Stan Mudenge, on 10 November in New York. We shall, with our EU partners, also focus on the electoral process during forthcoming consultations with the Government of Zimbabwe, under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to ensure that the registration of voters in Zimbabwe is free and fair. [14524]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to create a climate conducive to a free and fair election including the registration of voters. We are also working with our EU colleagues to encourage a free

and fair electoral process and will continue to do so in the context of consultations with the Government of Zimbabwe under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Zimbabwe Government concerning the forthcoming presidential elections; and if he will make a statement. [14739]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to urge the Government of Zimbabwe to admit international election observers and to create a climate conducive to free and fair elections. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reiterated this when he met the Zimbabwean Foreign Minister, Stan Mudenge, on 10 November in New York.

British Council Offices

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the new offices of the British Council opened in each of the last three years. [14736]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council has opened the following offices in the last three years.

April 1998 to March 1999:

Curitiba (Brazil)
Mandalay (Burma)
Havana (Cuba)
Auckland (New Zealand)
Gilgit (Pakistan)
Sochi (Russia)
Yaroslavl (Russia)
Sharjah (UAE)

April 1999 to March 2000:

Ramallah (East Jerusalem)
Brasov (Romania)
Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk (Russia)
Pristina (Yugoslavia)

April 2000 to March 2001:

Chongging (China)
Chandigarh (India)
Tehran (Iran)
Tripoli (Libya)
Multan (Russia)
Irkutsk (Russia)
Samara (Russia).

Jedda

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Saudi authorities concerning the arrest and continuing incarceration of Christians in Jedda. [15194]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are aware of the cases of a number of Christians of various nationalities (none British) arrested in Jedda. Saudi law prohibits the practise of any religion other than Islam. The British Consulate-General in Jedda has discussed these cases with EU partners and other diplomatic representatives. All those detained have received visits from their own diplomatic representatives. We raise our concerns about human rights with the Saudi authorities on a regular basis.

China

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if UK approval for China's application to join the World Trade Organisation was contingent on an improvement in human rights within *(a)* China and *(b)* Tibet. [15195]

Peter Hain: As the WTO accession process is primarily dependent on fulfilling trade-related and economic objectives, this was the basis of the approval of China's application for WTO membership. The UK will encourage China to implement its WTO obligations in ways which respect international human rights standards. We believe that closer integration of China into the international community will make an important contribution to improving the human rights situation in China over the longer term.

Refugees (Zakynthos)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Greece regarding the condition of the Afghan, Iraqi Kurds and Pakistani refugees who recently disembarked on the island of Zakynthos. [14738]

Peter Hain: The Government have made no representations to the Government of Greece about the condition of refugees recently disembarked on the island of Zakynthos.

HM Government wholly condemn the people-traffickers who cause the kind of human suffering witnessed in this incident and are working energetically with colleagues, including EU colleagues, to crack down on this evil trade.

TREASURY

Taper Relief

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to Tax Bulletin Issue No 53, *(a)* in the context of taper, what the Inland Revenue defines as "security", *(b)* for what reasons the Inland Revenue regards not all debentures as securities and *(c)* what guidance has been issued to relevant inspectors of taxes when considering the question as to whether a particular instrument was a security. [9759]

Dawn Primarolo: *(a)* For capital gains tax taper relief, "security" takes its ordinary meaning. In addition, certain earn-out rights under section 138A of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 may be treated as securities for the purposes of the whole Act, and thus for taper relief.

For planned changes to the meaning of "security" for the purposes of taper relief, I refer the hon. Gentleman to my written answer to his question on deemed securities.

(b) Whether a debenture is a security depends on the characteristics of the individual instrument.

(c) Tax Bulletin 53 states that the Inland Revenue will accept that any debt instrument which has the characteristics of a "debt on a security", as that term has been explained in judicial decisions, is a security for taper

purposes. Guidance on the meaning of the expression "debt on a security" is given in the Capital Gains Manual which is available to both tax offices and the public.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend section 251 (6) of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 to apply as a definition of security in the context of taper relief. [9760]

Dawn Primarolo: In order to simplify capital gains tax (CGT) and reduce uncertainty, especially in take-overs and company reconstructions, the Government will introduce legislation to provide that debentures that are deemed to be securities under section 251(6) of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 are also treated as securities for CGT taper relief.

The new provision will take effect for holding periods from 6 April 1998 and for disposals from 6 April 2001.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the climate change levy on manufacturing productivity. [R] [10256]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy is a broadly revenue neutral instrument which will raise the relative price of energy but lower the relative cost of employment.

The impact on any specific sector or industry will depend on a number of factors including:

The future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support.

Employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded reductions in employers' national insurance contributions.

The number of energy intensive firms in that sector that are eligible to receive a discount on the main rates of the levy by signing up to an energy efficiency agreement.

What use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy exempt sources of energy such as new renewables and combined heat and power.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to widen the discount schemes for the climate change levy. [14432]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no plans to amend the eligibility criteria for businesses entering into negotiated agreements for improving energy efficiency in return for 80 per cent. discounts of the climate change levy.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the statutory instruments affecting the working of HM Customs and Excise that have come into force since 31 March 1999. [11174]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* Statutory instruments that affect the work of the Department can be found listed in the HM Customs and Excise annual reports. The next report is due to be published at the end of November.

Public-private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 623W, on the Mott MacDonald study, if any public-private partnerships will be examined by the study; for what reasons he is unable to place the terms of reference in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [13456]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The study is intended to inform risk assessment in future publicly procured projects. For this reason, the study is confined to conventional procurement, as per the terms of reference, which are available in full in the Library.

Intellectual Property Rights

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which organisation owns the intellectual property rights to *(a)* the Inland Revenue proprietary system for processing tax returns, *(b)* the National Insurance Recording System 2 and *(c)* Customs and Excise proprietary systems; and if he will make a statement. [14742]

Dawn Primarolo:

(a) Inland Revenue—Under the strategic partnership contract with EDS, the Inland Revenue owns all the Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) created as part of the delivery of IT services to the Department.

(b) NIRS 2—The NIRS 2 deal with Accenture (then Andersen Consulting) is a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and accordingly the IPRs were granted to Accenture.

The PFI deal permits IR to have 'licence to use' the IPRs in perpetuity for a sliding scale of charge.

(c) Customs and Excise—All IPRs in Customs and Excise propriety systems are owned by the Department.

Child Care Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland are eligible for (i) the working families tax credit and (ii) the child care tax credit. [15147]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of families in receipt of the working families tax credit (WFTC) in each country are shown in the WFTC quarterly inquiries, copies of which are in the Library.

The following are estimates of the number of families in each country in receipt of the child care tax credit within WFTC at May 2001:

Country	
(a) England	119,400
(b) Wales	6,900
(c) Scotland	14,200
(d) Northern Ireland	3,900

Note:
The figures for England, Wales and Scotland are estimates based on a 5 per cent. sample of awards, and are therefore subject to sampling error. In addition, there were a small number of families for which the country was not known from the data used to compile these estimates.

Tax Receipts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what impact the reduced rate of output in manufacturing since January has had on *(a)* corporation tax receipts and *(b)* VAT receipts. [14423]

Mr. Andrew Smith: An updated projection for corporation tax and VAT receipts will be presented in the forthcoming pre-Budget Report.

British Petroleum

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from BP; and if he will place them in the Library. [14443]

Mr. Boateng: Treasury Ministers receive a large number of representations from a wide range of organisations on a wide range of subjects.

Company Cars

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total cost to business that will result from the changes to company car tax from April 2002. [14391]

Mr. Boateng: The Inland Revenue estimates that employers will pay around £25 million less in national insurance contributions over the first three years of the new system as a result of the reforms to company car tax.

The Inland Revenue also estimates that employers will save around £20 million per year in recurring compliance costs as a result of the reforms. A Regulatory Impact Assessment document looking in detail at the impacts of the company car tax changes on employers' compliance costs is on the Inland Revenue's website.

Customs and Excise (Rosyth)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs and Excise officers the Rosyth ferry terminal will employ; and what special measures will be included in their roles to prevent smuggling and the entry of illegal immigrants. [13938]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* It is a matter for the Commissioners of HM Customs and Excise where and how they deploy their staff. They continually keep the position under review and will deploy staff based on the assessed level of risk and results from smuggling.

The Immigration Service rather than Customs and Excise are responsible for preventing the entry of illegal immigrants.

NHS Funding Review

Dr. Fox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the result of the review of the future funding of the NHS, commissioned from Derek Wanless, upon receipt of the report in April 2002. [15054]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Budget 2001 announced that Derek Wanless had been asked to carry out a review to examine the technological, demographic and medical trends over the next two decades that may affect the health service in the UK as a whole. I confirm that the Government intend to publish his report when it is completed.

Capital Modernisation Grant Scheme

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to which nations and regions of the United Kingdom the Government capital modernisation grant scheme is applicable. [15067]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The capital modernisation fund applies to all parts of the United Kingdom for non-devolved functions and to England for devolved functions. Where money is allocated to English Departments, corresponding allocations are made to the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland based on the usual Barnett formula. The amounts allocated to the devolved Administrations from the fund are set out in the table 1.12 of the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2001–02.

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish his pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [14145]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Chancellor will present the pre-Budget report on 27 November.

Illegal Food Imports

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of customs resources available to control the importation of illegal food. [15197]

Mr. Boateng: The lead responsibility for controls on imported food lies with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and agencies acting on its behalf. Customs has both provided support to these agencies and dealt with illicit meat detected as part of Customs normal control activities on imports. It is examining with DEFRA how it can best contribute to the overall Government response to the risks presented by illegal meat imports.

Refurbishment Project

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* building and *(b)* refurbishment projects are planned by his Department in (i) the current year and (ii) the next financial year; and what the costs are of each project. [6523]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on 5 May 2000, *Official Report,* column 231W.

Approved Pension Schemes (Tax Relief)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the total cost of tax relief for approved pension schemes in the last financial year was provided to higher rate taxpayers. [14417]

Ruth Kelly: The estimates available for 2000–01 are as follows:

Cost of relief at 40 per cent. on pension contributions paid by employees and self-employed—£3.5 billion.

Cost of relief at 40 per cent. on pensions contributions paid by employers in respect of higher rate employees—£4.6 billion.

The employers' component is estimated on the basis that under present arrangements, employers' contributions are not taxable as a benefit in kind of the employees. The estimates assume that the proportion of total employers' contributions related to higher rate taxpayers is the same as that observed for employees' contributions. It is not possible to apportion the other elements of the total cost of tax relief between higher rate taxpayers and others.

Estimates are provisional, based on the Survey of Personal Incomes 1999–2000.

Departmental Secondments

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many secondees in his Department are paid by *(a)* their previous employer and *(b)* his Department. [14702]

Ruth Kelly: There are currently 20 people seconded to HM Treasury from outside the civil service. In each case the Treasury meets the salary cost by reimbursing the employer.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the term of secondment of each secondee in his Department; and if they are renewable. [14701]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the people seconded from outside the civil service are set out in the table:

Name	*Start date*	*End date*
Trevor Ashenden	3 April 2000	2 April 2002
Rachel Austin	24 September 2001	23 September 2003
Paul Bilton	13 August 2001	12 February 2003
Dee Bingham	24 September 2001	28 December 2001
Nick Bloom	24 September 2001	23 April 2002
Graeme Brown	26 February 2001	31 August 2002
Tony Burdon	3 September 2001	2 September 2002
Nick Buxton	5 June 2000	4 June 2002
Steven Cain	4 January 2000	3 January 2002
Nigel Fawcett	12 February 2001	30 November 2001
Paul Gregg	24 May 1999	23 May 2002
Robert Jennings	3 October 2001	2 April 2002
Paul Kennedy	15 November 1999	1 December 2001
Birone Lynch	23 April 2001	30 November 2002
Richard Maddison	26 October 2000	30 November 2002
Ciaran Martin	10 January 2000	9 January 2002
Simon Pink	6 August 2001	5 February 2003
Colin Stratton	8 January 2001	7 January 2003
David Watkins	10 January 2000	9 January 2002
Peter Westaway	1 September 2001	31 December 2001[1]

[1] Four days per week.

Secondments are not renewable but may be extended by mutual agreement.

All secondments in HM Treasury operate in accordance with Civil Service Commissioners Recruitment Code, which states that periods of secondment may be granted up to three years and extended to a period not exceeding five years.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Steel Industry

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with Corus management in the last six months regarding the future of the steel industry; and if she will make a statement. [13728]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met Corus management recently for a general discussion. The Government attach great importance to the steel industry and will maintain close contact with Corus and other key players in order to maintain its future.

Terrorist Threat

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost is of additional security arrangements at nuclear installations since 11 September; and what her calculation is of the annual future costs of these arrangements if they are continued. [13719]

Mr. Wilson: Robust security arrangements were already in place at civil nuclear installations before the events of 11 September. Security at nuclear sites is kept under regular review. The additional costs to the operators of increased security has not been collated centrally.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the protection of *(a)* nuclear power stations and *(b)* road and rail bridges from terrorist attack. [13411]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's policy on the protection of nuclear power stations is to maintain an independent regulatory authority and provide it with regulatory powers. The Government's security regulator is the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS), which is responsible for setting security standards and enforcing compliance under the Nuclear Generating Stations (Security) Regulations 1996 made under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. OCNS ensures that levels of protection at nuclear power stations is adequate, taking into account the likely level of threat against them.

In respect of road and rail bridges, security policy is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Nuclear Energy

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government plans are with regard to nuclear energy; and if she will make a statement. [13885]

Mr. Wilson: Nuclear power currently produces about 25 per cent. of electricity generated in the UK, and with almost zero carbon emissions is contributing to the achievement of UK and international carbon emissions targets. Existing nuclear stations are expected to continue to contribute to our energy requirements, provided they meet the stringent safety and environmental standards currently required. The Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit review of energy policy announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 25 June is looking at the objectives of energy policy to develop a strategy that ensures current policy commitments are consistent with longer-term goals. To achieve its aim, the review is considering all sources of energy including nuclear. At this stage, there is no presumption of any change in nuclear industry policies. The review is due to report to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the end of the year.

Sellafield

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list each of the buildings at Sellafield which have facility arrangements and particular safeguards provisions in place for the application of international safeguards; and, for each building or group of buildings, when the safeguards provisions came into effect. [14688]

Mr. Wilson: The European Commission has provided particular safeguards provisions for a total of 28 Material Balance Areas at the BNFL Sellafield facility. Facility Attachments for the two parts of the BNFL Sellafield facility (Special Nuclear Materials Store 9 and the THORP Plutonium Product Store) that the IAEA has designated for routine inspection have been drawn-up with the European Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Under Exemption 1.1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, disclosure of detailed information on nuclear material accountancy arrangements, including the description and location of Material Balance Areas, would harm national security and would not be in the public interest.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the annual cost of storing plutonium at Sellafield; and what proportion of the cost is recovered from overseas customers. [14693]

Mr. Wilson: This is a commercial matter for BNFL and its customers, under Exemption 13—Third Party's Commercial Confidences—of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* financial investment and *(b)* other assistance the North-west Regional Development Agency has put into St. Helens in each of the last three years. [14718]

Alan Johnson: The North-west Development Agency has invested in a range of projects in St. Helens during the last three years. Expenditure breaks down as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1998–99	7.2
1999–2000	7.3
2000–01	8.9

Total investment during the current financial year is expected to be approximately £7.1 million. The agency also works closely with St. Helens metropolitan borough council and other partners to provide advice and guidance on economic development and regeneration issues.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

South Africa (AIDS)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much financial aid the UK Government have allocated to help combat the AIDS epidemic in South Africa. [14455]

Clare Short: DFID is currently designing a new multi-sectoral HIV/AIDS programme, due to start next year, with an anticipated budget of £40 million over four years. Since 1994, the UK Government have allocated £19 million to help combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she has taken to help combat the AIDS epidemic in South Africa. [14454]

Clare Short: DFID's co-operation with South Africa includes support to the Government's National HIV/AIDS and STD programme, finance for a national condom social marketing programme and assistance to various NGOs to help promote behaviour change and improve HIV/AIDS-related services. We are now working with South African partners to design a substantial new initiative which will extend our support to include the education system and the private sector.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress made by the UN panel in Zimbabwe on the report into resource exploitation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [14401]

Clare Short: The final report of the UN panel into resource exploitation in the Democratic Republic of Congo has not yet been published. The report is due to be published in the near future. We are not aware of the contents of the final report.

Commonwealth Scholarships

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many students from southern Sudan have been awarded Commonwealth scholarships in 2000–01. [14400]

Clare Short: Sudan is not a member of the Commonwealth and is not eligible for such awards.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many Commonwealth scholarships have been awarded to students who were nominated by bodies other than the student's own Government in 2000–01. [14399]

Clare Short: In 2000–01, 241 individuals took up places under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship plan, 134 of whom were nominated through agencies appointed by the governments of their respective countries. 107 were also nominated directly from their universities, except in the case of the Indian sub-continent, where nominations come from the national university authorities of the countries concerned.

World Trade Summit

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which non-Governmental organisations she has invited to accompany the United Kingdom delegation to the world trade negotiations in Doha. [14683]

Clare Short: The official UK delegation included representation from the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress and the UK NGO Trade Network.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will set out the policies she plans to put forward at the world trade summit in Doha; and if she will place in the Library copies of all documents *(a)* submitted by the United Kingdom to the Doha summit and *(b)* distributed at Doha by (i) other countries and (ii) international bodies. [14694]

Clare Short: I advocated the launch of a 'Development Round' in which cuts are made to the tariffs and subsidies which act as barriers to the exports of developing countries, and in which the problems developing countries face in implementing WTO agreements are addressed.

I will have the documents submitted by the UK to the WTO Ministerial placed in the Library. However, I regret that the other documents requested are not available to me.

Uganda/Rwanda

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the talks between the presidents of Uganda and Rwanda on Tuesday 6 November. [14534]

Clare Short: This was an important and fruitful meeting. The two Presidents signed an Understanding not to interfere in each other's affairs and to set up mechanisms to monitor this with the UK acting as Third Party. The Prime Minister briefly joined the talks.

Sex Trade (Africa)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what actions the Government are taking to reduce the sex trade in young girls in *(a)* the Ivory Coast and *(b)* Africa. [14074]

Clare Short: The Government have signed the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that strengthens the protection it gives against the sale of children, and child prostitution, and also the new convention against transnational crime that includes a protocol on trafficking of women and children.

Our support for the work of the International Labour Organisation is focused on eliminating such worst forms of child labour.

We are working with European partners and African states on this issue. It was one of the most important issues tackled at the recent Africa-EU summit. The states in the region are making serious efforts to counter it.

Consultation Documents

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many consultation documents were issued by her Department and its predecessor office from *(a)* 15 October to 14 January, *(b)* 15 January to 14 April, *(c)* 15 April to 14 July and *(d)* 15 July to 14 October in each year from 1996. [12900]

Clare Short: The following consultation documents were issued by my Department:

One in the period 15 July 20 14 October 1997;

Two in the period 15 April to 14 July 1999;

Three in the period 15 October 1999 to 14 January 2000;

One in the period 15 January to 14 April 2000;

Two in the period 15 April to 14 July 2000;l

One in the period 15 October 2000 to 14 January 2001; and

One in the period 15 January to 14 April 2001.

Records of its predecessor office do not list consultation documents.

HEALTH

Cardiologists

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified cardiologists there were in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 2000–01. [15144]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is provided in the table. Data for 2000 are the latest available.

Hospital medical staff within the cardiology specialty, England at 30 September

Number

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
All staff	1,020	1,080	1,220	1,220	1,340
Consultants	390	400	460	470	550

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Nurses

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the baseline year for measuring the extra numbers of nurses recruited to meet the target contained in the National Plan. [15053]

Mr. Hutton: The baseline for the NHS Plan workforce targets is the 1999 workforce census.

Student Nurses

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what grants are available to student nurses on *(a)* diploma and *(b)* degree courses. [14141]

Mr. Hutton: National health service bursaries are available to those accepted onto NHS-funded pre-registration nurse training programmes at both diploma and degree levels.

Those undertaking the diploma-level qualification receive a non-means tested bursary (currently £5,305 (£6,232 in London)), while those on the degree-level programme receive a means tested bursary (current rate £2,098 (£2,578 in London)) and student loan. Degree-level students receive additional payments to take account of the longer length of academic year undertaken by health professional students and for both groups additional allowances are available to older students, single parents and others with dependants.

In addition the NHS meets all students' liability for a tuition fee contribution (currently £1,075) on their behalf, in full and without means testing.

With effect from September the basic bursaries were increased by 10.4 per cent. coupled with a 2.4 per cent. inflation increase in the additional allowances and other elements of the bursary scheme. This is the biggest increase since the introduction of the bursary more than 10 years ago.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements exist to help student nurses complete their courses in the event of financial hardship. [14142]

Mr. Hutton: National health service-funded students studying at degree-level who have taken out their full entitlement to a bursary and loan and who find themselves in financial difficulty can apply through their university/college for additional help in the form of hardship loans. Degree-level students who have exhausted all other sources of financial help may, in exceptional circumstances be eligible for an NHS hardship grant.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced on 4 October 2001 that there would be a review of student funding policy, to include consideration of hardship support. The Department will consider the findings of the review in relation to NHS-funded students.

Health Care Professions (Discipline)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the bodies responsible for disciplinary matters in the *(a)* medical profession, *(b)* nursing profession and *(c)* other professions allied to medicine or associated with healthcare. [15049]

Mr. Hutton: Disciplinary matters in the national health service are dealt with by managers at a local level in the first instance. Some consultant doctors have a right of appeal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State against dismissal; the NHS Plan made a commitment to remove this. General practitioners can appeal to a Family Health Services Appeal Authority (FHSAA) against a decision that they have breached their terms of service. A separate NHS Tribunal decides if a GP can be suspended or disqualified. The NHS Tribunal will be abolished later this year and its powers transferred to health authorities, with a right of appeal to an independent FHSAA.

If a person's fitness to practise their profession is called into question, this will be dealt with by the regulatory body responsible for regulation of that profession.

The eight regulatory bodies responsible for regulation of healthcare professionals are:

General Medical Council

United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain

General Dental Council

General Optical Council

General Osteopathic Council

General Chiropractic Council

Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine

NHS Staff (Pay)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to move away from annual pay rounds for health service staff. [15048]

Mr. Hutton: There are no current plans to move away from the annual pay round. We are keeping under review the possibility of longer-term pay deals where these would be of benefit to the national health service.

Regulatory Bodies

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the regulatory bodies in the *(a)* NHS social care and *(b)* private health social care spheres. [15274]

Mr. Hutton: Local authorities are responsible for the regulation of residential care homes provided by national health service trusts. Both local authorities and health authorities are currently responsible for the regulation of private health social care services depending on whether personal care, nursing care or both are provided in such settings. This responsibility will be taken over by the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) from 1 April 2002. NHS care homes providing nursing come within the scope of the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI). We expect the NCSC and CHI to work together to ensure that consistent standards are applied across these services.

Waiting Times

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts have achieved *(a)* the six month, *(b)* the 12 month and *(c)* the 15 month in-patient waiting targets. [15063]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan, published in July 2000, sets out our plans to reduce maximum in-patient waiting times from 18 months now to 15 months by March 2002. Maximum in-patient waiting times will continue to fall to six months by March 2005.

The trusts with no in-patients waiting over six, 12 and 15 months at 30 September 2001 are given in the tables, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in *(a)* rank and *(b)* alphabetical order of NHS trust in London region, the (i) proportion and (ii) number of patients waiting (A) over 12 months and (B) over 18 months or more for in-patient treatment (1) at the latest available date, (2) in March 1997 and (3) in June 1997. [15286]

Mr. Hutton: Since the start of the waiting list initiative in 1998 London has made very significant progress. In-patient waiting lists have fallen by a quarter from 216,000 to 159,000. This marks the largest reduction in the country.

Furthermore, since March 1998 the number of patients in London waiting over 12 months for treatment has reduced by nearly half from 17,500 to 9,500 and, before the end of March 2002 no patient should be waiting over 15 months for treatment.

The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Outcome Indicators

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent discussions he has had with European Health Ministers on ways to develop common sets of outcome indicators; [15060]

(2) what steps he is taking to develop clinical outcome measurements for *(a)* cancer, *(b)* coronary heart disease and *(c)* other conditions which allow comparison with European outcome indicators. [15058]

Mr. Hutton: The Department participates in the following initiatives involving the European Community which look at the quality of healthcare:

Under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) officials have been exploring the feasibility of developing common outcome indicators for some or all of the OECD's member countries.

The European Union Diabetes Indicator Project is developing and piloting a set of indicators for monitoring diabetes and outcomes across all EC countries.

Inter-consultant Referrals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients there are waiting on out-patient lists as result of inter-consultant referrals. [15059]

Mr. Hutton: Data are not collected on the number of out-patients waiting as a result of inter-consultant referrals. Data are collected only on the number of first out-patient referrals from general practitioners.

Government Statistical Service

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health Minister is responsible for checking statistics issued by the Government Statistical Service. [15183]

Mr. Hutton: Department of Health statistics are prepared by the Government Statistical Service and issued on the authority of the Director of Statistics.

NHS Leadership Agency

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will outline the senior management structure of the NHS Leadership Centre. [15278]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service Leadership Centre forms part of the NHS Modernisation Agency which was established in April 2001. Barbara Harris is the Director of the Leadership Centre and is accountable to David Fillingham, Director of the NHS Modernisation Agency who in turn is accountable to Nigel Crisp, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health and Chief Executive of the NHS.

An interim senior management structure is in place for the Leadership Centre comprising staff from the pre-existing NHS Leadership Programme, and clinicians and managers on secondment from the NHS and the Department of Health. A permanent structure will be finalised early in 2002.

Operation Cancellations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* geographical, *(b)* financial and *(c)* provider restrictions there are on the range of hospitals patients can choose to utilise, should their operations be cancelled at the last minute and not rescheduled within 28 days. [15050]

Mr. Hutton: From April 2002, when a patient's operation is cancelled by the hospital on the day of surgery for non-clinical reasons, the hospital will have to offer another binding date within a maximum of the next 28 days or fund the patient's treatment at the time and the hospital of the patient's choice. Patients may choose national health service or private treatment and the NHS will fund the operation. Trusts will met the cost from their existing budgets.

Ward Beds

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts have not conformed to the standard of four beds per ward. [15047]

Mr. Hutton: There is no absolute standard that states that trusts must have a maximum of four beds in a ward bay. National Health Service Estates issues guidance on design of wards and departments, and this suggests a number of possible configurations, including multi-bed bays and single rooms. Health Building Note 4 states

"a preference is emerging for a four-bedded room with designated sanitary facilities for each bedroom"

but this does not rule out other configurations.

A variety of factors govern the layout of any particular ward, including patient preference and clinical caseload and mix. Whatever the layout, it is important that privacy and dignity are maintained. The Department has issued guidance in this area, including "Essence of Care" benchmarks which support staff in developing best practice in fundamental nursing care. Privacy and dignity is one of these benchmarks.

We have issued £40 million this year to help eliminate Nightingale wards for older people. This will involve refurbishment of existing wards to smaller bed bays, with a number of single rooms.

Team Bonuses Projects

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts are operating pilot team bonuses projects. [15056]

Mr. Hutton: The following national health service trusts have been selected to take part in the first wave of NHS team bonus pilots, which was launched in October.

Location/Trust

Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance Trust

Bradford City Primary Care Trust

Bradford Hospitals and Bradford South and West PCT

Calderstones Learning Disabilities Trust

Lincolnshire Ambulance Trust

Newham Primary Care Trust

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust

Norfolk and Norwich Health Care NHS Trust

South Devon Health Care NHS Trust.

A further wave of team bonus pilots will be announced shortly.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) in each of the last five years, what has been the cost of publicly funded treatments for patients in *(a)* United Kingdom private hospitals and *(b)* overseas hospitals; [7220]

(2) how many patients have been treated in private hospitals, funded by the NHS, in each of the last five years. [7219]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The table sets out the total amount of national health service funds spent by health authorities in England outside the NHS. These figures include expenditure on treatment for NHS patients in private hospitals, local authorities and the voluntary sector.

£ billion

Year	*Spend*
1996–97	0.87
1997–98	1.08
1998–99	1.25
1999–2000	1.41
2000–01	1.47

Source:
Department of Health Common Information Core, Out-turn

United Kingdom residents are personally liable for costs of hospital and other medical treatment overseas unless there are reciprocal health agreements under which the costs are assumed by Governments. Since many of these agreements are on a cost-waiver basis, information on the cost of patients treated in overseas hospitals is not available.

A meaningful time series of data on the number of NHS patients treated in private hospitals is not available.

Press Release

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Minister *(a)* considered and *(b)* approved the press release, reference 2001/0530. [15198]

Mr. Hutton: Ministers do not approve statistical press releases issued by the Government Statistical Service. They are issued on the authority of the Director of Statistics. As soon as the error was identified, a corrected version was issued by the Government Statistical Service.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Skills and IT Training

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information her Department has evaluated regarding age discrimination in the provision of skills and IT training. [13170]

John Healey: The Government support a wide-ranging research programme to inform the development of their education and training policies, including those relating to participation in learning by older people. In addition to survey data and academic and action research, we consult with the providers of education and training, employers, trade unions and, of course, older learners themselves.

Following the launch of the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment, the Government undertook a comprehensive evaluation programme. This involved an evaluation of the "employment cycle" including training and development within work; and a qualitative study into the effectiveness of three Government training programmes to help unemployed older people into work. The results from this research have been used to develop policy on combating age discrimination. For example, the evaluation of the Age Diversity Code led to an enhancement of the "Age Positive" campaign, which promotes the benefits of an age diverse workforce to employers; and it also helped to target the campaign effectively on small and medium sized employers.

School Buildings

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact of devolving financing of school buildings on head teachers' ability to carry out their core educational work. [13251]

Mr. Timms: School buildings that are well maintained and are suitable for delivering the curriculum are a key element supporting improvement in educational standards in schools. In January this year the Department published findings from an initial evaluation study, which supported this view.

Since school buildings are key to raising standards, we believe that head teachers and their governing bodies should be able to play a decisive role in the management of their school buildings. To help schools do this, consistent delegation of all revenue funded repairs to school buildings was introduced for all schools from April 1999, and each school has been allocated a devolved capital budget since April 2000. Most capital funding, for major work to repair, improve or expand school buildings is still managed by local authorities. But we believe giving schools their own capital budgets as well means that decisions about smaller works are improved, since they are taken by those who best know where their impact can increase standards. They also enable schools to influence local authority decisions about major capital investment.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the cost of *(a)* advanced modern apprenticeships and *(b)* foundation modern apprenticeships in the last 12 months. [14221]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is not available. Training and Enterprise Councils were not required to supply such breakdowns. However, the total amount spent by TECs in the 12 months ending 31 March 2001 on work based training for young people, which included advanced modern apprenticeships, foundation modern apprenticeships, lifeskills training and other training, was £811 million.

Skills Shortages

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on skills shortages in the Buckingham constituency. [14208]

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on skills shortages in the Wycombe constituency. [14874]

John Healey: Data on skills shortages are not collected on a constituency basis by the Department. However, the Employers Skill Survey 2001, which was funded by the Department, provides estimates within Local Learning and Skills Council boundaries. In this survey, skill shortage vacancies were reported by five per cent. of employers in the Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire Local Learning and Skills Council area. This compares to a national average of four per cent. and a high of eight per cent.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost is of the effective provision of pre-school education project. [14098]

Mr. Timms: The total cost of the effective provision of pre-school education research project, as agreed in the project's contract, for the period 1 September 1996 to 31 August 2003 is £1,858,419.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the public service agreement target for costs of contracted inspections in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [14102]

Mr. Timms: These are matters for HM Chief Inspector of Schools and I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mentors/Support Units

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost is in 2001–02 of the learning mentors and learning support units. [14105]

Mr. Timms: We have allocated just over £100 million to support learning mentors and learning support units in Excellence in Cities and Excellence Clusters this financial year. An additional £21 million has been allocated for learning support units outside the areas covered by Excellence in Cities and Excellence Clusters. Schools are free to use their other sources of funding to pay for additional learning mentors and learning support units.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost is in 2001–02 of her Department's support for the national mentoring network. [14084]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department's general financial support to the national mentoring network in 2001–02 is £600,000. This funding is used to promote and develop high quality volunteer mentoring programmes to help young people. In addition the Department is providing the national mentoring network with £30,000 a year for two years specifically to co-ordinate the membership of Excellence in Cities Learning Mentors and to develop relevant networks and activities for them.

Literacy/Numeracy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the *(a)* number and *(b)* cost of family literacy and numeracy initiatives in the last 12 months. [14219]

John Healey: Family literacy and numeracy is a key element of Skills for Life, the national strategy for adult literacy and numeracy, which was launched in March 2001 by the Prime Minister. This is a national initiative to enable parents and their children to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, learning together.

Funding of £7 million through the Standards Fund will reach up to 20,000 families in 2001–02. An additional sum of £10 million will also be made available in 2001–02 to widen access to family literacy and numeracy programmes to reach at least 64,000 parents and 28,000 children.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the number of children who are not educationally sub-normal and who left school in each of the last five years unable to *(a)* read and write and *(b)* undertake simple arithmetic; and if she will make a statement. [14069]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number and percentage of 15 year olds achieving, and not achieving, a GCSE pass (A*- G) in English or Mathematics in the last five years are listed in the following tables.

Number and percentage of pupils achieving A-G in maths or English*

	Percentage		*Number*	
	English	*Maths*	*English*	*Maths*
1996–97	89	87	522,221	510,486
1997–98	89	87	511,936	500,432
1998–99	90	89	522,874	517,955
1999–2000	91	90	528,157	522,353
2000–01[1]	91	90	622,246	615,408

[1] 2001 figures are based on provisional data

Number and percentage of pupils not achieving A-G in maths or English*

	Percentage		*Number*	
	English	*Maths*	*English*	*Maths*
1996–97	11	13	64,544	76,279
1997–98	11	13	63,273	74,777
1998–99	10	11	58,097	63,906
1999–2000	9	10	52,235	58,039
2000–01[1]	9	10	54,340	60,378

[1] 2001 figures are based on provisional data

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of literacy problems in England in the last three years; and what progress she has made with tackling illiteracy in that period. [13516]

John Healey *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* Lord Moser's 1999 Report, "A Fresh Start", notes that perhaps as many as 7 million people (roughly one in five adults) in England have difficulties with functional literacy and numeracy. We are commissioning a new survey next year to provide an up-to-date assessment of the scale of basic skills need in England.

The Government are fully committed to helping those who do not have adequate literacy skills. For adults, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minster launched Skills for Life, the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy in England on 1 March 2001. New national standards, a core curriculum for literacy and numeracy, teacher training and national tests in literacy and numeracy are all now available nationally after a successful pilot. A national promotional campaign is currently boosting demand. We are working across Government and with key partner organisations to ensure that all those who can help adults with literacy and numeracy skills needs are able to do so. Our target is that 750,000 adults improve their literacy and numeracy by 2004. More than 70,000 adults have already gained literacy and numeracy qualifications since April 2001.

We are also committed to raising literacy standards for all children. The national literacy strategy, introduced in all primary schools in September 1998, is raising literacy standards for all primary aged pupils. This year 75 per cent. of 11 year olds achieved Level 4 or above in the Key Stage 2 English tests, a 10 per cent. point improvement since 1998. Literacy standards are also rising consistently at Key Stage 1.

Learndirect

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the cost of the Learndirect development centres. [14220]

John Healey: We made available £44 million in 1999–2000 and £74 million in 2000–01 to support the development and operation of Ufi Ltd. This money was used by Ufi to support a wide range of developmental activities including the Learndirect development centres.

Ofsted

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the performance target of *(a)* transferring staff from local authorities to Ofsted and *(b)* providing initial training by September. [14067]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for Ofsted to comment on and I have asked HM Chief Inspector of Schools, Mike Tomlinson, to write to the hon. Gentleman and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

School Funding

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the cost is in 2001–02 of the ethnic minority and traveller achievement grant; [14088]

(2) what the cost is in 2001–02 of expenditure through the standards fund to raise standards in literacy and numeracy; [14097]

(3) what the cost is of the early years training and development standards fund in 2001–02; [14099]

(4) what the cost is in 2001–02 of the social inclusion: pupil support standards fund; [14104]

(5) what the cost is of standards fund grants in England in 2001–02 for *(a)* improving adult pupil ratios in reception classes, *(b)* the supported early retirement scheme for heads, *(c)* administrative support in small schools, *(d)* performance management and threshold assessment training, *(e)* the working environment fund, *(f)* the small school support fund, *(g)* teaching assistants, *(h)* support for parent governor representatives, *(i)* teaching incentives for new maths and science teachers, *(j)* education and health partnerships, *(k)* local authority support for lifelong learning, *(l)* protecting and expanding local education authority music services, *(m)* school security and *(n)* the learning mentors and learning support units programme; [14200]

(6) what the cost is of standards fund grants in England in 2001–02 for *(a)* gifted and talented children, *(b)* the access fund for 16 to 19-year-olds, *(c)* social inclusion pupil support, drug prevention and youth service, *(d)* special educational needs, *(e)* study support, *(f)* playing for success, *(g)* family literacy and family numeracy, *(h)* year of literacy and numeracy booster classes, *(i)* summer literacy and numeracy skills, *(j)* early excellence centres, *(k)* early years training and development, *(l)* specialist and beacon schools, *(m)* advanced skills teachers, *(n)* initial teacher training schools, *(o)* the new national curriculum, *(p)* qualifications, *(q)* school leadership and *(r)* school improvement. [14201]

Mr. Timms: The cost of these grants in 2001–02 are shown in the table. Administrative support in small schools and the small school support fund have combined into the small schools fund. The working environment fund was for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 only. Support for parent governor representatives is included in the School Improvement Grant for 2001–02. Local authority support for lifelong learning is funded through the Learning and Skills Council for 2001–02. Access funding for 16 to 19-year-olds of £10 million has been made available by the Government for 2001–02, but is no longer part of the Standards Fund.

£ million

Grant name	*Total allocation*	*DfES contribution*	*LEA contribution*
Ethnic minority achievement	153.9	81.6	72.4
Traveller children achievement	15.6	8.3	7.4
National literacy strategy	74.8	51.4	23.4
National numeracy strategy	74.8	51.4	23.5
Key stage 3	63.2	38.4	24.8
Literacy and numeracy summer schools	22.0	11.7	10.3
Family literacy and numeracy	6.9	3.6	3.2
Early years training and development	13.5	7.2	6.3
Social inclusion: pupil support	161.9	85.8	76.1
Adult:Pupil ratios in reception classes	27.8	14.7	13.1
Supported early retirement scheme for heads	9.2	4.9	4.3

£ million

Grant name	Total allocation	DfES contribution	LEA contribution
Small schools fund	78.4	41.6	36.9
Performance management and threshold assessment	28.0	28.0	0.0
Teaching assistants	197.2	104.5	92.7
Teacher recruitment measures (golden hellos)	0.5	0.5	0.0
Education health partnerships	5.7	5.7	0.0
LEA music services	50.0	50.0	0.0
School security	21.5	11.4	10.1
Learning support units	21.0	21.0	0.0
Excellence in cities: gifted and talented children, learning support units and learning mentors	127.8	127.8	0.0
Gifted and talented summer schools	3.8	3.8	0.0
Drug prevention	12.5	9.0	3.5
Youth service	2.0	1.1	0.9
Special educational needs	73.0	38.7	34.3
Study support	67.1	41.2	25.9
Playing for success	4.6	2.4	2.1
Booster classes	46.0	46.0	0.0
Early excellence centre	4.1	4.1	0.0
Specialist schools	79.1	79.1	0.0
Beacon schools	30.6	30.6	0.0
Advanced skills teachers	29.0	15.4	13.6
Training schools	4.4	4.4	0.0
National curriculum	17.9	9.5	8.4
Qualifications	2.9	1.6	1.4
School leadership	26.2	21.6	4.6
School improvement, including support for parent governor representatives	206.9	110.5	96.3

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to review the national schools funding formula. [15046]

Mr. Timms: There is no national formula for funding schools, and there are no plans to introduce one. We confirmed in the Green Paper "Modernising Local Government Finance", published in September 2000, that the allocation of funds between schools would remain a local responsibility.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the cost of the *(a)* Standards Fund for further education and *(b)* first 15 beacon colleges. [14250]

Margaret Hodge: The standards fund for further education is £160 million in 2001–02—twice the amount available in 2000–01. Every beacon college, and there are now 18, is eligible for £50,000 from the standards fund to help them promote and disseminate examples of their good practice.

Departmental Name Change

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost has been to public funds of re-branding her Department to accommodate its name change following the last general election. [14435]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 11 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 554w.

Local Government Finance

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the amount of each item of funding outside the revenue support grant which her Department has made available to *(a)* Telford and the Wrekin council and *(b)* Shropshire county council in 2001–02 to date. [14475]

Mr. Timms: The tables show the Department's allocated grants to Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire local education authorities in 2001–02.

Telford and Wrekin local education authority

	£
Standards Fund Grant	4,523,820
Teachers Pay Reform Grant	1,122,193
Nursery Education Grant (3-year-olds)	1,700,000
Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership Grant	575,952
School Standards Grant	2,313,000
Education Budget Support Grant	310,000
Capital	7,810,000

Shropshire local education authority

	£
Standards Fund Grant	6,164,397
Teachers Pay Reform Grant	1,798,619
Nursery Education Grant (3 Year Olds)	888,000
Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership Grant	766,232
School Standards Grant	3,588,000
Education Budget Support Grant	100,000
Capital	7,353,000

Key Stage 2 (Cheating)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority with respect to their procedures relating to allegations of cheating in Key Stage 2. [14502]

Mr. Timms: I have received a report on incidents of malpractice in this year's National Curriculum Assessment Tests and their outcomes. I am pleased to note that the majority of reported incidents were minor, with 24 being sufficiently serious to warrant the schools' results being adjusted. Of these, two were whole school

annulments, seven were partial annulments in one or more subjects and 15 were cases where individual pupils results were adjusted.

Student Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reasons student loans are provided at a lower than commercial rate of interest. [14535]

Margaret Hodge: The costs of higher education are shared between the state, parents and graduates, given the clear evidence that the graduates benefit financially from their higher education. Student loans are provided at a zero real rate of interest as part of the Government's contribution to the costs of higher education.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average annual *(a)* subsistence and *(b)* study costs were of taking a degree at (i) Oxford, (ii) Cambridge, (iii) London and (iv) other English universities in the most recent year for which figures are available. [14536]

Margaret Hodge: The Department's latest student income and expenditure survey of a representative sample of higher education students shows the following figures for students' reported expenditure in the academic year 1998–99:

Average expenditure of full-time undergraduate and PGCE students, 1998–99

£

	London	Other England
Living costs[1]	4,109	4,094
Accommodation costs[2]	1,534	1,279
Participation costs[3]	824	780
Expenditure on children	65	48

[1] Includes food, household goods, personal items such as toiletries, clothes and tobacco, entertainment including alcohol, non-course related travel and other general expenditure.
[2] Includes rent, mortgage, retainer fee paid over the vacation, council tax, household insurance and utility bills.
[3] Includes students' personal contribution to fees, books, equipment and stationery, travel to and from college and childcare costs.
Source:
Changing student finances: income, expenditure and the take-up of student loans among full- and part-time higher education students in 1998–99, by Claire Callender and Martin Kemp, DfEE Research report 213, December 2000

Figures are not available for Cambridge and Oxford universities separately from 'Other England'. Cambridge university was not among the institutions selected to take part in the survey, and the sample of students at Oxford university was too small to provide reliable data.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will publish the Student Funding review. [14532]

Margaret Hodge: The outcome of the Student Funding review will be announced next year. We will be consulting on proposals for change before any decisions are made.

Terrorism

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance has been issued by her Department to *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* teachers in respect of discussion of (i) the global campaign against terrorism and (ii) the use of military force in Afghanistan. [14687]

Mr. Timms: Guidance was recently made available to local authorities and local education authorities relating to the events of September 11 and the subsequent conflict. It can be accessed from the home page of the DfES website and on Teachernet. The guidance does not specifically inform teachers how to address discussion of the global campaign and the use of military force in Afghanistan. Its purpose is to help teachers allay the fears of pupils and to offer examples of good practice to ensure the emotional and physical well being of both pupils and staff. It recognises that schools have done a great deal already and that heads and teachers have the professionalism and expertise to deal with issues as they arise. It reminds them of existing sources of help and encourages a local response and co-operation with local agencies. The guidance is work-in-progress and will be regularly updated in response to comments received and changing circumstances.

Freedom of Information Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what date her Department established a working group of officials to prepare her Department for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and on what dates this committee has met since it was set up. [14766]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department's strategy paper for implementation of the Freedom of Information Act includes provision for a forum of officials to help in formulating policy and guidance especially involving their own areas of work. The intention is to establish the forum early in the new year.

In the meantime, the Department has been active in preparing for implementation by developing and commencing a training and awareness programme, setting up a dedicated intranet site, alerting our non-departmental public bodies to their legal responsibilities, and holding discussions with key stakeholders on the development of the publication scheme.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the correspondence she received from training providers offering views on the pilot programmes of individual learning accounts. [14581]

John Healey *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* No. The Department only publishes correspondence if it has invited stakeholders to specifically write or feed back on an issue and that the information supplied will be placed in the public domain. Correspondents with the Department would not expect to see the contents of their correspondence published, except in these circumstances. Such a process was not undertaken in 1998, 1999 or 2000 prior to the national framework, nor in relation to the pilot or development work.

Any relevant material will be made public through the forthcoming Public Accounts Committee hearing on ILAs.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what advice she has received from the police in the last three months on the extent of fraud in connection with individual learning accounts. [14582]

John Healey *[holding answer 13 October 2001]:* My Department has received no direct advice from the police on the extent of fraud in connection with ILAs. At the end of October, the police were carrying out formal investigations into four learning providers (although only three of these have claimed funds from the Department) and are making preliminary inquiries into a fifth learning provider.

My Department's special investigations unit is currently conducting enquiries into a further nine learning providers which may potentially become police cases and will be considering, with the police, any lessons learned.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the number of jobs that will be lost as a result of the suspension of the individual learning accounts programme from 7 December, in England. [12394]

John Healey: I appreciate the business concerns expressed by some learning providers. However, we have given more than six weeks' notice of the suspension of the ILA programme. Eligible learning from existing ILA holders booked in advance with the ILA Centre by 7 December will attract the discounts from the scheme and that learning can start within a period of up to six months later. This will give learning providers a period of time in which to adjust their business plans.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what level of fraud involving individual learning accounts has been detected in the London borough of Sutton. [12525]

John Healey: Complaints received from individuals about alleged fraudulent activities are not recorded by geographical area.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 618W, on Individual Learning Accounts, when she first received complaints from individuals alleging that providers had claimed individual learning account incentives without their knowledge. [12289]

John Healey *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The first ILA provider to have been suspended because of a number of such complaints was on 25 June 2001. On 11 June 2001 the Department received the first letter in relation to this particular case, about incentives claimed without the knowledge of the account holder. From July of this year the Department received an increasing number of similar complaints from individuals and local Trading Standards Officers.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to provide funding to support the programmes of community-based learning providers where these are affected by the decision to suspend individual learning accounts. [13245]

John Healey *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* We have supported five community-based ILA pilot projects of which two were in Liverpool and one each in Sheffield, London, and Kent. These were originally due to end in June but were extended to end on 28 December 2001.

We have given more than six weeks notice of the suspension of the ILA programme. Eligible learning booked by existing ILA holders with the ILA Centre by 7 December will attract the discounts from the scheme as long as the start date of the learning is within six months of the registration. It is likely that the impact on the pilots of the decision to suspend ILAs will be small but officials are meeting with the local providers concerned.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with representatives of community-based learning providers in respect of the impact on their provision of the suspension of individual learning accounts. [13246]

John Healey *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* During the recent debate in the House on 6 November 2001, I said I would look into the effect on some organisations of the withdrawal of the ILA programme. My officials are now arranging meetings with those most affected.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no discussions with representatives of community-based learning providers although officials met the five community based organisations who are running ILA pilots yesterday.

Nursery Places

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress is being made in ensuring a nursery place is available for every three and four-year-old whose parents require it. [14725]

Mr. Timms: Since September 1998 all four-year-olds have been able to access a free, part-time early education place.

Around 62 per cent. of all three-year-olds currently have access to a free, part-time, early education place. We expect this to rise to 66 per cent. by March 2002, with every three-year-old, whose parents want one, entitled to a place by September 2004.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of requests for ill health early retirement under the Teachers' Pensions Regulations were agreed on application in each of the last three years; and what percentage of appeals against refusal were successful over the same period. [14724]

Mr. Timms: Applications for ill health benefits are considered on the medical evidence provided in support of the application. There is no time limit on appeals and they are often therefore associated with the submission

of further medical evidence. The percentages of all recommendations leading to acceptance in the last three years are:

	Percentage
April 1998-March 1999	79
April 1999-March 2000	78
April 2000-March 2001	75

Separate figures for appeals are only available from 2000–01. Of the 47 per cent. of teachers who appealed against the rejection of their application, 65 per cent. were ultimately awarded ill-health retirement benefits.

Asset Management Plans

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 468W, on asset management plans, when in November the results will be published. [13112]

Mr. Timms: The Department will be publishing the information at the end of November.

Pupil Achievement

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the achievements of pupils of comparable ability in areas of *(a)* selective secondary education and *(b)* comprehensive secondary education. [10074]

Mr. Timms: GCSE results (based on grades and average point scores) for 15-year-olds in grammar schools are, broadly speaking, similar to the top 25 per cent. in comprehensive schools. 25 per cent. reflects the proportion of pupils typically admitted by grammar schools in fully selective LEAs.

Skills Councils

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) when she will invite applications from existing national training organisations to become trail-blazer sector skills councils; [10930]

(2) what criteria she will use in approving the trail-blazer sector skills councils; [10928]

(3) what plans she has to issue provisional licences to trail-blazer sector skills councils. [10929]

John Healey *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* Trail-blazer sector skills councils will provide an early assessment of the impact of influential employer-led bodies in sectors with an employment base of economic or strategic significance. Up to six trail-blazers will be chosen to offer a mix of sectors with a range of different needs and experiences. The trail-blazers will be announced by mid December and will receive provisional licences. In addition to meeting the criteria for being licensed as a Sector Skills Council, trail-blazers will have the capacity to become operational in the spring of 2002.

I have written to the existing National Training Organisations and other sector based employer groups about expressing an interest in becoming a trail-blazer.

When the proposed trail-blazer SSCs are approved, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills will issue licences on behalf of the UK lifelong learning Ministers.

Free School Dinners

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will rank the top 30 local education authorities according to the percentage of day pupils eligible for free school dinners. [14070]

Mr. Timms: The data requested on the percentage of day pupils eligible for free school dinners in England for January 2000 have been placed in the House of Commons Library. Data for January 2001 will be placed in the Library as soon as they are available.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of school children eligible for free school dinners attend schools in each region of England and Wales. [14071]

Mr. Timms: Information on school meal arrangements for maintained nursery and primary, maintained secondary and special schools by local education authority area in England for January 2000 has been placed in the House of Commons Library. Data for January 2001 will be placed in the Library as soon as they are available.

For information on school meals in Wales, I refer my hon. Friend to the National Assembly for Wales.

Local Education (Leeds)

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the contracts and their financial value awarded by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the local education authorities to Capita. [13735]

Mr. Timms: Any contracts between local education authorities and Capita are a matter between the parties concerned and not the Department.

The Department has contracts with Capita for the administration of the Teachers' Pension Scheme, individual learning accounts, implementation of the Connexions Card and provision of general management consultancy support.

The financial value of individual contracts between the Department and Capita is commercial in confidence.

Higher Education Students

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will reconsider the criteria relating to the award of bursaries to higher education students so that students living in Excellence in Cities areas and attending further education colleges outside that location are not excluded from eligibility. [13778]

Margaret Hodge: Eligibility for Opportunity Bursaries depends on whether a student is attending one of the schools or further education colleges covered by the Excellence Challenge programme. The programme is being piloted over the next three years in Excellence in Cities (EiC) Phase 1 and 2 areas and Education Action Zones (EAZ). Local EiC Partnerships and EAZ Forums

have determined whether to include further education colleges located outside these areas within their Excellence Challenge plans.

There is £93 million available within the Access and Hardship Funds in 2001–02, over four times the amount provided in 1997–98. Higher education institutions are encouraged to use part of this money to provide bursaries for students who do not meet the criteria for an Opportunity Bursary.

Political Subjects

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what guidance she gives to teachers and head teachers to maintain political impartiality when controversial political subjects are discussed in school; [13395]

(2) if she will make a statement about the wearing of political badges by teachers and head teachers in school. [13394]

Mr. Timms: The law guards against biased or unbalanced teaching. Teachers must take "reasonably practicable steps" to ensure that, where political or controversial issues are brought to pupils' attention, they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views (Section 407 of the Education Act 1996).

Practical advice on how to teach controversial issues has been sent to all schools (Citizenship at Key Stage 3 Teachers Guide). We trust the professionalism of teachers to work within the framework of the school's values in relation to their expressing political opinions in class.

There is no other legislation or guidance issued from the Department which covers the wearing of political badges by school staff. The head teacher of a school has day-to-day responsibility for the conduct of the school and of staff and we would expect them to take a common sense view when dealing with staff whose attire indicates a particular political view. Where it is the head teacher who is visibly demonstrating political allegiance, it would be for the governing body, which is ultimately responsible for the direction of the school, to intervene, again taking a common sense view and taking account of local circumstances.

Section 11 Funding

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much section 11 funding is allocated to each of the London borough authorities. [14942]

Mr. Timms: The education element of the Home Office's Section 11 Grant scheme ceased on 31 March 1999. It was replaced with the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant, which is administered by my Department. For 2001–02 £153,914 is available nationally to improve attainment of minority ethnic pupils. The amounts allocated to London boroughs are set out in the table.

LEA	*Ethnic minority achievement grant*
Corporation of London	107,415
Camden	2,931,900
Greenwich	1,912,505
Hackney	4,299,222
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,202,577
Islington	2,529,175
Kensington and Chelsea	1,164,506
Lambeth	3,402,055
Lewisham	2,698,457
Southwark	2,053,869
Tower Hamlets	8,044,136
Wandsworth	2,332,179
Westminster	2,136,538
Barking	634,870
Barnet	1,913,572
Bexley	273,969
Brent	2,991,961
Bromley	112,808
Croydon	2,107,095
Ealing	3,701,735
Enfield	2,476,533
Haringey	3,599,985
Harrow	1,263,821
Havering	109,926
Hillingdon	792,240
Hounslow	2,360,138
Kingston-upon-Thames	312,690
Merton	989,608
Newham	1,410,781
Redbridge	2,417,966
Richmond-upon-Thames	142,621
Sutton	229,067
Waltham Forest	2,557,579

Note:
All figures include both DfES grant and LEA contribution

Class Sizes

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action her Department is taking to monitor the number of classes with over 30 pupils in Key Stage 1 and to deal with such cases. [15009]

Mr. Timms: Infant class size counts currently take place in January, as part of the Annual Schools Census, and September. From this September local education authorities and schools have been responsible for ensuring that infant classes for five, six, and seven-year-olds comply with the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requirement to contain 30 or fewer children except in certain limited circumstances.

In January 1998, 29 per cent. of all infants were in classes of 31 or more. Figures published this morning show that in September 2001 after taking out the permitted exceptions allowed by law there are now less than 0.1 per cent. of the 63,000 infant classes that have extra children.

Special Needs Pupils

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact of special needs pupils on primary school SATs results for *(a)* England and *(b)* Shropshire. [14791]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not collect separate data on the performance of pupils with SEN and it is not therefore possible to assess their impact on the National Curriculum Assessment Tests.

We have made no specific assessment of the position of pupils with SEN on primary school National Curriculum Assessment Test results in Shropshire. The percentage of

pupils with SEN in maintained primary schools in that LEA was 21.1 per cent. in January 2000, compared to the corresponding national figure of 21.6 per cent.

The Department established an SEN Data Strategy Group which, earlier this year, recommended a number of improvements to the collection of data on pupils with SEN. We are now considering how best these recommendations could be implemented, including developing appropriate data collection software and taking the views of schools and LEAs.

Primary School Therapists

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the waiting time is and how many are on the waiting list for *(a)* behavioural therapists and *(b)* speech therapists for primary school children in *(a)* England and *(b)* Shropshire. [14790]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

Under the Standards Fund 2001–02, support is available to local education authorities to enhance speech and language therapy services in conjunction with the NHS and the voluntary sector. This support will be extended to other therapies in the 2002–03 round.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Government Office for London

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people were employed by the Government office for London in *(a)* May 2000, *(b)* November 2000, *(c)* May 2001 and *(d)* November 2001. [15044]

Mrs. Roche: The Government office for London employed approximately 375 people in May 2000, 270 in November 2000, 245 in May 2001 and 255 in November 2001.

UK Online Project

Ms Buck: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the allocations this year to each London local authority area under the UK online project. [13661]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

As part of the wider drive to get the UK online, some £25 million has been made available to support 25 local authority e-government pathfinders for 2001–02, in a programme of innovation and shared learning. Five of these pathfinders are London boroughs and their individual allocations are set out in the table.

£

Local authority	*Amount of funding*
London borough of Brent	1,050,000
London borough of Bromley	1,550,000
London borough of Camden	1,810,000
London borough of Newham	1,150,000
London borough of Wandsworth	883,000

Written Answers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will issue guidance to Departments to require that answers to written questions which are replied to by letter during a parliamentary recess are sent for publication in the *Official Report* for the following sitting day. [12073]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have been asked to reply.

I welcome the hon. Lady's suggestion. My office has today issued guidance to all Whitehall parliamentary clerks setting out new standing instructions.

This guidance states that when a written question is replied to by letter during a recess a copy of the parliamentary question and the reply must be sent to *Hansard*, in order for it to appear in the *Official Report* the next sitting day.

SCOTLAND

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action her Department took in recognition of Energy Efficiency Week. [11515]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 592W.

Scottish Estuary Forums

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what support is provided by the Crown Estate to each of the Scottish estuary forums. [11547]

Mrs. Liddell: The Crown Estate provides funding and other support to each of the Scottish estuary forums. In addition, it has one member of staff on secondment to the Scottish Coastal Forum of which it is a member and participates in the management groups of the Tay, Forth, Cromarty Firth, Clyde and Solway Forums.

Parliamentary Questions

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will reply to the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West on 29 October. [13872]

Mrs. Liddell: I replied to the hon. Member on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 747–48W.

Electoral Registration (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she took prior to 1 July to encourage members of ethnic minorities in Scotland to register to vote. [14327]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office's publicity campaign in February this year operated in tandem with the Home Office's campaign on new electoral arrangements. It included a number of initiatives which specifically targeted people from ethnic minority communities across the United Kingdom. In particular, notices and material were placed in UK-wide publications and other media specifically aimed at ethnic minority groups, and it was arranged for the organisation's Operation Black Vote to use its database of ethnic minority contact points throughout the country, including Scotland, to distribute information leaflets.

Cohesion Report

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response she is making to the Scottish Executive's discussion paper on Scottish economic development in light of the cohesion report. [14406]

Mrs. Liddell: The paper to which my hon. Friend refers is one of a series of discussion papers produced by the Scottish Executive Economist Group.

It will be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to consider whether to respond on the policy issues raised in this particular paper.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Islamic Society of Britain

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of links between the Islamic Society of Britain and *(a)* Muslim fundamentalist extremists and *(b)* anti-Zionist activism. [14842]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* We are not aware of any links that give rise to any criminal or security concerns, but if the hon. Member has any evidence to the contrary he should pass it to the police.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances an immigrant or asylum seeker is able to have visits from family members abroad. [10111]

Angela Eagle: The Immigration Rules make provision for visits to the United Kingdom. To qualify for entry as a visitor, applicants must demonstrate that they are genuinely seeking entry as a visitor for the period stated, that they have sufficient funds to support and accommodate themselves and any dependants without working or recourse to public funds, and that they will leave the United Kingdom at the end of the visit. The maximum period allowed for a visit is six months.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people seeking asylum have been dispersed to other areas of the UK from London in each of the last three years. [14730]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the form requested.

Asylum seekers were not dispersed centrally before April 2000.

Information recorded by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) shows that as at the end of July 2001, 28,130[1,2] asylum seekers, including dependants, were being supported in NASS accommodation outside of London after dispersal.

The number of these asylum seekers who were in London prior to dispersal is not available. NASS currently does not hold statistics on the location of asylum seekers before they are dispersed by NASS. Statistics are only available on the areas that asylum seekers are dispersed to.

[1] Figure rounded to the nearest 10

[2] Cases which have had their support terminated are excluded from this figure

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for political asylum in the United Kingdom were made in the three months to *(a)* 1 October 2001 and *(b)* 1 October 2000. [14310]

Angela Eagle: The table provides the information requested for the latest three months for which data are available, and for the corresponding period in 2000.

Applications for asylum to the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, May-July 2000 and May-July 2001[1,2]

Month	*Applications*
2000	
May	6,725
June	6,545
July	6,870
Total May–July	20,140
2001	
May	5,290
June	5,300
July	5,975
Total May–July	16,570

[1] All data rounded to nearest 5. The monthly data shown may not sum to three-monthly totals due to rounding.
[2] Provisional

Information on asylum applications and initial decisions is published regularly in the annual statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House, and from the Research Developments and Statistics (RDS) website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html. Data for the period July to September 2001 will be published on 30 November. Revised monthly data for 2000 are available at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/asylumrev2k.pdf.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of how many *(a)* refugees and *(b)* those with special immigration status in each of the last five years have medical qualifications; [14313]

(2) what plans he has to fast-track *(a)* refugees and *(b)* those with special immigration status with medical qualifications through English language classes; [14316]

(3) what assessment he has made of the cost of a fast-track system to teach *(a)* refugees and *(b)* those with special immigration status with medical qualifications to speak English. [14317]

Angela Eagle: We are aware that a number of the refugees who come to the United Kingdom are highly skilled and many have professional experience in the medical sector. However, asylum applications are judged solely on the basis of whether the applicant is genuinely fleeing persecution. Information about professional skills which are not relevant to the asylum claim, are not therefore collected on arrival.

We have no current plans to fast-track refugees or those with exceptional leave to remain, with medical qualifications, through English language classes. But we want to be able to identify the types of intervention that will assist people to gain employment quickly in their field of expertise, if they are given the right to remain in the United Kingdom.

There is close co-operation between the Home Office and the Department of Health and other agencies to look at how we can do more to identify people with medical qualifications at an early stage. For example, over the last year, the Department of Health has worked with the Refugee Council to set up a voluntary refugee doctor database, which now contains the details of over 400 refugee doctors. In addition, the British Medical Association has been encouraged to prepare guidelines for clinical attachments for overseas and refugee doctors. This will help to provide valuable experience of the national health service and help preparations for language and clinical skill tests.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers, previously under care of local authorities while under 18 years of age, upon reaching 18 have been dispersed to each of the NASS-designated dispersal areas. [14717]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The information requested is not available. The figures recorded by National Asylum Support Service (NASS) for the dispersal of asylum seekers do not show the number of asylum seekers who were previously treated as an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC).

Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, local authorities continue to have duties and powers in respect of UASCs who have been accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 until they are at least 18 and to assist them until they are at least 21. The Government's policy of dispersing asylum seekers would have made these duties difficult to implement. It has therefore been agreed that with effect from 1 October 2001, except in exceptional circumstances, NASS will not seek to disperse those young people who have been accommodated by the local authority under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and who reach the age of 18 without a final decision being reached on their asylum claim.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 100W, on asylum seekers, what assessment he has made of the reasons for the increase between 1999 and 2000 of refusal of asylum applications on the basis of non-compliance. [11974]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* A higher proportion of applications were refused on grounds of non-compliance in 1999 and 2000 than had previously been the case. The increase was due partly to the stricter enforcement of the 10 day deadline for return of the Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) and partly to administrative problems which led to a backlog of correspondence within the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and some flawed refusals as a consequence. We have made a number of changes over the past 12 months to improve our administrative processes and reduce flawed refusals. These include the introduction of a dedicated PO Box for the return of completed SEFs, and adjustments to internal procedures to ensure that the receipt of SEFs is registered on a database.

We have also taken steps to improve asylum applicants' understanding of the asylum process and of the importance of meeting the time limit. We have done this by simplifying the explanatory leaflet which is sent out with the SEF, and by making it available in the 33 languages spoken by most asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. The SEF form has also been simplified. Non-governmental organisations were consulted about these improvements.

Al-Muhajiroun

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to proscribe al-Muhajiroun; and if he will make a statement. [12160]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government are well aware of the statements made by the al-Muhajiroun organisation and any suggestion that these statements breach the law will be thoroughly investigated. To qualify for proscription under the Terrorism Act 2000, I must be satisfied in accordance with section 3 of the Act that an organisation is "concerned in terrorism". The Government are keeping under close review whether the activities of al-Muhajiroun bring that organisation within the requirements for proscription set out in section 3 and, if the conclusion is that this organisation is concerned in terrorism, I will give full consideration as to whether it is appropriate to recommend their proscription to Parliament.

Revenue Support

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the amount of each item of funding outside the revenue support grant which his Department has made available to *(a)* Telford and the Wrekin council and *(b)* Shropshire county council in 2001–02 to date. [14476]

Angela Eagle: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Landmark/Inn on the Park

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what issues were raised in the representations received by *(a)* him and *(b)* NASS in relation to (i) Landmark and (ii) Inn on the Park in Everton, Liverpool. [14457]

Angela Eagle: Issues raised in representations received by Home Office Ministers and the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) in relation to the Landmark and Inn on the Park buildings have included the quality of the accommodation, concern over public order and allegations about the treatment of asylum seekers.

Full consideration has been given to all the issues raised in representations, and the allegations surrounding the treatment of asylum seekers housed by NASS in the Landmark building have been thoroughly investigated by the police and by the Head of NASS's Investigations section. Those investigations and an on-going programme of contract management control by NASS, have indicated areas for improvement in the provision of Landmark's delivery of their contract and these either have been or are being dealt with. NASS continues to monitor all of its providers and where contractual obligations are not met the ultimate sanction is termination of the contract.

Correspondence

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Putney will receive

a substantive reply to his letter of 21 September, for which he received an acknowledgement on 7 November, on behalf of his constituent Mrs. Olga Brown. [14370]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 15 November 2001. I am sorry I did not reply sooner.

Ports of Entry

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people seeking entry into the UK at ports of entry were refused and immediately removed in 2000. [13927]

Angela Eagle: 38,275 persons seeking entry into the United Kingdom at ports of entry were refused leave to enter and subsequently removed in 2000. Information about the interval between arrival and eventual removal is not collected centrally, and could only be established by reference to individual records. It is therefore not possible to say how many were removed immediately.

Immigration Law

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were held in custody under UK immigration law, on 1 November, broken down by nationality. [13925]

Angela Eagle: The requested information on persons detained under Immigration Act powers as at 30 June 2001 is given in the table. The table excludes persons detained at Oakington Reception Centre, for which gender information is not available, but includes persons detained in prison establishments under dual Immigration Act and other powers.

More recent information is not currently available. We plan to publish data on immigration detention on 30 November on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html, relating to persons detained as at 30 September.

Immigration Act detainees as at 30 June 2001 [1,2]

Nationality	*Male detainees*	*Female detainees*
Afghanistan	25	—
Albania	70	*
Algeria	75	—
Angola	10	—
Bangladesh	45	—
Cameroon	15	*
China, People's Republic of	65	5
Colombia	15	*
Czech Republic	15	—
Gambia	10	*
Ghana	30	5
India	100	*
Iran	15	—
Iraq	15	—
Ivory Coast	10	—
Jamaica	105	5
Kenya	15	5
Latvia	10	—
Lithuania	20	—
Moldova	10	*
Morocco	15	—
Nigeria	80	5
Pakistan	115	*
Poland	15	*
Romania	30	*
Russia	15	—
South Africa	10	5
Sri Lanka	65	—
Turkey	35	—
Uganda	15	—
Ukraine	40	*
Yugoslavia, Federal Republic of	120	5
Zimbabwe	85	10
Other nationalities	130	10
Total	1,440	55

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five, with * = one or two, and exclude persons detained in Oakington Reception Centre and police cells. Figures may not sum due to rounding
[2] Figures include 245 persons detained in prison establishments under dual Immigration Act and other powers
[3] Other nationalities with five or fewer detainees

Rats

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has to regulate the transport of caged rats; and if he will make a statement. [R] [14068]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office has responsibility for the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Under section 21 of that Act, a Code of Practice for the Housing and Care of Animals in Designated Breeding Establishments is in place, which covers best practice for the care of laboratory animals during transport. Failure to comply with this Code of Practice does not, however, render a person liable to criminal or civil proceedings.

The Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 applies to all vertebrates transported for commercial purposes, and under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 it is an offence to convey a captive or domestic animal in such a way as to cause it unnecessary suffering. These pieces of legislation are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Afghanistan (Media Guidelines)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has given to the UK news media on the handling of sensitive security issues during the conflict in Afghanistan. [13675]

Mr. Blunkett: There are well-established arrangements with the news media for the discussion of hoaxes, false alarms, and the handling of public safety information. These are co-ordinated by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat of the Cabinet Office, and have recently covered suspected anthrax incidents.

Additionally, No. 10 spoke informally to selected broadcasters about the potential dangers of broadcasting material issued by bin Laden.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what higher court judicial decisions

have been made as to the admissibility of hearsay evidence in proceedings seeking Antisocial Behaviour Orders; and if he will make a statement. [12027]

Mr. Denham: In R. (on the application of McCann and Others) *v.* Manchester Crown court, the Court of Appeal held that applications for Antisocial Behaviour Orders are made in civil proceedings, and that therefore the civil standard of proof applied (although that standard is a flexible one) and hearsay evidence was admissible.

Departmental Spending (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much of the expenditure by his Department in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02 and *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) was allocated with reference to the index of multiple deprivation; which expenditure programmes are allocated with respect to this index and other measures of relative geographic deprivation; and if he will make a statement. [8941]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* In 2001–02, £2.9 million for a scheme to improve the security of local shops in deprived areas has been allocated by reference both to the indices of deprivation compiled by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions and to the Welsh index of deprivation. We plan to allocate a further £5.8 million under the scheme by reference to those indices in 2002–03. Police grant and probation area funding are also allocated on the basis of formulas that take account of relative deprivation. In the current financial year, police grant is expected to be approximately £3,995 million and grant to local probation boards approximately £500 million.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* telecoms companies and *(b)* mobile phone manufacturers concerning the redesigning of mobile phones to make inadvertent 999 calls less likely. [10391]

Mr. Denham: The Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) have been working together to address the issue of inadvertent silent 999 calls from mobile phones.

British Telecom and Cable and Wireless carry all emergency 999–112 calls. Following a successful trial with the Metropolitan police, ACPO have arranged for British Telecom and Cable and Wireless to route all silent 999 calls for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland through a switch that engages a recorded message. This message states that the emergency services have been called, but that no voice connection has been detected, and that the number "5" on the keypad should be pressed twice if the emergency services are required.

This service came into effect nationally on 1 October 2001 and will remove silent calls that were previously routed to police command and control rooms throughout the country. These accounted for approximately 20 per cent. of all 999 calls and their removal will improve the efficiency of control rooms and their ability to deal with genuine emergency calls.

Oftel are currently working with manufacturers to improve the design of mobile phones to reduce problems. These changes should be introduced from 2003 onwards. Interim solutions are being sought from manufacturers to provide specific key protection around the "9" and "1" keys to prevent accidental activation.

Communications Data Access

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy to allow law enforcement agencies access to all communications data of every UK telephone and Internet user; and if he will make a statement. [15186]

Mr. Blunkett: Access to communications data may be sought only for specified purposes (including, for example, investigation of crime) under the Data Protection Act 1998 or the Telecommunications Act 1984. It may additionally be supplied in obedience to court orders.

Chapter II of Part I of The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) will provide a more regulated structure for access requests and create a system of safeguards.

A test of necessity (for example in the interests of national security or for the purpose of preventing or detecting crime) must be met before any communications data are obtained under Chapter II. An authorising officer must also consider the conduct involved in obtaining the communications data to be proportionate to what it seeks to achieve.

The use of powers to access data will be subject to oversight by the Interception Commissioner.

Security Appeals Tribunal

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to respond to the decision of the National Security Appeals Tribunal, dated 1 October, in respect of the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) and MI5; and if he will make a statement. [15276]

Mr. Blunkett: I expect by the end of November to have decided on a course of action in response to the determination of the National Security Panel of the Information Tribunal on the appeal by the hon. Member for Lewes against a Data Protection Act 1998 national security exemption certificate covering the security service.

Protection of Badgers Act

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to change the way in which offences committed under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 are recorded by the Criminal Records Office. [12692]

Mr. Denham: In common with all other offence provisions which carry the possibility of imprisonment, convictions, cautions, reprimands and warnings under sections 1(1) and (3), 2 and 3 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 are recordable by police forces on the Police National Computer. These include offences of wilfully killing, injuring or taking a badger, cruelly ill-treating a

badger, and intentionally or recklessly interfering with a badger sett. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Firearms Act

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to set a minimum age requirement for *(a)* possession of and *(b)* use of weapons under (i) section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968 and (ii) section 2 of the Firearms Act 1968. [7247]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* As indicated in the Government's response to the Home Affairs Select Committee's (HAC) second report on Controls over Firearms, we do not believe there is a need for a minimum age limit for the possession and use of a firearm providing that young people below a certain age are under proper adult supervision. The present legal position is complex, and different age limits apply to different types of firearms according to the circumstances in which they are used and the degree of supervision. We have therefore asked the Firearms Consultative Committee to look at this issue in the context of the Government's response to the HAC and to advise on the detailed implications of any changes.

National Asylum Support Service

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what facilities he has to conduct independent investigations into the National Asylum Support Service's monitoring of the contracts it has awarded in relation to accommodation and support for asylum seekers. [10824]

Angela Eagle: The work of the contract management staff of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is overseen by the Head of Procurement who reports to the Director, NASS. The service is an integral part of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office and its work is subject to the normal management, audit and complaints procedures of that Directorate.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints were submitted to the National Asylum Support Service in its recent investigation into management and support service at Landmark and Inn on the Park in Everton, Liverpool. [10989]

Angela Eagle: Twelve such complaints from asylum seekers were received during the investigation.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the results of his Department's recent investigation into management and support services at Landmark and Inn on the Park in Everton, Liverpool. [10974]

Angela Eagle: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) investigation was internal and there are no plans to publish a report.

Terrorism Act

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has made for the review of the Terrorism Act 2000; and how observations from *(a)* interested persons and *(b)* organisations may be submitted for consideration. [15789]

Mr. Blunkett: I am pleased to say that Lord Carlile of Berriew QC has accepted my invitation to carry out the annual review of the Terrorism Act 2000.

Written observations about the operation of the Act should be submitted to Lord Carlile, c/o 6 Floor, West Wing, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT by 31 December 2001.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Public-private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the projects in her Department which have been considered as potential public-private partnerships since 1997 which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public-private partnership proposed; and if she will make a statement. [13452]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W.

There have been no projects considered by my Department and the Royal Parks Agency as potential public-private partnerships which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public-private partnership proposed.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Recycling

10. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the level of usage of recycled materials as a proportion of the volume collected in the last 12 months. [13073]

Mr. Meacher: In 1999–2000, 11 per cent. of municipal waste in England and Wales was collected for recycling or composting. The Department does not hold information on the level of usage of materials as a proportion of the amounts collected for recycling.

37. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to involve the public in decisions on waste recycling and disposal; and if she will make a statement. [13101]

Mr. Meacher: Both waste recycling and disposal are covered by statutory performance standards set using the Best Value regime which requires that local authorities' services are subject to regular reviews which must involve consultation with local people.

Fodder

15. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the cost and availability of fodder. [13079]

Mr. Morley: The Arthur Rank Centre, RSPCA, ADAS and industry bodies have been examining the prices and availability of fodder and grazing throughout the country. The foot and mouth disease culls and movement

restrictions have resulted in some farmers having fodder and bedding in surplus and others having an unexpected need for it. The Department has been discussing the work of charities in brokering fodder supplies between farmers. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs was pleased to announce on 6 November a further £2 million to help address the problems farmers and rural communities are facing as a result of foot and mouth disease restrictions. The money will be largely channelled as matched funding through the Addington Trust Fund and other charities to help them meet these needs.

Energy Efficiency

16. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policy to promote energy efficiency in UK companies. [13080]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are committed to improving energy efficiency as a highly cost-effective way of achieving our climate change goals. The Energy Efficiency Commitment will, from next April, provide a substantial boost to domestic energy efficiency activity. The Energy Saving Trust and Carbon Trust receive over £66 million from the Department to promote domestic, business and public sector energy efficiency and the take-up of low carbon technology. The climate change levy, and its associated voluntary agreements, are an important spur to business energy efficiency.

30. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the contribution that more efficient use of energy can make in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. [13094]

Mr. Meacher: Energy efficiency outside the transport sector is expected to contribute more than 50 per cent. of the CO_2 reductions outlined in the Government's climate change programme and about 45 per cent. of the total greenhouse gas reductions. These figures increase to around 75 per cent. and 65 per cent. respectively if more efficient use of energy in transport is included. Assessments made by my Department for the PIU Energy Review covering the period up to 2050 suggest that there is substantial scope for further cost-effective energy efficiency savings across the economy.

Climate Change

17. **Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the progress of the climate change negotiations at Marrakesh. [13081]

Margaret Beckett: UK Ministers, officials and experts played a leading role in the negotiations in Marrakesh. We believe the agreement reached should now pave the way for ratification and entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol. The UK intends to ratify, along with our EU partners, in time to allow entry into force before the World Summit on Sustainable Development next September.

Waste Management

18. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what structures are being put in place to help local authorities achieve their statutory waste targets. [13082]

Mr. Meacher: We are helping councils deliver their Statutory Performance Standards for recycling and composting through major extra funding from the Spending Review 2000. By 2003–04 revenue support will have risen by £1.1 billion over current provision; there is £220 million for PFI waste schemes over the spending review period; and there is a £140 million ring-fenced fund for waste and recycling over the next two years. £50 million of New Opportunities Fund moneys will also be available over the next two years to support community sector work on recycling in the UK.

The Government have also established the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), a company with £40 million funding to help to overcome market barriers to recycling. It will operate across all waste streams to foster markets for recycled materials.

We view the statutory targets we have set for local authority recycling and composting of household waste as a major priority. Where authorities fail to deliver those targets the Secretary of State has powers to intervene under Section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999.

A protocol has been agreed with the Local Government Association setting out the principles under which these powers will be used. These could range from inviting the authority to submit an action plan setting out how it proposed to meet the statutory recycling targets by a given deadline, to at the other end of the scale, removing the management of the waste function from the authority completely and asking another agent to conduct the waste service on their behalf.

Genetically Modified Organisms

19. **Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made in implementing the new EU directive on deliberate releases of GMOs. [13083]

Mr. Meacher: Consultations with stakeholders on the broad issues raised by the new Directive were completed in England on 26 October. The Department is currently analysing the 43 responses received, and will make this analysis and copies of the responses available to the public and to Parliament (unless specifically asked to treat responses in confidence).

We will consult further on draft implementing regulations early in the new year, with a view to laying them before Parliament by June 2002.

The Scottish Executive, the National Assembly for Wales and the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland will make separate implementing regulations on issues for which they have devolved powers.

Diversification

20. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial and

technical assistance is offered by her Department to farmers who wish to diversify their operations; and if she will make a statement. [13084]

Alun Michael: The Department provides grants for farmers in England for good diversification projects through the Rural Enterprise Scheme, and skills training to support those projects through the Vocational Training Scheme, both of which are part of the England Rural Development Programme. Funds are also available from the Regional Development Agencies to renovate redundant farm buildings. Technical assistance is provided by the Rural Development Service and through the Farm Business Advice Service.

35. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial assistance is available to hill farmers to diversify their businesses. [13099]

Alun Michael: The Rural Enterprise Scheme (RES), which is a part of the England Rural Development Programme, provides grants for all types of farmers, including hill farmers, seeking to pursue good diversification projects. The RES has a total budget of £152 million between 2001 and 2006. Financial assistance is also available for planning consultancy advice for viable diversification projects under the RES. Other funding is available from Regional Development Agencies in the form of Redundant Building Grant. Additional measures, such as the Vocational Training Scheme and the Farm Business Advice Service, also offer relevant support.

Flood Prevention

21. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent by central Government, local government and agencies on flood defences and flood prevention in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2000–01; and what the estimated spending is for 2001–02. [13085]

Mr. Morley: Flood defence is provided by the Environment Agency, local authorities and internal drainage boards. The table shows expenditure by the Environment Agency in England, by English local authorities and estimated expenditure by internal drainage boards.

	1997–98	*2000–01*
Environment Agency	255.2	270.4
Local authorities	13.0	[1]20.1
Internal Drainage Boards	[2]40.0	[2]41.0
Total	308.2	331.5

[1] Provisional
[2] Estimate

It is not possible to provide a fully broken down estimate of expenditure in 2001–02 but DEFRA grant will increase by some £26 million and levies to the Environment Agency increased by some £19 million indicating that overall expenditure could increase by some £45 million on the 2000–01 figure.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to implement the recommendations of the National Audit Office to increase levels of investment in capital and maintenance in preparation for floods; and if she will make a statement. [13882]

Mr. Morley: Operational responsibility for flood alleviation measures rests with local operating authorities, namely the Environment Agency, local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards. This Department provides funding on capital works and the provision available for flood and coastal defence has already been increased from last year's outturn of £66 million to £114 million in 2003–04. The operating authorities' maintenance and operational programmes are funded largely through local government funding arrangements. Currently some £264 million a year is provided through Standard Spending Assessments which are largely supported by central grant and non-domestic rate income. Further increase in both funding streams will be considered in the Spending Review 2002 process.

Sewage

23. **Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the placing of combined sewage overflow tanks; and if she will make a statement. [13087]

Mr. Meacher: The siting of combined sewer overflow tanks is subject to local authority planning development control.

Local Farm Produce

24. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with large retailers about developing more local sourcing of farm produce. [13088]

Alun Michael: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had any recent meetings with large scale retailers about local sourcing of farm produce. However, Food from Britain, whom we grant aid, have been working with the major supermarkets to encourage them to source more local produce and we are aware that there has been a considerable expansion in local sourcing in recent years.

CHP

25. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government are taking to ensure that the target for combined heat and power is reached by 2010; and what assessment has been made of the impact upon capacity of the introduction of the new electricity trading arrangements in March 2001. [13089]

Mr. Meacher: The Department is developing, in close collaboration with other Departments, a draft CHP strategy, which will set out the measures needed to achieve the Government's target of at least 10,000 MW of installed CHP electrical capacity by 2010. I expect to issue the draft strategy for consultation around the turn of the year.

The recent report by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, 'Report to DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators', issued in August, indicated that the export of power from CHP has reduced by around 60 per cent. since the introduction of

NETA. The Government have issued a response to Ofgem's review and through this are consulting on a number of specific points to address the issues that CHP generators face under NETA.

Kyoto Protocol

26. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on those countries who are signatories to the Kyoto agreement and whose carbon dioxide emissions are increasing. [13090]

Mr. Meacher: As of 28 September, there were 84 signatories to the Kyoto Protocol. Nearly 40 of these are developed countries with emissions reduction or limitation targets. Carbon dioxide emissions in about two thirds of these countries increased between 1990 and 1999, which is the most recent year for which data are available, but total emissions from developed countries (including the US) were about the same as in 1990.

The Protocol gives developed countries considerable flexibility as to how they meet their Kyoto targets, including using international emissions trading and projects to reduce emissions in other countries to supplement domestic action. The Protocol also allows countries to count increased carbon uptake by forests and soils (so-called "sinks"), and to make reductions across a basket of six greenhouse gases, not just carbon dioxide.

BSE

28. **Clive Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what tests for BSE are carried out on livestock destined for human consumption; and what plans she has to review this in the future. [13092]

Mr. Morley: The EU surveillance programme for TSE's requires testing for BSE in all cattle over 30 months destined for human consumption. In the UK, this applies only to a small number of animals belonging to Beef Assurance Scheme herds which can be sold for human consumption up to 42 months old. These cattle have been tested since January this year.

The EU programme has been extended to cattle aged 24–30 months which have died on farm or in transit and are casualties. A small proportion of casualties will be eligible for human consumption and arrangements are being made for them to be tested.

In line with EU requirements, arrangements are also being made to test 20,000 sheep aged over 18 months.

The Commission will be reviewing the testing programme in the light of results from member states.

Online Services

29. **Mr. Allan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of her Department's progress in meeting the Government's targets for making all its services available online. [13093]

Mr. Morley: Regular progress reports are made to the Office of the e-Envoy. The latest figures submitted in October show that 53 per cent. of DEFRA's services are available electronically.

Rights of Way

31. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she has made in identifying and mapping public rights of way under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [13095]

Alun Michael: The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 provides for a cut-off date in 25 years time for the recording of certain rights of way on definitive maps and the extinguishment of those not so recorded by that date. In order to ensure that the definitive maps are as complete as possible by this date, we have asked the Countryside Agency to consider ways of co-ordinating the efforts of user groups in researching any, as yet, undiscovered rights of way.

The Countryside Agency is currently in phase 1 of this project, which will assess the scale of the task. The contractors (made up of a consortium led by Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education) will be consulting all interested parties on the best way of supporting the research and on providing information and training. The aim is that by spring 2002 the Agency will have sufficient information to put in place a mechanism for managing grant aid to provide support and training and for undertaking research.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 does not include a separate requirement to identify and map public rights of way. Definitive maps of public rights of way were first required to be produced under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949. They are the responsibility of the local highway authority who (under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) have a duty to keep the definitive map and statement under continuous review and to make such modifications as they deem necessary.

Foot and Mouth

32. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to receive the reports of the independent inquiries into foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [13096]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 804W.

34. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the extent of the foot and mouth epidemic. [13098]

Mr. Morley: The last confirmed case of foot and mouth disease was on 30 September. We have made progress on lifting infected area restrictions and most counties are now classified as foot and mouth disease free. However, there is no room for complacency and we may yet identify isolated pockets of remaining infection as our testing programme proceeds. Any relaxation of restrictions must be proportionate to the risks involved.

36. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the report by Devon county council on the Government's handling of the foot and mouth outbreak. [13100]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary on 31 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 1416 in another place.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evidence she has collated recently of meat from animals vaccinated against foot and mouth disease entering the UK from *(a)* France, *(b)* Holland, *(c)* other EU countries, *(d)* Argentina and *(e)* South Africa. [14057]

Mr. Morley: None. Within the EU the Netherlands was the only country that vaccinated against foot and mouth disease (FMD). However, the vaccinated animals were subsequently slaughtered and meat from them was not exported.

The importation into the UK of fresh meat derived from FMD susceptible animals originating in Argentina is currently prohibited. Prior to the prohibition, meat from vaccinated animals could be imported from Argentina, but had to be deboned and fully matured so as to remove any risk of the live FMD virus being present. Following outbreaks of FMD in South Africa, the UK prohibited imports of fresh meat with effect from January 2001. Following an improvement in the FMD situation in South Africa, and appropriate guarantees from the South African authorities, this prohibition was lifted in June 2001 in line with EC law. This meant that meat originating in certain areas of South Africa which are FMD free can be imported into the UK. Imports of meat from vaccinated animals in South Africa is not permitted; however, meat imports must still be deboned and matured.

End of Life Vehicle Directive

33. **Barbara Follett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to assist local authorities with the implementation of the European end of life vehicle directive. [13097]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities are not intended to have any direct responsibility for implementing the European end of life directive.

The directive requires producers to be responsible for all or a significant part of the costs of take-back and treatment of end of life vehicles from 2007. These arrangements should help to ease the situation for local authorities in dealing with abandoned vehicles. It has not yet been decided how take-back and treatment of end of life vehicles between 2002 and 2007 will be funded.

Foxhunting

14. **Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the veterinary risk assessment report commissioned by her into the resumption of foxhunting. [13078]

Mr. Morley: The Veterinary Risk Assessment has been placed in the Library of the House and published on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/.

The Government issued a document this morning on proposals to replace the current blanket ban on hunting in England and Wales. The proposed new arrangements permit certain forms of hunting with dogs to recommence under a permit issued by a Divisional Veterinary Manager, in foot and mouth disease free counties. All forms of hunting will remain prohibited in foot and mouth disease infected areas as does the hunting of deer in the whole of England and Wales.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to lift the suspension on fox hunting with dogs; and if she will make a statement. [14403]

Alun Michael: The Veterinary Risk Assessment has been placed in the Library of the House and published on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/.

The Government issued a document this morning on proposals to replace the current blanket ban on hunting in England and Wales. The proposed new arrangements permit certain forms of hunting with dogs to recommence under a permit issued by a Divisional Veterinary Manager, in foot and mouth disease free counties. All forms of hunting will remain prohibited in foot and mouth disease infected areas as does the hunting of deer in the whole of England and Wales.

Sheep Identification

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for an individual identification system for sheep. [13086]

Mr. Morley: If we are to free up movements of sheep for the spring we must put in place arrangements that will enable us to trace sheep movements in the event that there is a resurgence of foot and mouth disease. We have had initial discussions with industry representatives, which covered individual identification. We are now examining a number of points on which they expressed concern. Officials will be considering these further with them, before coming to a final decision.

I am aware that industry would prefer to move straight towards electronic identification. Electronic identification also remains the Department's objective but it would take time to implement and would not deal with immediate problems.

Bee Diseases

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will meet representatives of Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. to discuss measures to control bee diseases. [12757]

Mr. Morley: The Department held its annual meeting with the beekeeping sector on 8 November. Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. was among the organisations that sent representatives. The meeting discussed a range of issues affecting the sector, including measures to control bee diseases.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will include an aim to deal with fuel poverty within her Department's aims and objectives. [11790]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The Department's overall aim is sustainable development, and its responsibilities are broad, encompassing the food chain and farming, environmental protection and the well-being of the economy and communities in rural areas. Reference

to each and every specific policy area is therefore not written into the Department's general aim and objectives. I remain fully committed however, to implementation of the Government's fuel poverty strategy, the final version of which will be published shortly, and which will provide the framework for ending the blight of fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010. The Department's overall objectives enhance this priority.

Recycling (Refrigerators)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of *(a)* refrigerators and *(b)* deep-freezers local authorities will have to store in the years (i) 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03, before they can be recycled. [12034]

Mr. Meacher: It has been estimated that up to 3 million domestic refrigeration units are disposed of in the UK each year. The number that will require storage prior to recycling depends on the construction of suitable facilities for the recovery of ozone depleting substances. Some of these could be operational as early as spring 2002. The Department estimates that up to 750,000 units will need to be stored in 2001–02. Many of these will be stored by, or on behalf of, local authorities. It is more difficult to estimate storage requirements for 2002–03, although the requirement for storage will decrease as recovery and recycling facilities become operational. It is estimated that of the 750,000 units stored, 540,000 would be fridges, 120,000 fridge-freezers and 90,000 freezers.

Wildlife

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will review her Department's guidelines to safeguard the wilflife in south-east England. [13071]

Mr. Meacher: We have recently improved protection of wildlife and their habitats across England and Wales, through provisions in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the first major wildlife legislation for 20 years. Work continues to review and develop nature conservation policy, guidelines and legislation and we have consulted widely on a revised Code of Guidance to English Nature, which we aim to publish shortly.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Support Agency

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time taken by the CSA in the last 12 months to obtain an attachment of earnings order from the date of application to the courts is; what the upper decile time is; and how many orders are in the upper decile. [14357]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 14 November 2001:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the Child Support Agency.

You have requested average times for obtaining Attachment of earnings orders from the date of application to the courts.

The Child Support Agency does not make Attachment of earnings orders. The Child Support Agency has provision to make Deduction from Earnings orders which do not require court action.

A Deduction from earnings order is a legally binding instruction to an employer to deduct child maintenance and arrears from a non resident parent's earnings and to pay it to the Child Support Agency.

Deduction from earnings orders are an effective way of ensuring payment of child support where a non-resident parent chooses to pay in this way, or where other methods have failed. In cases where a non-resident parent refuses to pay child support, a deduction from earnings order is often the best way to ensure regular and reliable maintenance is paid.

In May 2001, 141,600 non resident parents were paying child support via deduction from earnings orders.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time taken by the CSA in the last 12 months to determine an absent parent's contribution to child support is; what the upper decile time is; and how many determinations are in the upper decile. [14358]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 14 November 2001:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the Child Support Agency.

You asked what the average time is for the CSA in the last 12 months to determine a non resident parent's contribution to child support; what the upper decile time is; and how many determinations are in the upper decile.

The information you have requested is not available in the format requested. The information that is available is provided at Appendix A.

I hope this is helpful.

Appendix A:

Time taken to make child support assessments (November 2000-October 2001)

Time taken	*Number of cases assessed*	*Percentage*
Less than 20 weeks	49,165	48.5
Between 20 and 52 weeks	32,115	31.6
Over 52 weeks	20,156	19.9
Total	101,436	

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time taken by the CSA in the last 12 months to recover underpayments by absent parents is; what the upper decile time is; and how many vacancies are in the upper decile. [14359]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Andrew Smith, dated 14 November 2001:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the Child Support Agency.

You asked what the average time is for the CSA in the last 12 months to recover underpayments by Non resident parents.

The information you have requested is not available as it is not collected in the format you have requested.

Maintenance that is due but not paid is collected as arrears. Clients are asked to pay arrears in a lump sum, or to agree to make regular payments towards arrears in addition to regular maintenance. Agreements follow negotiations which take into account the non resident parent's ability to pay and the need for maintenance to reach the parent with care as soon as possible. If no agreement can be reached between the Agency and the non resident parent the case is subject to enforcement action.

I hope this is helpful.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the feasibility of bringing responsibility for Housing Benefit claims within the *(a)* remit and *(b)* locality of the new Jobcentre Plus offices; and if he will make a statement. [14297]

Malcolm Wicks: There are no plans to bring responsibility for Housing Benefit claims into Jobcentre Plus. We expect Jobcentre Plus and local authorities to work closely together to provide a coherent service for customers. We are aligning Jobcentre Plus district boundaries with local authority boundaries so as to manage the interaction between the two more effectively.

Income Support

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were in receipt of income support payments under the preserved rights scheme in each year since 1997; and how many were *(a)* under 65 and *(b)* over 65 years in each case. [15180]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Thousand

Year	*All preserved rights customers*	*Aged under 65*	*Aged 65 and over*
1997	123.7	40.6	83.1
1998	103.6	38.4	65.2
1999	86.2	36.0	50.1
2000	74.3	34.0	40.3
2001	65.1	31.9	33.1

Notes:
1. Figures are based on 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred and are expressed in thousands.

Source:
Income Support Quarterly Statistical Inquiries, May 1997–May 2001.

Rented Accommodation

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will monitor the impact *(a)* nationally and *(b)* regionally of the revised definition of the single room rent on access to, and affordability of, privately rented accommodation for young people aged under 25 years. [11501]

Malcolm Wicks: The revised definition of the single room rent was introduced from 2 July 2001. We are currently considering options for monitoring the effect of the new definition.

WALES

Water Supply (Ceredigion)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on water supply in Ceredigion. [13063]

Mr. Paul Murphy: That is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. However, I refer the hon. Member to the comments my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary addressed to him in the debate in Westminster Hall on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 296–97WH.

Chernobyl

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what area of land in Wales is affected by the radioactive fallout from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident; and what estimate he has made of how long it will take for all restrictions arising from Chernobyl to be lifted. [14685]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Information about the land area affected by the radioactive fallout is not held centrally. However, 5,000 farms across Wales were placed on restriction following the Chernobyl accident. Of those, 360 remain on restriction. Monitoring is carried out continually and the Food Standards Agency will take scientific advice as to when restrictions can be relaxed.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Statutory Bereavement Payment

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to increase the statutory bereavement payment in fatal accident cases; and if he will make a statement. [14203]

Mr. Wills: Consideration is being given to both the costs and benefits of an increase. A regulatory impact assessment has been completed, analysing the effects of increasing the level of bereavement damages. Any increase would have an impact on business and other Government Departments, and before an announcement can be made the Lord Chancellor will need to consult his colleagues.

An announcement on whether or not an increase will be made is expected by March 2002.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Watson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 754W, if he will publish the full results of the pilot study run in nine magistrates courts committee areas between 2 April and 29 June; and if he will make a statement. [14458]

Mr. Wills: I have today placed a copy of the evaluation report prepared following the pilot scheme run in the nine magistrates courts committee areas in the Library of each

House. This report includes the national results for the pilot period. The scheme for cracked, ineffective and vacated trials has been endorsed for national roll-out in January 2002.

Freedom of Information Act

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if it is his policy that the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is to be implemented in stages. [15196]

Mr. Wills: The Freedom of Information Act will be fully implemented by January 2005, 11 months before the timetable set out in the Act itself. The publication scheme provisions will be implemented first, on a rolling programme, starting with central Government in November 2002. A full schedule of organisations and dates of implementation was placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 13 November. This roll-out will be completed in June 2004 and the individual right of access to information held by all public authorities will be implemented in January 2005.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 16 November 2001

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Solicitor-General what her Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of Fair Trade goods. [15210]

The Solicitor-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. The Law Officers' Departments aim to support ethical trading wherever practicable in the conduct of its business.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Solicitor-General what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13296]

The Solicitor-General: I gave no holding replies during this period.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Solicitor-General how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to her Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13295]

The Solicitor-General: Five named day questions were tabled to me during this period. None received a holding reply.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the President of the Council what his Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of fair trade goods. [15214]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of state for International Development, today, at column 931W.

The Privy Council Office however does not have a refreshment facility in which it could stock fair trade goods.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13319]

Mr. Robin Cook: None.

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13300]

Mr. Robin Cook: Seven named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to the Privy Council Office between 15 October and 5 November.

No such questions received a holding answer.

PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers; [13297]

(2) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13316]

The Prime Minister: Thirty-seven named day written parliamentary questions were tabled for answer in the specific period. Of these seven received holding replies. I provided substantive answers for five of these questions within three parliamentary days, and two within seven parliamentary days.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on Government representation on the board of the successor company to Railtrack. [12149]

Mr. Jamieson: It will be for the Railway Administrator to put a proposal to the Secretary of State for a scheme to transfer the network operator out of administration. We have indicated that we will be making a proposal for a company limited by guarantee to take over Railtrack's role, but the Secretary of State will consider any proposal put to him by the administrator to transfer the railway

assets out of administration as a going concern. The composition of the board of Railtrack's successor will therefore depend on the eventual scheme put to us by the administrator.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his oral answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 195, on documents relating to the Railway Administration Order of 7 October, if he will make a statement about the level of the proposed payments to Railtrack under the RenewCo scheme. [11800]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* No structure could be found for a RenewCo vehicle that successfully met all of the conditions set out in the 2 April agreement between Government and Railtrack.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 781W, what advice the agencies gave officials about their requirements to give investment grade rating to the proposed successor to Railtrack. [14678]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials have discussed the Government's proposals for a company limited by guarantee (CLG) with credit rating agencies. Proposals for a CLG will be targeting a long term credit rating of A/A2 or higher, to reflect the financing capacity requirement of the rail infrastructure business.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many save as you earn schemes are held by employees of Railtrack. [14438]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not hold this information. It is a matter for the company.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the impact on take-up of employee share ownership schemes resulting from the devaluation of employee share schemes held by employees of Railtrack. [14437]

Mr. Jamieson: It is for employees to consider the strength of their company when participating in employee share schemes.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place the notes of his meetings with *(a)* the Chairman of Railtrack on 25 July and *(b)* the Rail Regulator on 5 October, in the Library. [15499]

Mr. Byers: Details of internal communications are exempt from disclosure under section 2 of Part II of the code of practice on access to Government information.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place copies of his Department's correspondence with the Strategic Rail Authority regarding negotiations on the development of RenewCo and the payment of funds to Railtrack under *(a)* the resettlement procedure and *(b)* the arrangement for payment of network grant proposed by the Rail Regulator in October 2000 and agreed by Railtrack in January 2001, in the Library. [15500]

Mr. Byers: The criteria required RenewCo to be successfully established were stated in the 2 April agreement between Government and Railtrack.

Central Trains

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with Central Trains about providing an improved service between Grantham and Skegness. [13493]

Mr. Jamieson: We are aware of the desire to improve this service. The Rail Passenger Partnership fund administered by the SRA would be a possible source of support for an increased local service. Bids can be made individually or by consortia which could include the train operator and local authority.

London Underground

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the estimate of the interest charged to support the PPP for the London Underground at 1 October; and what is the current estimate. [13989]

Mr. Spellar: London Underground is currently negotiating the contracts to deliver this investment. To estimate at this stage of the negotiations what rate of interest the private sector infrastructure companies might be charged on the debt they raise would undermine London Underground's commercial position and jeopardise its ability to deliver best value.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the Health and Safety Executive to complete consideration of the safety case for the PPP for London Underground. [14492]

Mr. Jamieson: The independent Health and Safety Executive is responsible for the timetable for consideration of London Underground's safety case. They will reach a decision after considering all the relevant issues.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions at what level of cost overrun under the PPP for the London Underground infracos will be able to demand additional financial support; and if he will make a statement. [14482]

Mr. Jamieson: The modernisation contracts provide for an "extraordinary review" if costs are increased by more than £200 million despite the infrastructure company carrying out the investment in an economic and efficient way. This is aimed largely at external events, which the infrastructure companies might be unable to bear and which could arise in any long-term contractual relationship.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how the budget for London Underground step-in inspection and maintenance powers will be set; who will be responsible for funding that budget; and if he will make a statement; [14518]

(2) how long infracos will be allowed to comply with a notification of the need for safety works, before London Underground can invoke its step-in works to default powers under the PPP arrangements; and if he will make a statement; [14516]

(3) if he will make a statement on the arrangements that London Underground will have available to them to inspect the tube for safety concerns under the *(a)* proposed works in default and *(b)* step in powers process under the PPP arrangements; [14517]

(4) how many staff will be employed in *(a)* the inspection team and *(b)* the maintenance team available to London Underground to carry out its step in powers under the PPP arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [14513]

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the detailed arrangements under the works in default step-in powers for *(a)* notifying infracos of the need to take action on safety grounds and *(b)* performing works not carried out by infracos under the London Underground PPP. [14480]

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how disputes between Transport for London and infracos as to the exercise of step-in powers by London Underground will be resolved; and if he will make a statement. [14495]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground will have a range of methods under the contracts for checking whether the infrastructure companies are carrying out their obligations. The contracts will require the private companies to provide asset management plans and detailed information on asset condition on an open book basis. London Underground will have rights to audit or inspect work and records at short notice.

Where London Underground finds a safety concern it will be able either to direct action from the infrastructure company or to step in itself, whether or not the infrastructure company has complied with its obligations. This step-in power allows London Underground to do the work itself or to employ an outside contractor or another infrastructure company. In either case, if the infrastructure company has breached its obligations, the work will be done at the expense of the infrastructure company that failed to meet its obligations. If action is determined by London Underground in these circumstances to be needed, it can be taken immediately with any disputes resolved later. In such cases London Underground does not need to give notice of its intended step-in.

It is for London Underground to determine the appropriate number of staff to be employed for inspection and step-in, and to set the relevant budgets.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will deem approval by the HSE of the safety case for the London Underground PPP arrangements to be a guarantee that the PPP regime is safe; and if he will make a statement. [14519]

Mr. Jamieson: It is the responsibility of London Underground Ltd. under health and safety legislation to ensure safety on the underground network. It is the role of the Health and Safety Executive to assess and consider for acceptance London Underground's safety case, and to inspect for compliance as necessary. Acceptance of London Underground's safety case would mean that London Underground had made a satisfactory case under the Railway Safety Case Regulations 2000 to give confidence to the HSE that it has the ability, commitment, and resources to properly assess and effectively control risks to the health and safety of the public, staff and contractors.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to request the National Audit Office to review, prior to the award of the contracts, the value for money of the proposed PPP for the London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [14514]

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the NAO to report on the London Underground PPP; and if he will make a statement. [14485]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer given to the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 12 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 503W.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under the *(a)* actual and *(b)* proposed (i) contracts and (ii) understandings, what level of compensation will be payable to the infracos who have submitted bids for the PPP for London Underground in the event of the PPP Scheme being found not to represent value for money; and if he will make a statement. [14512]

Mr. Jamieson: No compensation will be payable to bidders in the event of bids for the modernisation plans for the underground being found to be not value for money.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what definition of a fair return on investment is being used for the private sector infracos investing in the London Underground PPP; and if he will make a statement. [14488]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 186W. The rate of return will be determined by the fair and rigorous competitions that London Underground are conducting.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what projections he has made as to fare increases after the London Underground PPP contracts are signed; and if he will make a statement. [14489]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 26 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 312W. Fare decisions on the London Underground are now a matter for the Mayor of London.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of *(a)* the management structures proposals for London Underground PPP from the point of view of safety and *(b)* the conclusions reached by

Sir Desmond Fennell in his report on the King's Cross fire as to the management structure operated by London Underground. [14490]

Mr. Jamieson: As the Duty Holder under the relevant legislation, London Underground is responsible for ensuring that safety risks are reduced to as low as reasonably practical. The independent Health and Safety Executive is responsible for safety regulation of London Underground.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contingency plans he proposes to put in place in the event of insolvency by one or more of the infracos in the London Underground PPP; and if he will make a statement. [14487]

Mr. Jamieson: The Greater London Authority Act 1999 contains specific provisions to protect the public interest should an infrastructure company perform poorly and be at risk of becoming insolvent (sections 220–224).

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will indicate *(a)* for each year of the first seven and a half year period and *(b)* for the total of the first seven and a half years of the infraco contracts for the PPP of London Underground, what proportion of investment will come from (i) the private sector and (ii) the public sector; and if he will make a statement. [14484]

Mr. Jamieson: The plans for the modernisation of the Underground will deliver around £13 billion of investment to improve the underground's infrastructure over the next 15 years. London Underground is in the process of negotiating the contracts to deliver these plans. It is currently estimated that in the first seven and a half years some 25 per cent. of finance for these plans will be provided by the private sector, with the remainder coming from London Underground fares and Government grant.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with London Underground on the future membership of its board post PPP; and if he will make a statement. [14491]

Mr. Jamieson: The board of London Regional Transport is responsible for considering and approving appointments to the board of its subsidiary, London Underground Ltd. This responsibility will remain with London Regional Transport until London Underground Ltd. transfers to Transport for London.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement as to the phasing of works under the London Underground PPP between different tube lines and between *(a)* stations, *(b)* track and signalling infrastructure and *(c)* rolling stock. [14494]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on 18 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 195W. Bidders have said that in the first period of the Tube modernisation plans: over 60 miles of track will be repaired or replaced; over 500 carriages will be replaced or refurbished; over 50 stations will be modernised; new signalling will be installed on the Northern and Victoria lines, with improvements elsewhere; and CCTV will be installed to improve security in trains and stations.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement as to the guarantees under the London Underground PPP which will ensure *(a)* replacement and *(b)* upgrading of the tube infrastructure. [14498]

Mr. Jamieson: The public private partnership is designed to achieve a comprehensive modernisation of the entire underground network. The infrastructure companies will be contractually required to deliver specified upgrades of each line by dates set by London Underground. In addition infrastructure companies must meet specified levels for the condition of all underground assets, comply with London Underground standards and the requirements of their safety case.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions the Government have had with the National Audit Office over the value for money of the London Underground PPP; and if he will make a statement. [14493]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 12 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 503W. My Department's officials have had numerous meetings with the National Audit Office on the value for money evaluation of the Government's plans for London Underground.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement as to which risks will be transferred to the private sector under the London Underground PPP, and the extent to which those risks will be transferred. [14497]

Mr. Jamieson: In line with Treasury guidance, the Government's plans for the London Underground follow the principle that risks should be allocated to whoever is best able to manage them. The aim is not to transfer risk for its own sake, as this would lead to a decline in value for money, but rather to optimise the transfer of risk.

Transport for London

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the credit rating is of Transport for London; and if he will make a statement. [14496]

Mr. Jamieson: Transport for London's credit rating is a matter for Transport for London.

Departmental Name Change

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total cost has been to public funds of re-branding his Department to accommodate its name change following the last general election. [14450]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 10 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 438W.

Westminster City Council

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has

been the cost to public funds of the Westminster Auditor's inquiry into Westminster city council's designated sales policy for the period since 30 April 1999; [14329]

(2) what the cost to public funds of the Westminster Auditor's inquiry into Westminster city council's designated sales policy was from 18 July 1989 to 31 October 2001. [14328]

Dr. Whitehead: We are advised by the Audit Commission that the auditor's costs for the investigation, up to and including the publication of his report in 1996, was £3,017,905, which has been met by Westminster city council.

The Commission has a responsibility to indemnify the auditor for the cost of any proceedings resulting from such investigations. Under the indemnity the Commission had met, up to 30 April 1999, costs of £2,997,000 incurred by the auditor, his solicitor and barrister, in relation to the inquiry. The total litigation costs, including those of some of the appellants whose appeals were successful in the Divisional Court, amounted to £3,705,000 in the same period.

The auditor's costs (including those of his solicitor and barrister) incurred since 30 April 1999, indemnified by the Audit Commission, amount to £1.75 million to 31 October 2001, including the costs of the remaining successful appellant (£514,265), which were not paid over until after 30 April 1999, but exclude any costs borne by Westminster city council since 30 April 1999.

Train Toilets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers the Rail Regulator has to oblige train operating companies to make working toilets available to passengers on trains. [14705]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for the train operating companies.

Rosyth Ferry Terminal

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date his Department first informed the European Commission of plans for the Rosyth ferry terminal; what correspondence took place between his Department and the European Commission; and if he will place copies in the Library. [13935]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* The Commission has been aware of plans for the Rosyth ferry terminal for some time, and a meeting was held to discuss the state aids issues on 9 November.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate the Government have made of the value of the Millennium Dome site. [14503]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report,* column 21W.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Government will publish the requirements for potential buyers of the Millennium *(a)* Dome and *(b)* site. [14504]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 26 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 43 1W.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what date the Government expect to have sold the Millennium Dome. [14511]

Ms Keeble: The aim is to secure a sale as quickly as possible, consistent with value for money, securing a worthwhile and sustainable future for the Dome and a deliverable outcome.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans the Government have to allow residential building on the Millennium Dome site; [14510]

(2) what plans the Government have to dismantle the Millennium Dome. [14505]

Ms Keeble: None.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the factors which will influence the costs incurred by the Millennium Dome after 31 December; [14507]

(2) what estimate the Government have made of the costs that will be incurred by the Millennium Dome after 31 December. [14506]

Ms Keeble: English Partnerships, as owners of the Dome, are continuously revising their estimates of costs in the light of changing circumstances, and are making every effort to keep costs down. The average monthly maintenance cost has fallen to £240,000, including security, rates and services. These costs, together with the costs of any additional works required in preparation for a future Dome use, will be kept under review, and budgets adjusted accordingly.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to regenerate the Greenwich peninsula; and what role it expects the Millennium Dome to play in this regeneration. [14509]

Ms Keeble: The regeneration of the Greenwich Peninsula is a key element in developing this part of east London, and driving the transformation of the Thames Gateway.

The development of the 300 acre peninsula site is creating a template for future mixed use development and is bringing unprecedented regeneration benefits to a part of London which was inactive for many years. In doing so, English Partnerships, the Government's regeneration agency, has transformed one of the largest tracts of derelict land in Europe. The development area, which also contains the new North Greenwich Interchange, includes the United Kingdom's first Millennium Village; Britain's first low energy Sainsbury's food store; Britain's largest B&Q store; Europe's first round multiplex cinema; a fully integrated school and health centre and a 162-bed hotel.

In addition there are 50 acre of parks, open spaces and new river walks and cycle path, together with a new river pier and a new yacht club.

Like many others, including the London borough of Greenwich, the Government are committed to the Dome staying in Greenwich. It is an important landmark on the London skyline which has hastened the regeneration of Greenwich peninsula and more widely and has added to the quality and variety of world-famous structures that were already so prominent in the area. Delivering a successful future for the Dome will build on this, ensuring continued recognition world-wide and enabling the regeneration momentum that has been established to continue.

Runway Capacity

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he will take to make runway capacity available for increased regional air *(a)* services and *(b)* routes. [14321]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) is considering runway capacity issues. The forthcoming consultation documents on air services in the south-east of England and regional air services will present a range of runway capacity options.

Airport slots are allocated in accordance with EC Regulation 95/93. Ministers are currently considering policy options for the protection of slots at London airports for regional access.

Regional Air Travel

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what change there has been in the amount of regional air travel in the last six weeks. [14322]

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the market for regional air services after the events of 11 September. [14336]

Mr. Jamieson: Over the last six weeks air services across the UK have been in a state of flux. Routes have been cancelled, put on hold, reduced in terms of frequency, moved between airports and put back on by another airline.

BAA reported that at their airports their worst affected routes were the North Atlantic down 25.9 per cent. in September (38 per cent. in the period after the 11 September). However growth has continued in Scotland, figures for October show Edinburgh up 13 per cent. and Glasgow up 7 per cent., Stansted has also recorded growth of 5 per cent. These increases are largely the result of the continued development of low cost airlines.

The Government are working hard to help return the aviation industry to business as usual as quickly as possible. We are carrying out a fundamental review of aviation security to ensure that air travel is as safe from terrorist attacks as we can make it while, at the same time, balancing security with our freedom to travel.

Air Passengers (Security)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he is making of the impact of low-cost airlines on the running costs of airports; and what impact this has had on the provision of security for passengers. [14335]

Mr. Jamieson: This is primarily a commercial decision for airlines and airports. The CAA as the economic regulator of airports can also consider complaints. Low cost airlines have no impact on the security of passengers as the security measures required by DTLR do not depend on whether an airline is low cost or high cost.

Homelessness (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many homeless people there are in the Greater London area; and what the figure has been in each of the last three years. [14733]

Ms Keeble: Information reported to the Department by London boroughs on the number of households accepted under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, in each of the last three years, is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1998–99	26,470
1999–2000	28,440
2000–01	29,630
2001–02[1]	7,350

[1] First quarter

Source:
DTLR P1(E) housing returns (quarterly)

National and regional summaries of local authorities' activity, including a table presenting figures on homelessness acceptances as reported by each London borough, are provided in a quarterly Statistical Release published by the Department. Copies are available in the Library, and also via the Department's website. The latest edition, published on 12 September, presents statistics up to the end of June 2001.

Stagecoach Bus Service (Monmouth)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if she will request *(a)* the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* the Vehicles Inspectorate to undertake an assessment of overcrowding on the Stagecoach 69 bus service between Llandogo and Monmouth carrying pupils to and from school. [15243]

Ms Keeble: As I said in my answer of 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 138W, to my hon. Friend, the primary responsibility for ensuring that a bus is not overcrowded lies with the driver. The driver or conductor should not allow more passengers than the bus is certified to carry, and may limit the number of passengers below that if the number being carried at the time is detrimental to safety.

It is not the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive to investigate overcrowding on buses. However, the Vehicle Inspectorate would follow up specific complaints or reports of known regular incidents

of overcrowding. To do so they will need detailed information of the times, date and location and if possible the vehicle registration. This information on the case referred to in this instance should be forwarded to The Senior Traffic Examiner, Dave Rhys, at the Vehicle Inspectorate, School Road, Miskin, Pontyclun, Mid Glamorgan, CF72 8YR.

Port Health

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will give a breakdown of the spending on Port Health in each of the last three years for which centrally collected data are available. [15055]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* English local authorities have reported the following expenditure on Port Health:

Port Health net current expenditure by local authority: 1995–96 to 1997–98

£000

Local authority	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98
City of London	1,878	2,173	2,191
Birmingham	1	1	1
Gateshead	17	10	13
Leeds	3	3	3
Liverpool	82	84	95
Manchester	36	37	38
Newcastle upon Tyne	28	16	21
North Tyneside	44	26	33
Salford	36	37	38
Sefton	47	49	55
Solihull	−1	0	0
South Tyneside	44	26	33
Trafford	9	9	9
Wirral	61	64	70
Bristol UA	95	84	89
East Riding of Yorkshire UA	—	35	34
Hartlepool UA	8	0	10
Kingston upon Hull	215	n/a	n/a
Middlesbrough UA	38	0	0
North Lincolnshire UA	—	35	0
Poole UA	9	7	19
Portsmouth UA	76	90	98
Redcar and Cleveland UA	—	41	41
Southampton UA	340	375	258
Stockton-on-Tees UA	38	41	44
Allerdale	3	2	2
Barrow-in-Furness	2	2	2
Blyth Valley	40	40	44
Boothferry	31	—	—
Boston	2	8	6
Caradon	12	16	16
Carrick	107	107	107
Cleethorpes	62	—	—
Colchester	3	2	2
Crawley	107	185	173
Dover	103	64	53
Easington	−3	0	0
Ellesmere Port and Neston	9	9	9
Gillingham	3	3	3
Glanford	31	—	—
Great Grimsby	25	—	—
Great Yarmouth	10	11	14
Halton	9	9	9
Holderness	15	—	—
Ipswich	0	1	0
Kerrier	15	15	15
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	8	1	0
Lancaster	21	22	24
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	39	—	—
Lewes	63	67	66
Plymouth	104	103	105
Purbeck	2	2	3
Rochester upon Medway	6	4	5
Scarborough	3	3	3
Selby	18	14	15
South Kesteven	1	0	0
Stroud	11	13	14
Suffolk Coastal	196	130	−1
Teignbridge	1	−1	1
Tendring	69	42	44
Vale Royal	9	9	10
Wansbeck	40	40	44
Warrington	9	8	8
Waveney	13	13	11
Weymouth and Portland	22	28	28
Wyre	10	11	12
Total	4,335	4,226	4,040

Note:
1. Authorities are listed within class as follows:
(a) Shire counties
(b) Unitary authorities
(c) Shire districts

The structure of local government has changed over the period, with the staged establishment of unitary authorities. Where these exist they took on, for their area, the function of the old shire county and district.

Where relevant, shire districts pre-reorganisation have been placed on the same line as the post-reorganisation unitary authority.

A dash denotes an authority did not exist during the financial year and a negative figure would represent a net income.

Airline Industry

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received from the airline industry on levels of employment following the incidents of 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [15665]

Mr. Jamieson: We have received numerous representations from the airline industry and others on the effects of the events of 11 September.

The Government recognise the importance of the aviation industry to the UK economy and is therefore paying close attention to the industry's current problems. We moved quickly to underwrite, on a temporary basis, third party war risk insurance for UK airlines and service providers to the airline industry. The initiative has subsequently been widely copied elsewhere. The European Commission has set out guidelines on emergency aid measures which were endorsed at the meeting of European Transport Ministers on 16 October. We support the Commission's stance and are actively considering whether further aid should be paid to the British airline industry in accordance with the guidelines.

Housing Capital Resources

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he

will announce the results of the consultation exercise on the needs indices to be used in the allocation of 2002–03 housing capital resources to local authorities and registered social landlords. [15790]

Ms Keeble: Decisions have now been taken about the needs indices to be used in the allocation of housing capital resources for 2002–03. I am arranging for details of the indices to be placed in the Library of the House.

The Department issued a consultation paper in July seeking views on the development of the indices, including some specific proposals for changes to the indices for 2002–03. Some 80 responses were received. A list of the respondents is available in the Library of the House and individual responses can be viewed in the Department's Library.

The responses reflect the difficulty of striking the right balance over the differing housing needs around the country. Responses from London argued that the revised indices would not give sufficient weight to the need to provide additional affordable housing in areas of high demand; those from northern regions raised concerns that the proposed changes do not adequately reflect the problems of area renewal and housing market failure.

The Indices of Deprivation 2000 (ID2000) were adopted last year as the basis for the future allocation of resources to deprived areas. The consultation paper set out a proposal for moving to base the targeting of housing capital resources on the most deprived areas as identified in ID2000. We have decided to proceed with this change. ID2000 is a more up to date, broader based measure and is a clear improvement on the largely, 1991 Census-based Index of Local Conditions on which the targeting is currently based. Work is either planned or being undertaken to address the acknowledged weaknesses in the housing element of ID2000 and the absence of a crime measure.

Most LAs are unaffected by moving to use ID2000 but a small number of authorities face sizeable shifts in index shares. We will, as indicated in the consultation paper, apply transitional arrangements to phase the impact of this change in over three years.

We have also decided to proceed with the three other proposed changes—the introduction of a low demand indicator into the LA index; the increase in the share of the LA index accounted for by the LA stock indicator; and the revised basis for the index used to allocate Disabled Facilities Grant resources. The transitional arrangements will also apply to these changes.

The housing capital resources for LAs for 2002–03 will be allocated through the Single Capital Pot (SCP). The performance-related component (5 per cent.) within this is much less than has applied to housing allocations in earlier years (50 per cent.). The consultation paper indicated that we did not consider it right for the better performing authorities to face the whole impact of this in one year. The consultation paper proposed that the transitional arrangements should be applied in a way which also covered the reduction in the size of the performance element. We have decided to address this in a different way by allocating a part, one third, of the formulaic housing element of the SCP on the basis of performance assessments. This has the advantage of much greater transparency and it also reflects the latest performance assessments rather than being fixed on the 2000 assessments as would have been the case under the initial proposal.

Pedestrian Protection

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the additional average cost of providing pedestrian protection in the Honda Civic car, which car has the best pedestrian protection rating to date in the European New Car Assessment Programme; and which cars have been assessed at 65 per cent. or above in the EEVC Working Group 10 tests. [15679]

Mr. Jamieson: The Honda Civic has the best Euro NCAP pedestrian protection result to date, with a score of 72 per cent. We estimate that the additional vehicle manufacturing cost of the Honda Civic relating to pedestrian protection to be around £6.50. We have made no specific estimate of the extra running costs linked to pedestrian protection.

The Euro NCAP pedestrian test currently allows a mix of best and worst positions, chosen by manufacturers and Euro NCAP respectively.

However, we believe that significant further modification would be required for the vehicle to meet the full EEVC WG10 or the later WG17 requirements, resulting in a further increase in manufacturing and running costs. In a separate series of DTLR funded research tests using the EEVC WG17 procedures and criteria, the Honda Civic was subject to 19 tests. The results are summarised below.

		WG17 requirements	
Test	*Total tests*	*Met*	*Not met*
Child head	12	2	10
Upper leg	3	2	1
Full leg	4	2	2
Total	19	6	13

This should not detract from the significant achievements by Honda on pedestrian protection in relation to other cars. Published results of Euro NCAP tests show that no other cars have scored 65 per cent. or above.

Roadworks (Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans his Department has for road works on the A12 between Hatfield Peverel and Mountnessing in the next 12 months; [14962]

(2) what action he will take to alleviate the traffic jams on the A12 north of Boreham at Hatfield Peverel while the road works are in progress; [14964]

(3) when the road works on the A12 to the north of Boreham at Hatfield Peverel will be completed; and when the A12 will return to normal traffic flows; [14963]

(4) if he will make a statement on the traffic jams being caused by road works on the A121 north of Boreham at Hatfield Peverel; and what has been the average time it takes vehicles to travel through the road works in each week since their establishment. [14965]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Richard Thorndike to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 15 November 2001:

Tim Matthews has been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about planned and proposed roadworks on the A12. I am replying as Tim Matthews is currently away on business.

I am sorry that the resurfacing of the A12 near Hatfield Peverel is causing problems for road users. We expect the work to be completed around the middle of February, although to minimise delays over Christmas, the traffic management will be suspended between noon on 19 December and noon on 7 January.

We have not recorded details since work started of the delays for each week. Although we know there have been delays of over an hour particularly when there have been accidents. However, on average in the morning it takes about 10–15 minutes longer to travel southbound and about 5–10 minutes longer to travel north.

We have no plans for major roadworks on the A12 between Hatfield Peverel and Mountnessing during the next 12 months. We are, however, planning to resurface part of the Brentwood Bypass next September which will involve some work at the Mountnessing Interchange. Details will be published nearer the time.

If you would like more details, the Agency's Project Manager, James Hassall would be happy to discuss the scheme. His telephone number is 01234 796094.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued; [13326]

(2) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13307]

Dr. Whitehead: In the period 15 October to 5 November, my Department answered 261 named day parliamentary questions, of which 81 (31 per cent.) received holding answers.

Of the 81 that received holding answers, 72 (89 per cent.) received substantive answers within three parliamentary days (of which 29 (36 per cent.) received substantive answers within one day); and 9 (11 per cent.) received substantive answers within seven parliamentary days.

Physical Agents Directive

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent meetings he has had with representatives of the *(a)* haulage, *(b)* construction and *(c)* engineering sectors regarding the European Commission's proposed physical agents directive; and if he will make a statement. [15687]

Dr. Whitehead: The Health and Safety Executive has had several meetings with industry sectors about the two physical agents directives on vibration and noise. The most recent meeting with construction sector representatives was on 14 November and with engineering sector representatives on 1 November. They will be meeting representatives of the haulage industry on 20 November.

Fair Trade Goods

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of Fair Trade goods. [15216]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department's procurement policy is about the achievement of value for money. The Department does not have a specific policy requiring the purchase of fair trade goods. Purchasing Officers are expected to consider each case on its merits with particular regard to the need for any products purchased to represent value for money. However, this Department does have available in the main staff restaurant fair trade beverages and confectionery and only provides fair trade beverages for official meetings. In addition, this Department's policy is to purchase timber and timber products only from sustainable and legal sources.

Local Government Finance Settlement

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will make a statement on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2002–03. [16241]

Mr. Raynsford: Subject to the progress of parliamentary business, we expect to make an announcement to the House on Thursday 29 November.

New Track

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he intends to allow assets of the not-for-profit company known as New Track to be made available as security to bankers in order to secure funding for the company. [11221]

Mr. Spellar: A substantial portion of the income for a company limited by guarantee would be covered by stable long-term contracts. These would form the basis for an investment grade credit rating to secure funding for the company.

TREASURY

Departmental Underspending

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister regarding underspend in the Department of Health; [13206]

(2) what measures he is taking to reduce underspend in the *(a)* Department for Education and Skills, *(b)* Department of Health, *(c)* DETR main programmes, *(d)* Ministry of Defence and *(e)* Home Office; [13203]

(3) if he will provide a breakdown of the main items of intended expenditure that were not spent comprising the underspend arising from the difference between the

Final Department Expenditure Limit and Provisional Outturn for 2000–01 for the *(a)* Department for Education and Skills, *(b)* Department of Health, *(c)* DETR main programmes, *(d)* Ministry of Defence and *(e)* Home Office. [13202]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 606–07W.

Scottish Devolution

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is regarding consultations prior to the publication of proposals involving the transfer of powers to the Scottish Executive by *(a)* primary legislation and *(b)* Order in Council. [13823]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 748W.

Income Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will quantify in real cash terms the total change in the amount of income tax paid by higher rate taxpayers between May 1997 and the latest date for which information is available. [14425]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to "Inland Revenue Statistics", table 3.4, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The latest version of the table can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an assessment of the cost of lowering the higher rate of income tax by 1 pence. [15395]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to "Inland Revenue Statistics" table 1.6, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13299]

Mr. Boateng: 86 of the 143 named day questions tabled to the Treasury in the period concerned were answered substantively on the nominated day.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13318]

Mr. Boateng: Of the 75 named day questions to which holding answers were given in the period concerned, 53 received substantive answers within three sitting days, 12 within seven days, five within 10 days and five within 15 days.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to improve fiscal incentives for the development of combined heat and power plants. [15512]

Mr. Boateng: Gas or coal used by good quality combined heat and power systems is exempt from the climate change levy. Electricity produced by such systems is also exempt if it is used on the site where it is generated or if it is sold through a bilateral contract to another end user. Good quality CHP systems are also eligible for 100 per cent. enhanced capital allowances as part of the Government's climate change levy package. The Government are considering how best to encourage CHP and will be publishing proposals in the form of a CHP strategy in the coming months.

Illegal Drugs (Hull)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to *(a)* increase and *(b)* improve illegal drugs interception by Customs and Excise at the Port of Hull; and if he will make a statement. [15690]

Mr. Boateng: Greater flexibility in the deployment of officers enable Customs in Hull to respond more quickly to smuggling threats. The Customs drug dog unit in Hull has been expanded and from the new year an X-ray scanner will be based in Hull to greatly increase the number of freight examinations.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Heath: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the quarrying industry on the design of the proposed aggregates levy. [15340]

Mr. Boateng: I and my officials have had meetings with various representative bodies for the aggregates industry, and other interested parties throughout the development of the levy.

Illegal Food Imports

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many, and what percentage of flights arriving at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick, *(c)* Stansted and *(d)* other airports in the UK were checked, in the latest year for which figures are available, for the presence of food intended for illegal importation; and of those flights checked, on how many occasions such food was found. [15192]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The lead responsibility for controls on imported food lies with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and agencies acting on its behalf. Customs has provided support to these agencies and participated in a number of joint exercises at airports to address the risk of illegal meat imports. Application of normal Customs controls to incoming flights is based on

assessment of a range of risks and no figures exist of how many flights were checked for the purpose of detecting illegal importation. Where illegal food is found during Customs examination appropriate action is taken. Seizures in the year 1 April 2000–31 March 2001 were:

Heathrow: 217

Gatwick: 73

Stansted: 5

Other airports: 94.

This does not include seizures made in joint exercises with the lead enforcement agencies where they take the seizure action.

Advanced Corporation Tax

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total cost to local government pension schemes resulting from the abolition of advanced corporation tax relief on pension funds. [14698]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The LGA estimated that the net effect of the 1997 decision to abolish advance corporation tax relief on local authority pension funds was £130 million. The Government specifically took account of this estimate in the spending plans set by the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review.

Radio Spectrum

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the possibility of selling or licensing the military spectrum to the private sector. [14419]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Chancellor of the Exchequer commissioned earlier this year an independent review of radio spectrum management, led by Professor Martin Cave, to advise on the principles which should guide future management of the spectrum, to help derive most value from this national asset. One of the issues which the review is exploring is how best to improve the arrangements for facilitating access, for commercial uses, to any defence spectrum which would not compromise any legitimate current or future defence needs. The review is due to report to Ministers by the end of 2001.

Freedom of Information

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date his Department established a working group of officials to prepare his Department for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and on what dates this committee has met since it was set up. [14775]

Mr. Blunkett: I have been asked to reply.

In May this year, the Home Office established a Board level Senior Group to steer departmental progress towards implementation of the Act. The group first met on 8 May. Pending a decision on the timing of implementation, it has not met since, but is now scheduled to meet on 29 November 2001.

The Senior Group is supported by a working-level Practitioners Group, which met on 14 May and 17 September 2001.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Direct Selling (Utilities)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to tighten the regulation of direct selling by utilities. [12152]

Mr. Wilson: Direct selling is regulated under a range of consumer legislation. The Consumer Protection (Cancellation of Contracts Concluded away from Business Premises) Regulations (The Doorstep Selling Regulations), govern doorstep sales and were strengthened in 1998. New Distance Selling Regulations, governing telephone and internet sales, came into force in October 2000. Local Trading Standards departments are responsible for the enforcement of these regulations. Breaches of the regulations that result in harm to the collective interests of consumers could also be grounds for the courts to make a Stop Now Order requiring the company concerned to cease the offending conduct. Under The Stop Now Order (E. C. Directive) Regulations, which came into force on 1 June 2001, the power to apply for such Orders is held by the Director General of Fair Trading, local authority trading standards officers, and sectoral regulators.

In the case of gas and electricity, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) introduced a Marketing Licence Condition in 1998 that governs the sales and marketing practices of suppliers. The Licence Condition was strengthened in January 2001. Ofgem closely monitors the sales and marketing activities of suppliers, and, where necessary, it will take formal action against individual suppliers.

In addition, I have recently written to all gas and electricity suppliers to express my concern about the distress caused by incidences of sales malpractice and demand that suppliers improve their performances. Consumers affected by sales malpractice not only form a negative view of an individual company, but also of the competitive market as a whole. It is in suppliers' own interests to maintain the highest possible sales standards, to resolve problems rapidly where they occur and to ensure that the consumer is content with the outcome.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to her Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13313]

Ms Hewitt: 104 named day questions were tabled, 52 per cent. received a holding reply.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to her Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary

days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13332]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows.

(a) 91 per cent.

(b) 98 per cent.

(c) 100 per cent.

(d) 0 per cent.

(e) 0 per cent.

Energy Sector

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect Government support for the energy sector, excluding oil and gas production, in each year since 1990. [13287]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* The information is set out in the table.

Government financial support for the energy sector, excluding oil and gas

£ million

	Total support	
Year	*Direct*	*Indirect*
1990–91	283.5	127.1
1991–92	571.2	809.7
1992–93	814.1	892.9
1993–94	595.8	963.1
1994–95	372.5	988.4
1995–96	236.8	793.5
1996–97	197.1	112.8
1997–98	215.5	126.5
1998–99	317.0	127.0
1999–2000	227.0	56.4
2000–01	334.1	64.9

Notes:

1. The figures for direct support include:

(a) direct Government funding for research and development on renewable energy through the DTI's Sustainable Energy Programme and through Research Councils via the Science Budget

(b) support for the coal industry but excluding the impact of debt write-offs and proceeds at the privatisation of British Coal and payments made in respect of historic liabilities retained in the public sector, such as health claims

(c) support for nuclear based on the funding to the UKAEA details of which were included in the reply to a parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 756–57W.

2. The figures for indirect support include:

(a) expenditure through the Non Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO), the Scottish Renewables Obligation and the Northern Ireland NFFO funded by the electricity consumer through the Fossil Fuel Levy in Great Britain and variant arrangements in Northern Ireland.

(b) the premium received by Nuclear Electric plc over and above the market price for electricity in the period 1990–96 details of which were provided in the reply to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 756–57W.

Postcomm

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licences have been issued by Postcomm within the reserved area; and what assessment she has made of their impact on Consignia's ability to meet its universal service obligations. [13743]

Mr. Alexander: To date, following consultation, Postcomm has issued a licence to Consignia plc, a condition of which requires the provision of a universal postal service, and four other licences.

Postcomm's primary duty is to exercise its functions in the manner which it considers is best calculated to ensure the provision of a universal postal service. Subject to this duty Postcomm shall exercise its functions in the manner which it considers is best calculated to further the interests of users of postal services, wherever appropriate by promoting effective competition between postal operators.

Consignia

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action Consignia is taking to improve recruitment and retention in areas where this is more difficult. [13733]

Mr. Alexander: As an operational matter, this is an issue for Consignia management.

Consignia is aware that there is a particular problem around staff turnover in the first few months of employment within areas where alternative employment is readily available. In response, with the active support of the Communication Workers Union, the company is trailing a new approach that includes mentoring of new entrants and retention payments.

I am advised that the results of these trials will be available in the new year.

Postal Services Regulatory Regimes

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received on the services condition of the European Union and UK postal services regulatory regimes. [13649]

Mr. Alexander: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry routinely receives formal and informal representations on different aspects of developments in the United Kingdom and European postal markets including regulatory regimes.

Fur Products

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what measures exist to ensure that consumers are not sold items made of or containing domestic *(a)* dog and *(b)* cat fur by (i) mistake and (ii) fraudulent practices; [13794]

(2) what measures are in place to combat potential consumer fraud with regard to the sale of fur *(a)* garments and *(b)* items; [13796]

(3) how many people are employed by her Department to ensure that fur products on sale in the United Kingdom are accurately described; and what is their annual budget; [13795]

(4) what information *(a)* is given and *(b)* has to be given by law to consumers regarding the origin by (i) species and (ii) country of (A) fur garments, (B) garments containing fur trim and (C) items made from fur in the United Kingdom; [13793]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department does not enforce legislation which protects consumers from misleading statements about products. Trading standards officers who are employed directly by Local Authorities enforce the Trade Descriptions Act 1968. The Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations 1988 place the duty to investigate under the Regulations on the Director General of Fair Trading.

It is a criminal offence under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 for a person in the course of a trade or business to apply, by any means, false or misleading statements to goods, including statements about their composition. Additionally, the Director General of Fair Trading can take injunctive action under the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations 1988 (as amended) to prevent misleading advertisements. The regulations define an advertisement widely, as any form of representation which is made in connection with a trade or business in order to promote the supply or transfer of goods.

The Trade Descriptions (Sealskin Goods) (Information) Order 1980 requires goods made wholly or partly of, or derived wholly or partly from, sealskin to be legibly and conspicuously marked with, or accompanied by, information to the effect that the goods are made of sealskin and where the seals were taken.

The Department is not aware of any other legislation that requires fur products to be labelled with information.

Nuclear Installations (Security)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations her Department has had with independent experts in respect of the security of nuclear facilities since 11 September. [14277]

Mr. Wilson: The Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS) within my Department is the Government's security regulator for the civil nuclear industry. OCNS has operational and regulatory autonomy in setting security standards and ensuring industry compliance. OCNS and DTI officials liaise with their counterparts in other agencies at home and abroad and with industry experts in the civil nuclear industry.

Community Post Offices

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the role of community post offices in the post office re-invention programme. [13762]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* Among the Performance and Innovation Unit report recommendations, all of which were accepted by Government, was that there should be a programme of modernisation and reinvention of the urban network. This reinvention programme will not be relevant to community post offices, defined by Post Office Ltd. as small rural offices with restricted opening hours, which fall within the rural network of offices serving settlements with less than 10,000 residents.

Postal Deliveries

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many first class letters from *(a)* the PO postcode area and *(b)* the Isle of Wight achieve delivery (i) by first post the following day and (ii) within 24 hours; and how many to London in each category achieve delivery by each of those times. [14364]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* This is an operational issue for Consignia.

I have been advised by the company that it does not hold all this information. However, for the financial year 2000–01 the company has provided the following information:

89 per cent. of first class letters were delivered the next day from the PO postcode area of posting.

92 per cent. of letters from the PO postcode area reached neighbouring areas the next working day.

86 per cent. of letters from the PO postcode area of posting reached distant areas the next working day.

Road Fund Licences (Post Office Sales)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates he has made of the costs associated with allowing all post offices to sell road fund licences. [14026]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* I have been informed by Post Office Ltd. that it acts as agent for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in issuing motor vehicle licences through 4,000 post offices. In order to safeguard the interests of taxpayers, DVLA has to ensure that the relicensing service is cost effective. Under the present arrangements, increasing the number of post offices offering the facility increases the costs without increasing the total revenue collected. With the completion of the Horizon automation programme, we are considering the scope for extending the facility more widely without additional cost to DVLA.

Postmasters (Compensation)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to *(a)* assist and *(b)* compensate sub-postmasters in Northern Ireland, with special reference to owners of rural post offices, affected by the phasing out of the old system of benefit payments in favour of the automated credit transfer system. [14977]

Mr. Alexander: Benefit and pension recipients who wish to collect their benefits in cash at post offices will continue to be able to do so after the change in payment arrangements, beginning in April 2003, by means of Universal Banking Services.

The Government remain committed to maintenance of a nationwide network of post offices and has committed £270 million of support over the next three years to start the implementation of the Performance and Innovation Unit's recommendations, all of which the Government accepted, for modernisation of the post office network.

The PIU report recommendations include financial support for modernisation of the urban and rural networks. Post Office Limited's objective for the urban network of the future is to establish bigger, better, brighter post offices based on viable businesses that deliver adequate returns to subpostmasters. The Government are also committed to providing transitional financial assistance to the rural network and will shortly receive advice from the Postal Services Commission on the best way of channelling assistance to rural post offices.

Sub-post Offices (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices have been *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in each of the London borough authorities in each of the last three years; and if he will list them. [15336]

Mr. Alexander: I understand from Post Office Limited that data on the post office network are not held on a local authority basis. From the financial year 2000–01, network data have been compiled on a regional basis and in that year there were 10 net closures of post offices in the London region.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much Government investment there was in the north-west Regional Development Agency *(a)* in 1999, *(b)* in 2000, *(c)* in 2001 and *(d)* is projected for 2002. [14716]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The north-west Development Agency's net budgets for these years are as follows:

North-west Development Agency budgets

	£000
2002–03 (gross indicative)[1]	276,600
2001–02 (net allocated)[2]	[3]276,215
2000–01 (net actual)[2]	[4]206,962
1999–2000 (net actual)[2]	141,337

[1] Only gross figures (including receipts) are available for 2002–03.
[2] Actual net figures (excluding receipts) available for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Latest net allocation figures (excluding receipts) available for 2001–02.
[3] Includes additional funding for the Business Recovery Fund in response to foot and mouth disease, and the Rapid Response Fund.
[4] Includes funding for additional activity.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on levels of Government investment in all regional development agencies in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [14719]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The Regional Development Agencies' budgets are as follows:

Regional development agencies' budgets

£000

	2002–03 Gross indicative[1]	*2001–02 Net allocated*[2]	*2000–01 Net actual*[2]
One North East	183,400	157,755	123,492
North West DA	276,600	276,215	206,962
Yorkshire Forward	221,900	218,134	172,668
East Midlands DA	95,200	86,717	75,497
Advantage West Midlands	185,700	159,801	135,897
East of England DA	71,600	58,247	42,582
South East of England DA	102,200	97,851	80,850
South West of England DA	92,400	84,663	68,468
London DA	298,100	277,142	270,860
Total	[3]1,527,100	[3]1,416,525	1,177,276

[1] Only "gross" figures (including receipts) are available for 2002–03.
[2] Actual net figures (excluding receipts) available for 2000–01. Latest net allocation figures (excluding receipts) available for 2001–02.
[3] Includes additional funding for the Business Recovery Fund in response to foot and mouth disease, and the Rapid Response Fund.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Al-Qaeda

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence he has that the hijackers who crashed the commercial airliners in the United States on 11 September were trained in al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. [14256]

Mr. Bradshaw: Al-Qaeda, harboured by the Taliban regime, have for some time run training facilities in Afghanistan. Prior to the current military action against al-Qaeda targets, there were at least 12 camps across Afghanistan, of which at least four were used for training terrorists. Following military action none of these camps are operational.

Most of the nineteen 11 September hijackers were al-Qaeda associates. A senior UBL associate has claimed to have trained some of the hijackers in Afghanistan. We know that al-Qaeda terrorists who carried out a failed attack on a US Navy destroyer in January 2000 had trained in camps in Afghanistan.

Organised Crime (Russia)

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what resources have been offered to the Russian Government to help it to combat organised crime in Russia. [14729]

Peter Hain: The UK is keen to assist Russian efforts to combat organised crime. We have signed two memorandums of understanding to facilitate co-operation between UK and Russian law enforcement agencies. The National Criminal Intelligence Service has provided advice and consultants to a Russian project to establish a financial intelligence unit, an essential element in tackling money laundering.

With our international partners, we participate in Operation Millennium, an Interpol initiative sponsored by the G8 to share intelligence on Eastern European, including Russian, organised crime. We also contribute to the Joint EU/Russia Action Plan on combating Russian organised crime, focusing on judicial co-operation in criminal matters and on law enforcement co-operation.

EU (New Members)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries seeking membership of the European Union he has visited during the last 12 months. [14734]

Peter Hain: Since his appointment in June, the Secretary of State has visited Warsaw on 30 September and Ankara on 17–18 October. The Secretary of State has also met his Czech, Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Cypriot counterparts. I visited both Prague and Budapest

in September, and have plans to visit more candidates early next year. I have also met the Foreign Ministers or chief negotiators of most of the candidate countries.

European Union Chapters

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many European Union chapters have been approved by the EU in each of the countries seeking membership; and if he will list them. [14735]

Peter Hain: Of the 31 chapters of the European Union acquis communautaire (EC legislation), Cyprus has provisionally closed 23, Hungary 22, Czech Republic 21, Slovenia 21, Slovakia 20, Estonia 19, Latvia 18, Lithuania 18, Poland 18, Malta 18, Bulgaria 12, and Romania eight. The FCO has deposited with the Commons Library a table detailing which chapters have been provisionally closed by each of the candidates.

Your Britain, Your Europe Project

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all publications issued under the Your Britain, Your Europe project; and what the *(a)* print run and *(b)* cost has been in each case. [14824]

Peter Hain: According to our latest and statistical information, the following publications bearing the Your Britain, Your Europe logo were issued during the lifetime of the Your Britain, Your Europe initiative:

Leaflet	*Cost (£)*	*Print run*
Your Britain, Your Europe	3,863	7,000
What has the EU ever done for us?	2,834	8,000
Europe Day Programme	2,342	10,000
The Treaty of Nice	2,618	13,200
Future of Europe	1,417	10,000
Want to know more about Europe	2,783	11,000
Regional Factsheets	1,408	2,200
Five editions of the newsletter	18,568	50,000

Bird Protection (Cyprus)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of the Republic of Cyprus regarding the trapping and eating of protected migrant birds; and what steps he plans to take to support improved enforcement of bird protection legislation in Cyprus. [14803]

Peter Hain: The Government remain concerned that this activity continues to take place in Cyprus, and welcome the inclusion of the issue on the agenda of the forthcoming Berne Standing Committee meeting. For our part, the Sovereign Base Area police have for a number of years put considerable effort into anti-poaching measures. Recently there has been an especially robust campaign including the expansion of anti-poaching patrols. The SBA police also work in close co-operation with the Cyprus Game and Fauna Service. In addition, as part of a larger initiative, the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats is being extended to the SBAs. We intend to continue to work with the Republic of Cyprus to bring an end to this unpleasant and outlawed practice.

European Commission (Costs)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many committees and advisory groups are funded by the European Community to advise the Commission; and at what cost. [14859]

Peter Hain: The general budget for the European Union for 2001 lists 473 committees under budget lines A-7031 and A-7032. Appropriations for their expenditure in 2001 totalled 21.96 million euros. The full list of these committees appears on pages 480–508 of the *Official Journal of the European Communities* of 26 February 2001.

British Russia Centre

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the annual reports of the British Russia Centre and British East-West Centre will be available. [16309]

Peter Hain: Copies of the centres' annual report for the financial year 2000–01 have now been placed in the Libraries of both Houses..

The centres received grant in aid of £226,648 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to support their activities in FY 2000–01. In addition, the centres secured funding of £109,346 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for direct expenditure on projects.

The centres manage projects to promote and support the development of democratic institutions, the rule of law and society in Russia, eastern Europe and central Asia. Activities last year included sending election observers to Kyrgyzstan; bidding for and winning a contract for a two-year project to assist in reform of tax systems in Russia, and a project to train young lawyers in the south Caucasus in specialist skills relating to the ECHR.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13321]

Mr. Straw: The four questions which were issued with holding replies received substantive answers within the following timescales:

(a) 2
(b) 1
(c) 1
(d) 0
(e) 0.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his

Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13302]

Mr. Straw: Sixty-six named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to my Department between 15 October and 5 November. Of these, 6 per cent. received a holding reply.

Sudan

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the UN Special Rapporteur for Sudan's recent comments to the UN General Assembly on the links between oil exploitation and conflict in that country; and if he will make a statement. [15688]

Mr. Bradshaw: The civil war in Sudan started decades before the oil project came on stream in 1999. The main fields are in or close to an area of longstanding conflict between pro and anti government Nuer militias. It is not clear that oil has significantly affected this situation. We are engaged, with our EU partners, in an effort to encourage the Government to be more transparent about the use to which it puts its oil revenues. The Government's assurances that the majority are devoted to development expenditure would be all the more convincing if they were backed up by clear data.

European Union Heads of Mission held a meeting with the Sudanese Minister of Finance on this subject on 6 November. But the overall objective remains to achieve a lasting peace, which alone will bring an end to suffering in Sudan. In that respect we warmly welcome Senator Danforth's mission to Sudan and intend to work closely with our US and EU colleagues, and interested regional parties, to try to achieve renewed progress.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of fair trade goods. [15206]

Mr. MacShane: We have no departmental policy on the purchase of fair trade products though my private office seeks to offer fair trade coffee and teas to visitors.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Sure Start, Birkenhead

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much of the *(a)* revenue and *(b)* capital allocation awarded to Birkenhead for the first year of its Sure Start programme was used. [11819]

Jacqui Smith: In the 2000–01 financial year, Sure Start Birkenhead received £141,000 of its revenue allocation and £22,000 of its capital allocation.

Private School Funding

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average extra funding per primary school pupil in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* England and *(c)* Shropshire was in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001. [13812]

Mr. Timms: The Secretary of State is responsible for England only. The funding data for the years in question are as follows:

Shropshire revenue funding per primary pupil

£

	Cash terms			*Real terms 2000*		
	SSA	*Grants*	*Total per pupil*	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Total per pupil*
1997–98	2,000	30	2,040	2,150	40	2,180
1998–99	2,100	40	2,140	2,190	40	2,230
1999–2000	2,220	120	2,340	2,260	120	2,380
2000–01	2,300	290	2,590	2,300	290	290
2001–02	2,410	460	2,870	2,350	450	2,800
Change	400	430	830	200	420	610

Note:
Real terms calculated using GDP deflators published by the Treasury 25 September 2001. The 2001–02 grant figures are provisional and are liable to change. The figures have been rounded to the nearest £10.

England revenue funding per primary school pupil

£

	Cash terms			*Real terms 2000*		
	SSA	*Grants*	*Total per pupil*	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Total per pupil*
1997–98	2,130	30	2,160	2,280	30	2,320
1998–99	2,250	40	2,290	2,350	50	2,390
1999–2000	2,370	120	2,490	2,420	120	2,530
2000–01	2,470	290	2,760	2,470	290	2,760
2001–02	2,590	500	3,090	2,520	490	3,010
Change	460	470	920	240	450	690

Note:
Real terms calculated using GDP deflators published by the Treasury 25 September 2001. The 2001–02 grant figures are provisional and are liable to change. The figures have been rounded to the nearest £10.

Students (Living Expenses)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 2 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 898W, on costs of living, what estimates the research gave of total required living expenses in *(a)* London and *(b)* other parts of England and Wales. [14677]

Margaret Hodge: The Student Income and Expenditure Survey 1998–99 did not give estimates of the total required living expenses. It recorded reported expenditure by students of students.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to examine the role of Capita in the operation of their contract to run individual learning accounts; and if she will make a statement. [14836]

John Healey: The Department regularly monitors the performance of Capita in the delivery of ILAs as part of the standard contract management arrangements.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of individual learning account credits was spent on IT-related skills. [15010]

John Healey *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The Department holds information specific to basic IT-related learning which attracts an ILA incentive of 80 per cent. As at 31 October, ILAs had supported 765,873 such learning episodes at a total cost of £147,669,129, since the launch of the national framework in September 2000.

During this period ILAs have supported 1,380,370 learning episodes.

Course titles for the 20 per cent. ILA discount do not allow precise figures for IT-related learning to be extracted.

Internet Access

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans her Department has to increase internet access to those without computers. [15126]

John Healey: The Department has a range of measures to increase access to those without computers particularly for those who live in disadvantaged areas. We are committed to establishing 6,000 UK online centres in England by the end of 2002. There are currently over 1900 UK online centres in operation with more opening each month. They offer access and support to people who have not used, or are not familiar with the internet. In addition we are investing in wiring up communities. Seven pilot projects are exploring how the benefits of access to information and communication technology, including the internet, will help individuals to develop new skills, access job opportunities and become more involved in their communities.

Excellent progress is being made to improve computer/student ratios in schools, further education colleges and higher education institutions. 97 per cent. of all schools are now connected to the internet. In future all school leavers should have the skills to use and benefit from new technologies.

Educational Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans she has to extend educational maintenance allowances to all areas of all local education authorities; [15554]

(2) what evaluation she intends to make of the educational maintenance allowance pilots; and when. [15469]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The educational maintenance allowance (EMA) scheme is still in the pilot stage. There are currently eight different variants of the scheme being tested in a total of 56 local education authorities.

The Department has commissioned the Centre for Research and Social Policy to carry out a rigorous three-year evaluation study of the pilots which is now in its third year of data collection. The study is examining each of the EMA variants to determine their effect upon participation, retention and achievement in further education. It is an extensive study not only of hard figures on take-up of EMAs but also includes interviews with local practitioners and partners. 20,000 interviews will be carried out with young people from both pilot and control areas to examine what factors influence their decisions at age 16 when considering post-compulsory education.

Early findings of the study show that EMAs are having a positive effect not only on participation and retention but also on student behaviour. However, it is important that we do not make any decisions on the future of EMAs until we have received satisfactory evaluation conclusions.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to her Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers; [13314]

(2) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to her Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13333]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have provided substantive replies to all of the 191 PQs tabled to this Department for answer on a named day between 15 October and 5 November, 96 of which were sent on the named day. Details of all the remaining 95, for which holding replies were issued, are as follows;

44 were answered within three parliamentary days; 28 within seven parliamentary days; seven within 10 parliamentary days; nine within 15 parliamentary days; and seven over 15 parliamentary days (the longest of which was 22 days after the named day).

SCOTLAND

Ministerial Visits

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if she will list all official overseas visits undertaken by Ministers in her Department in each year since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the cost in (i) cash and (ii) real terms, *(b)* the number and grade of (i) civil servants and (ii) special advisers accompanying Ministers and *(c)* the number of official engagements or meetings undertaken on each visit; and if she will make a statement; [6923]

(2) on how many occasions in each year since 1992 non-commercial flights were used by Ministers in her Department for official overseas visits; what the *(a)* destination, *(b)* Ministers involved, *(c)* cost and *(d)* reason for use of non-commercial flights were on each occasion; and if she will make a statement. [6924]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 823W.

Ministers (Evidence to Committees)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her policy is with regard to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in her Department giving evidence to (i) Scottish Parliament, (ii) Welsh Assembly and (iii) Northern Ireland Assembly committees; and to

what categories of document she gives (A) full access, (B) restricted access and (C) no access to (1) Scottish Parliament, (2) Welsh Assembly, (3) Northern Ireland Assembly and (4) House of Commons Select Committees. [7012]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1003W.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the Royal Prerogative for the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9370]

Mrs. Liddell: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the Royal Prerogative are exercised, nor would it be practicable to do so.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to her Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers; [13312]

(2) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to her Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13331]

Mrs. Liddell: Of the small number of 'named day' written questions (the vast majority are tabled as 'ordinary' written questions instead) tabled to my Department between the dates mentioned, all but one were either answered on the day or within 15 days.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of fair trade goods. [15209]

Hilary Benn: We take every opportunity to promote fair trade products and also to support ethical trading in mainstream business. As the hon. Member knows, fair trade tea, coffee and chocolate are available in the House of Commons and they are also available in the Department for International Development refreshment facilities. I understand that a number of other Departments have considered stocking fair trade products.

Afghanistan

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if, in liberated parts of Afghanistan, she will take steps to arrange for children who are seriously injured as a result of the fighting to receive medical treatment where this has not so far been available. [15618]

Clare Short: My Department is currently supporting a number of agencies including Save the Children, UNICEF and the Red Cross Movement, which provide health services for children throughout Afghanistan. I have recently announced further financial contributions to both UNICEF and the Red Cross, which will also include support for health services that benefit children.

We anticipate that the advances made by the Northern Alliance in recent days will improve access and enable more effective delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she will publish a detailed humanitarian aid strategy document for Afghanistan. [13988]

Clare Short: We have no plans to publish a humanitarian aid strategy document for Afghanistan. Thrice weekly updates on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan are published by my Department and held in the Library of the House. A further paper, "Afghanistan Recovery: An Emergency Plan for the First 100 Days", is also available in the Library of the House.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the Government's commitment to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan; and how services by road will be sustained. [13865]

Clare Short: The UK Government have fully committed to doing all they can to help relieve the suffering of the people of Afghanistan. My Department has set aside £40 million to respond to the current crisis affecting Afghans. In line with the objectives of the international community, our top priorities are to: help meet immediate life saving needs within Afghanistan; support refugee needs in neighbouring countries; help host populations in neighbouring countries through programmes which benefit them; and strengthen international humanitarian agency capacity and co-ordination. Funds are being channelled through UN agencies, the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

UN agencies, particularly the World Food Programme (WFO), continue to make good and steady progress in the delivery of humanitarian assistance into Afghanistan. New land convoy routes into Afghanistan are opening up, and the volume of relief supplies entering the country has increased over recent weeks as a result. With our support, WFP and the Russian Ministry for Emergencies (EMERCOM) have begun a joint operation to transport 9,000 metric tonnes of food from Tajikistan to northern Afghanistan.

Some mountainous areas of Afghanistan may become cut off by snow during the winter months. WFP are in the process of procuring snowploughs and other equipment to support their trucking operations in these regions. They have already begun snow clearance in the Anjuman Pass—the main north-east route into the Panjsheer Valley. As a last resort, WFP are also looking at the possibility of airdropping food to vulnerable people living in snowbound areas of Afghanistan.

The changing situation on the ground opens up new opportunities for us to improve humanitarian programmes and give better access to some of the most vulnerable people. Plans are now being made for the international staff of humanitarian agencies to return to parts of Afghanistan as soon as possible. Those agencies should now be able to accelerate deliveries so that winter stockpiles can be built closer to people who need them. However, such progress is dependant on improved security.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to her Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers; [13305]

(2) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to her Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13324]

Clare Short: We received 21 parliamentary questions for named day answer between 15 October and 6 November of which seven were answered without sending a holding reply. Ten received substantive answers within three days and four within seven days. No named day question took longer than seven days to answer.

Departmental Publications

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what were the total *(a)* publication and *(b)* advertising costs for the Department in each of the past four years. [15692]

Clare Short: Expenditure in relation to publications in the years in question is as follows:

Year	*£000*
1997–98	166
1998–99	347
1999–2000	570
2000–01	639

We have adopted a policy of openness and now publish policy documents that were previously kept secret.

We do not hold a separate advertising budget. However, the bulk of our advertising is in relation to recruitment, on which we spend around £1-£1.2 million per year.

Development and Co-operation Council

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the outcome was of the Development and Co-operation Council held in Brussels on 8 November; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [14396]

Clare Short: At its meeting on 8 November, the Development Council, by consensus:

Noted the progress that had been made in reform of the EC's external programmes, including the publication of the Commission's first ever annual report on external assistance. The Council agreed that further progress was needed and that in order to make the annual report a more useful tool for monitoring progress it should be substantially enhanced next year to include firm indicators of the effectiveness of the EC's aid programmes and policies;

Agreed that member states would consider further what steps might be taken to establish specific timetables to reach the 0.7 per cent. GNP aid target in the context of preparations for the UN Financing for Development Conference (Mexico March 2002);

Agreed that, following the events of 11 September, the Council should continue to give priority to implementing the Declaration on Development Policy agreed in November 2000, give increased attention to the development challenges in Asia, and continue to integrate analysis on conflict prevention and resolution into the EC's programmes;

Agreed conclusions on the preparations for the world summit on sustainable development (Johannesburg September 2002); measures to be taken to address poverty reduction; the link between fisheries policy and poverty reduction; the biodiversity action plan; mainstreaming gender equality in development policy; participation of civil society in the implementation of the Cotonou agreement; improving the EU development response towards ACP countries in crisis and conflict; and a resolution on the importance of development education.

Military Planners

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what contact her Department has had with military planners at US Central Command in Tampa, Florida, to enhance humanitarian aid efforts in Afghanistan; [13987]

(2) if she has seconded officials from her Department to US Central Command in Tampa, Florida to liaise with US military planners on the humanitarian aid strategy for Afghanistan. [13986]

Clare Short: Good civil/military liaison is essential to the effectiveness of the humanitarian effort.

Civil/military specialists from my Department have been deployed to CENTCOM and to Islamabad to liaise with the coalition military and United Nations humanitarian staff.

Freedom of Information Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what date her Department established a working group of officials to prepare her Department for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and on what dates this committee has met since it was set up. [14773]

Clare Short: DFID's Knowledge and Communications Committee oversees preparations for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The committee considered freedom of information issues at its meetings in July and November of this year.

"Trade Matters"

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the cost of

producing the Departmental publication, "Trade Matters, Eliminating World Poverty, Information Pack"; and how many were produced. [15691]

Clare Short: The cost of producing the "Trade Matters" information pack, which included an introductory booklet and 12 briefing papers, was around £48,000.

The quantities produced were as follows:

Booklet—30,000 copies

Briefing papers—36,000 copies (3,000 copies of each of 12)

Information pack wallets—4,000.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers; [13306]

(2) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13325]

Mr. Darling: We received 106 named day parliamentary questions for answer between 15 October and 5 November and we issued holding replies in respect of 18 (17 per cent.).

Substantive replies were subsequently issued to one question within three parliamentary days, 10 questions within seven parliamentary days, three questions within 10 parliamentary day and two questions over 15 parliamentary days. One question was subsequently transferred to another Department and one remains unanswered.

Benefits

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was recovered, in the last year for which information is available, of the benefits paid to those ineligible to receive such benefits by reason of *(a)* fraud and *(b)* mistake; and how much is estimated to remain uncollected. [7960]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 16 October 2001]:* It is not possible to separate the total amount of overpaid benefit recovered into overpayments due to fraud and those due to other reasons. At the end of September 2001, the total amount of overpayments remaining uncollected was estimated to be £1,040 million.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much a person must have in savings to receive interest equal to the value of *(a)* the average income support entitlement and *(b)* the average housing benefit entitlement, if interest is paid according to the base rate of the clearing banks. [7920]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Benefit	*Average amount payable per week (£)*	*Amount of savings needed to earn the equivalent amount in interest*
Income Support	70.21	Between £70,000 and £90,000
Housing Benefit	51.20	Between £50,000 and £65,000

Notes:

1. Calculations are based on a bank base rate of interest of 5.25 per cent.
2. The range given reflects the extent to which interest is gross or net of basic rate income tax.
3. Average benefit rates taken from Housing Benefit Quarterly Summary Statistics May 2001 and the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, 5 per cent. sample, May 2001.
4. Interest rate taken from Bank of England information on bank base rate appropriate to end of May 2001. This interest rate is arrived at through information provided by selected clearing banks. It has been assumed for the purposes of the calculations that interest can be obtained on a weekly basis without loss compared to the annual rate.
5. The amounts of savings have been rounded to the nearest five thousand pounds.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many winter fuel payment claims for winter 2000 have been received since the deadline of 31 March; how many of these claims have been allowed; how many have been disallowed; and how many have yet to be processed. [7921]

Mr. McCartney: For the winter of 2000–01, claims needed to be made before 31 March 2001. To date, there have been 5,379 claims which did not meet this deadline. Some 3,445 of these claims have been allowed. 1,379 have been disallowed, and 573 have still to be processed.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many former participants in the new deal have become *(a)* personal advisers and *(b)* senior advisers in the new deal for young people. [7980]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not available as the Employment Service does not hold details of the programmes in which all employees were previously engaged.

Pension Credit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much he has forecast for expenditure on the pension credit in its first full year. [7795]

Mr. McCartney: The Government will publish estimates of the costs of the Pension Credit when the Bill is introduced.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many responses to the pension credit consultation document he has received; who they are from; and if he will make them available in the Library. [14312]

Mr. McCartney: Over 400 responses were received to the formal consultation exercise (The Pension Credit: A Consultation Paper, Cm4900, November 2000), many welcoming our proposals. We continue to consider views and work closely with groups representing older people

to deliver a modernised and dedicated service to meet pensioner needs. We will be announcing our response to the Pension Credit consultation in due course.

SEMA

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how he monitors compliance by SEMA with its latest guidelines; and if he will make a statement. [11902]

Malcolm Wicks: Medical quality standards, including compliance with training and guidelines, are monitored monthly by SchlumbergerSema Medical Services. Doctors in the Department's Corporate Medical Group are regularly involved in validation of Medical Services' medical quality audit system and its application.

The Department takes a keen interest in Medical Services' performance against quality targets. Monitoring outcome reports are analysed by the Department's contract management team (IMPACT) and Corporate Medical Group, and stringent requirements are placed on Medical Services to develop and deliver action plans to improve performance where this fails to reach an acceptable standard. Failure to improve may result in service credits being applied.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the service credit arising from SEMA's performance against targets up to 31 March. [11906]

Malcolm Wicks: SchlumbergerSema Medical Services' performance against service levels and quality targets is reviewed monthly. Service credits are applied when performance falls below target. The Department aims to apply service credits in a manner which acts as an incentive to improve performance, therefore the decision to apply service credits takes into account any mitigating factors, and the effectiveness of action being taken to improve performance.

In the period to March 2001 the Department has claimed service credits from SchlumbergerSema on several occasions where there has been failure to deliver the required service or improvements.

Details of the amount involved are not in the public domain, as commercially sensitive information.

Job Losses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the numbers of *(a)* jobs lost and *(b)* jobs under threat by the events of 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [12552]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Because normal labour market turnover is so large, it is difficult to assess how much is due to particular changes or events.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the West Chelmsford constituency have been caught involved in *(a)* social security benefit fraud and *(b)* housing benefit fraud in each of the last five years for which figures are available; what action was taken against them; and what was the total amount of money calculated to have been lost to the Treasury as a result of the fraud. [14961]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

Benefit Claimant Count

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent estimate he has made of the impact on Government expenditure of a change in the claimant count of 50,000. [12797]

Malcolm Wicks: The impact on Social Security expenditure of either an increase or decrease in unemployment of 50,000 is estimated to be either a saving or additional cost of approximately £250 million, for a full year.

Child Benefit

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to award maximum child benefit to all siblings of a multiple birth; [13655]

(2) if he will review the provision of child benefit for siblings of a multiple birth. [13656]

Malcolm Wicks: There are no plans to award the higher rate of Child Benefit to siblings of a multiple birth.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter sent to companies to remind them of their obligation to offer access to a stakeholder pension. [7919]

Mr. McCartney: A copy of the letter, and the factsheet that accompanied it, has been placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Murder Inquiries

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish details of the arrangements for the inquiries into the murders of *(a)* Chief Superintendent Breen, *(b)* Superintendent Buchanan, *(c)* Lord Justice and Lady Gibson and *(d)* Billy Wright; and if he will make a statement. [12001]

Jane Kennedy: The package of proposals published after the Weston Park talks contained details of the investigation by a judge of international standing into the case of Chief Superintendent Breen and Superintendent Buchanan, Lord Justice and Lady Gibson, Billy Wright, Patrick Finucane, Rosemary Nelson, and Robert Hamill. Further details will be published in due course.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13309]

Dr. John Reid: In total 32 named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to my Department between 15 October and 5 November. Of these, 25 received holding replies.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13328]

Dr. John Reid: Of the 25 named day parliamentary written questions tabled to my Department which received holding replies between 15 October and 5 November: *(a)* none received substantive answers within three parliamentary days; *(b)* 21 received substantive answers within seven parliamentary days. The remaining four questions will receive substantive responses as soon as possible.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of fair trade goods. [15211]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to the reply provided today by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department for International Development. The Lord Chancellor's Department will take every opportunity to encourage the use of fair trade products through its procurement activities, and specifically during the course of the review of the arrangements for contracted catering services that is planned to take place during the next 12 months.

Jury Rooms (Smoking Ban)

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 752W, on smoking in jury rooms, if he will give instructions that all asthmatics who are allergic to tobacco fumes will automatically be exempted from jury service. [15689]

Mr. Wills: There are no plans to introduce any further restrictions on eligibility for jury service. However, a person suffering from asthma, or any other illness, can apply to the Crown court to be excused from service on the ground of personal hardship. It will ultimately be for a judge to decide whether a person should be excused for this reason.

WALES

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of fair trade goods. [15218]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, International Development. My Department has fewer than 50 staff and does not provide snack or canteen facilities.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers; [13310]

(2) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13329]

Mr. Paul Murphy: 10 questions. All received substantive answers on the given date.

HEALTH

SNOMED System

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are in place for independent scrutiny and evaluation of the SNOMED system; if the results of that scrutiny will be published; and if he will make a statement. [9400]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Agreement has been reached with the College of American Pathologists that a programme of formative evaluation work should be carried out in the national health service, as part of the United Kingdom contribution to the development of the SNOMED clinical terms. This will run through 2002–03. A further independent evaluation will be undertaken and plans are being drawn up for a panel to oversee this process. The SNOMED clinical terms will also be subjected to the NHS information standards approval process, which is overseen by the NHS Information Standards Board. The results of these evaluations will be published.

Intermediate Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy from 1 April 2002 to give people an enforceable right not to be charged for intermediate care services. [14714]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* Our view is that all intermediate care, as defined in paragraphs 7 and 8 of the January circular (Health Service Circular 2000–01: Local Authority Circular (2001)1) and subject to the normal time limits outlined there, should be free at the point of use.

Services commissioned or provided by the national health service are free. Although councils retain local discretion to charge we are encouraging them to make all such services free at the point of use, through the use of Health Act flexibilities.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken in evaluating the baseline figures for intermediate care to audit compliance with the criteria set out in paragraph 7 of HSC 2001/01: LAC (2001). [14712]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* A recent detailed survey of intermediate care validated the 1999–2000 baseline and established current levels of provision using the defining criteria in the January 2001 circular (Health Service Circular 2001/01: Local Authority Circular (2001)1).

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the definition of intermediate care in HSC 2001/01: LAC (2001). [14715]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* The definition in the January 2001 circular (Health Service Circular 2001/01: Local Authority Circular (2001)1) was drawn up in consultation with practitioners in the field. Subsequent feedback indicates that it has brought much needed clarity and is being implemented.

We shall, however, keep this under review and issue further guidance if needed.

Statutory Instruments (Explanatory Notes)

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the mechanisms for ensuring that Explanatory Notes to Statutory Instruments issued by his Department are comprehensible, with special reference to S.I. No. 3442. [13222]

Ms Blears: It is a long-standing convention that the Explanatory Note of a Statutory Instrument should contain a reference to the full title of any European Commission legislation that is implemented by that Statutory Instrument. In accordance with that convention, the Explanatory Note of Statutory Instrument No. 2001/3442 indicates which EC legislation is being implemented. The subject matter is inherently technical.

Beta Interferon

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the decision by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence not to recommend beta interferon to be supplied by the NHS for patients with multiple sclerosis; [13403]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost per patient of supplying beta interferon by the NHS to multiple sclerosis patients; [13405]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of NHS patients with multiple sclerosis who would require beta interferon if available from the NHS. [13404]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has not yet issued definitive guidance on the use of disease modifying drugs in multiple sclerosis. Its final appraisal determination (FAD) is now at the appeals stage.

However, as recommended in the FAD we are currently holding discussions with the manufacturers to consider a range of options under which drugs for multiple sclerosis might be made available under the National Health Service. One option is a "risk-sharing" scheme which will evaluate their clinical and cost effectiveness, and until these discussions are concluded we cannot provide detailed information on potential numbers of patients who may be affected. The FAD indicates that the current annual cost per patient of the various available drug treatments is £7,259 (Betaferon), £9,061 (Avonex), £9,088-£12,068 (lower dose/higher dose Rebif) or £6,650 (glatiramer acetate).

Coronary Heart Disease

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at how many places it was possible to treat coronary heart disease *(a)* in each health authority and *(b)* in total in England for the last two years for which figures are available. [13616]

Jacqui Smith: Coronary heart disease is treated throughout the national health service. Depending on the severity and nature of the disease, patients are treated in a variety of settings, covering prevention, treatment and rehabilitation in both community and hospital settings. It is therefore not possible to quantify provision in the manner requested.

Pneumococcal Vaccination

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the value of pneumococcal vaccination in reducing the winter burden on the NHS; [13970]

(2) if he will reduce the target age for pneumococcal vaccination to match the flu vaccination programme for older people. [13971]

Jacqui Smith: Pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for all those aged two years or older in whom pneumococcal infection is likely to be more common and/or dangerous, ie those with:

- Asplenia or severe dysfunction of the spleen
- Chronic renal disease or nephrotic syndrome
- Immunodeficiency or immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, including HIV infection at all stages
- Chronic heart disease
- Chronic lung disease
- Chronic liver disease including cirrhosis
- Diabetes mellitus.

The Department continues to recommend this vaccine based on underlying ill health rather than age. Because the Department's policy on pneumococcal vaccine is designed to reduce morbidity and mortality, we have made no specific studies on the reduction of winter burden on the national health service.

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to proceed with the reforms of the Mental Health Act 1982 outlined in the White Paper, "Reforming the Mental Health Act"; and if he will make a statement. [15178]

Jacqui Smith: We remain committed to the reform of the Mental Health Act 1983. New legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much each *(a)* primary care trust and *(b)* health authority paid in respect of free nursing care up to 31 October; and how many nursing home residents were placed in each registered nursing care contribution band; [12341]

(2) what estimate he has made of how many hours of nursing care will be funded from each of the registered nursing care contribution bands; [12343]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1329W, on nursing care, if he will place in the Library a copy of the background papers concerning the testing of the registered nursing care contribution tool; [12416]

(4) pursuant to his answer of 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1329W, on nursing care, *(a)* how many assessments had been completed by 31 October and *(b)* how many of these assessments were conducted face to face; [12415]

(5) pursuant to his answer of 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1329W, on nursing care, how many nurses had completed the training in the use of the tool by 31 October; how many nurses have been designated to undertake assessments; and of these, how many were in post by 31 October. [12417]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* I refer to the answers given to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 478–79W.

Copies of an "Evaluation of the Registered Nurse Care Contribution for the Determination of Residents' Needs for Registered Nursing Care, When in Use in Nursing Homes" undertaken by the Gerontological Nursing Programme of the Royal College of Nursing have been placed in the Library.

The Department is commissioning an evaluation of the implementation of free nursing care.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the projected cost is of providing free nursing care for the elderly in England in the next three financial years. [15420]

Jacqui Smith: £100 million was made available for free nursing care for adults over the age of 18 in nursing homes for the last six months of 2001–02. The full year costs for 2002–03 are currently being considered and allocations will be made early next year.

EU Food Supplements Directive

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in negotiations regarding the draft EU food supplements directive in protecting the interests of the UK health food industry. [12753]

Ms Blears: We supported the final compromise proposal on which political agreement was reached in the Council of Ministers recently. The final text includes a number of important and hard won concessions which will benefit both United Kingdom consumers and the UK health food industry.

Cutlass Review

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the timetable is for the Cutlass review of medicines; [13787]

(2) how many patients have been recruited to the Cutlass review *(a)* to take the existing medicines and *(b)* to take the atypical medicines; [13786]

(3) what assessment he has made as to the opinion of psychiatrists on the efficacy of atypical anti-psychotic medicines. [13783]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* A multi-centred, randomised, controlled trial of the Cost Utility of The Latest Antipsychotics in Severe Schizophrenia (CUTLASS) is being conducted under the Department's health technology assessment programme. The trial, which compares new (atypical) drugs with conventional drugs, started in 1999 and is due to end in November 2002. The design of the trial means that it is not possible to extract information before the trial is completed about how many patients have taken which drugs. It is similarly not possible to provide information on results until the trial is ended.

Treatments

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if it is his policy that treatments should not be available in the NHS unless they have been subjected to randomised controlled trials; [13782]

(2) what proportion of treatments used in the NHS have been subjected to randomised controlled trials. [13781]

Jacqui Smith: No. Clinicians may choose to prescribe medication on the national health service which has not yet been licensed for use in this country (with the manufacturer providing supplies on a "named patient" basis) or is not licensed for a particular indication for which it is to be used. The clinician will do so only after considering the benefit of administering the medicine in relation to the risk involved.

We do not hold information on the use of treatments which have not been the subject of randomised controlled trials.

Antipsychotic Medicines

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made as to the likely occurrence of *(a)* tardive dyskinesia and *(b)* other side effects from the use of (i) atypical antipsychotic medicines and (ii) older treatments; [13784]

(2) what the main side effects are from the use of typical antipsychotic medicines; and if he will make a statement. [13785]

Jacqui Smith: The safety and efficacy of antipsychotics are assessed at the time of licensing by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) with expert advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM).

Tardive dyskinesia is a well-recognised side effect of older "typical" antipsychotics. Tardive dyskinesia is of particular concern because it may be irreversible on withdrawing therapy and treatment is usually ineffective. Factors predisposing to the development of tardive

dyskinesia include old age, female sex, affective disorder, schizophrenia characterised by negative symptoms and organic brain damage. Newer atypical antipsychotics have been developed that are better tolerated, but tardive dyskinesia can still occur following long term administration with these drugs. The lower incidence of tardive dyskinesia with atypical antipsychotics remains to be established although at present this does appear to be the case.

Information on possible adverse effects is available in the summary of product characteristics which is produced by the manufacturer and approved by the licensing authority for each medicine. Tardive dyskinesia is well documented in the product information for both typical and atypical antipsychotics and is also described in the British National Formulary which provides guidance on prescribing to doctors.

Other side effects of older, typical antipsychotics can include; drowsiness, agitation, convulsions, dizziness, headache, confusion, gastrointestinal disturbances, dry mouth, constipation, difficulty with passing urine and blurred vision, cardiovascular symptoms, endocrine effects, blood abnormalities and skin rashes.

As with all medicines the safety of antipsychotics (typical and atypical) are continuously monitored by the MCA and the independent expert advisory body, the CSM.

Patients (Testing)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) under what circumstances it is lawful for patients to be tested without their knowledge or consent; and if he will make a statement; [14127]

(2) what guidance and legislation applies to staff of accident and emergency departments on testing girls under the age of 10 years for pregnancy without their knowledge or agreement or that of their parents. [14126]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* In treating a child, the welfare of the child must be paramount. While in most circumstances we would expect a child and, where relevant, his or her parents to be involved in decisions about that child's treatment or care, in certain circumstances—for example emergencies—this may not be possible.

A range of tests would be carried out in the case of abdominal pain, intended to facilitate a diagnosis, dependent upon whether or not the health professional involved considers the test to be an appropriate medical response to the symptoms presented. Ectopic pregnancy can be life threatening. The test described does not involve any form of physical intervention as the child is asked to give samples to enable the tests, and will voluntarily agree to provide these samples. Therefore there can be no question of assault by staff. The potential of pregnancy in a very young child may raise the question of abuse which, once the child's health has been safeguarded, may require further investigation. Following the case of Gillick, the courts have held that children who have sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable them to understand fully what is involved in an intervention will also have the capacity to consent to that intervention.

While there is no English statute setting out the general principles of consent, case law ("common law") exists. The Department has published the "Reference Guide to Consent for Examination or Treatment", (March 2001) which provides guidance in this respect. This states:

> "A life threatening emergency may arise when consultation with either a person with parental responsibility or the court is impossible, or the persons with parental responsibility refuse consent despite such emergency treatment appearing to be in the best interests of the child. In such cases the courts have stated that doubt should be resolved in favour of the preservation of life and it will be acceptable to undertake treatment to preserve life or prevent serious damage to health".
> (Section 3.8.5, page 17.)

In respect of adults, except in strictly defined circumstances (for example under the Mental Health Act) an adult cannot be subjected to a test which involves a physical intervention without his or her consent if the person is capable of giving it. If the person lacks capacity to consent, in England and Wales the test can be carried out if it is in the best interests of the person concerned. The law in Scotland is somewhat different.

We announced in the NHS Plan (paragraph 10.22) that we intend to ensure that good practice in consent for examination and treatment is in place in clinical and research settings, with changes to be introduced from the end of 2001. Guidance for health professionals and leaflets for patients have been produced to inform people about their rights and responsibilities earlier this year. Ministers are currently considering a model consent policy and revised consent forms for the national health service.

Endometriosis

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases of endometriosis diagnosed at *(a)* Dorset County, *(b)* Poole General and *(c)* Royal Bournemouth hospitals in the 1999–2000 data year were classified stage three or four; [13943]

(2) how many endometriosis patients from Dorset were referred out of county for laser treatment during the data year 1999–2000; [13944]

(3) how many cases of endometriosis were diagnosed in the 1999–2000 data year at *(a)* Dorset County, *(b)* Poole General and *(c)* Royal Bournemouth hospitals. [13942]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* The Department does not collect information showing the number of patients diagnosed with endometriosis, or the classification of the condition. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chief executives of the national health service trusts concerned for further information.

Information from the health episode statistics database shows that no patients from Dorset were referred out of the health authority area for laser treatment for endometriosis.

NHS Reconfiguration Panel

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the composition of the NHS reconfiguration panel; when he expects appointments to this body will be made; what the remit of the panel is; and what measures he is taking to ensure its independence. [14301]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* Composition of the independent reconfiguration panel (IRP) will follow the modernisation board model of one third professionals, one third managers and one third patients' and citizens' representatives. Dr. Peter Barrett has been appointed chair of the IRP. The members are being selected through open competition and the interviews are due to take place shortly. The aim is to complete the appointments process by the end of the year.

The panel's draft terms of reference were outlined in the press release accompanying Dr. Barrett's appointment. These will need to be agreed with the panel membership before being confirmed. The panel will provide authoritative advice to the Secretary of State on referred proposals for national health service service change. The panel will publish the advice it gives in relation to each proposal referred to them by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

The IRP will have a crucial role in advising on the outcome of significant reconfigurations, making the process more transparent and accountable. It is important to have public confidence in the panel and the processes it will use in its deliberations.

We propose to hold a simulation exercise early in the new year to which all major stakeholders will be invited to participate. We are also committed to consulting widely on the criteria that the panel will use. The simulation exercise will form part of the consultation process.

Electro-convulsive Therapy

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the trends have been in the use of electro-convulsive therapy in the last 15 years; and what research his Department has undertaken into the trends. [14937]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The most recent information available concerning trends in the administration of electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) is contained in the one-off survey covering the period from January 1999 to March 1999, England only, that was undertaken to provide an up-to-date and accurate snapshot picture of the use of electro-convulsive therapy (ECT). A copy of this document is available in the Library.

The results of the ECT survey showed that in keeping with the trend from 1985 through 1999–91 the number of administrations of ECT has declined. The estimated 65,930 administrations of ECT compares with 105,466 reported administrations in 1990–91 and 137,940 in 1985.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been waiting more than 13 weeks for an out-patient appointment *(a)* on the latest day for which figures are available and *(b)* for the previous quarter, in the Mid Essex hospital trust area. [14966]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is given in the table.

Total number of patients waiting 13 weeks or more for an outpatient appointment at Mid Essex hospital services national health service trust at quarter 1 2001–02 (June 2001) and quarter 2 2001–02 (September 2001).

Number of patients waiting over 13 weeks

2001–02	*Number*
Quarter 1 (June 2001)	2,146
Quarter 2 (September 2001)	2,439

Source:
QM08 quarterly return

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were *(a)* waiting for inpatient treatment and *(b)* waiting more than 12 months for inpatient treatment, on the latest day for which figures are available in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area. [14967]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is given in the table.

Total number of patients waiting and the number of patients waiting over 12 months for hospital treatment at Mid Essex hospital services national health service trust in September 2001.

	Number
September 2001	
Total waiting	8,968
Waiting over 12 months	683

Source:
Monthly waiting list return

Digital Hearing Aids

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the July 2000 NICE guidance on NHS audiology services and digital hearing aids was published before the financial contract for the NHS bulk purchasing of digital hearing aids for the first wave sites had been completed. [15677]

Jacqui Smith: Yes. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance was published in July 2000 and the bulk purchasing contract was completed at the beginning of October 2000.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will set out the timetable for the evaluation of digital hearing aids under the 20 first wave sites; [15680]

(2) what guidance his Department has given to the 20 NHS sites providing digital hearing aids for the financial year 2002–03; [15681]

(3) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) of 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 560W, on digital hearing aids, what evaluation has been made of the impact that an extra £25 million extra expenditure on audiology services will have; and by what date his Department expects to make a decision as to the speed and scale of the modernisation of NHS audiology services. [15676]

Jacqui Smith: Twenty national health service trusts are participating in the modernising hearing aid services pilot project, which is addressing the most effective hearing aids for NHS patients, the best ways of supplying hearing aids and how a modernised hearing aid service can best be delivered to NHS patients. £11 million has been invested since May 2000 and up to 18,000 people will have benefited by March 2002.

The Institute of Hearing Research is evaluating the modernisation project on behalf of the Department. Interim reports have been made available to the Department, based on limited data at this stage, suggesting that there is benefit to patients from a digital hearing aid fitted in a modernised service. The evaluation is on-going and further reports are expected to be available in March and December 2002.

Detailed guidance on patient protocols, when to fit various aids etc., has been given to those sites participating in the pilot. Guidance will be updated based on the experience of the pilot sites. Subject to favourable evaluation, we will make decisions about how best to spread the modernised services, including the provision of digital hearing aids, throughout the NHS. We have earmarked funds to begin roll-out and up to £25 million will be invested by 2003–04 subject to further favourable evaluation. Funding decisions for 2002–03 will be made in time to allow sites to make plans for delivering services for that financial year.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to monitor the number of people who have decided to purchase digital hearing aids from overseas. [15678]

Jacqui Smith: No such steps are being taken. People who purchase digital hearing aids overseas are not required to inform the Department of their purchase.

NHS Plan

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the sponsors for the public consultation to confer on the NHS plan referred to in Annex E (p112) of the Department's Annual report 2001. [15418]

Mr. Hutton: The sponsors in kind who helped us with the distribution of the NHS Plan by making copies available on their shelves were five retail chains: Safeway, Morrisons, Waitrose, Tesco and Sainsbury; and three high street pharmaceutical chains: Boots, Lloyds and Superdrug.

Osteoporosis

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he will take to encourage primary care organisations to consider the recommendations in "Primary Care Strategy for Falls and Osteoporosis", published by the National Osteoporosis Society in July; [10210]

(2) what was the cost to the health service of dealing with osteoporotic fractures in each of the last three years; [10211]

(3) what estimate he has made of the impact which recommendations in the "Primary Care Strategy for Falls and Osteoporosis", published by the National Osteoporosis Society in July, could have on reducing the number of fractures which the health service has to deal with; [10208]

(4) what estimate he has made of the impact which recommendations in "Primary Care Strategy for Falls and Osteoporosis", published by the National Osteoporosis Society in July, could have on reducing the cost to the national health service of dealing with fractures. [10209]

Jacqui Smith: The latest evidence suggests that the annual cost of hip fractures in the United Kingdom is in excess of £1.7 billion. Hip fractures are caused mainly by osteoporosis. Through the National Service Framework for Older People we have signalled the importance of addressing osteoporosis. This document sets targets and milestones for local health and social care systems to establish an integrated falls service, which will include appropriate interventions and advice to prevent osteoporotic fracture.

We welcome the National Osteoporosis Society's primary care strategy for falls and osteoporosis. This strategy, involving many different agencies, is an excellent example of the type of integrated approach that is likely to be successful in the long term. We hope that local health care providers make its implementation a priority in their work to develop the osteoporosis aspects of integrated falls services.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13308]

Jacqui Smith: The Department received 345 named day parliamentary questions in the period 15 October to 5 November, 61 per cent. received a holding answer.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13327]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is as follows:

Substantively answered within three days—69 per cent.

Substantively answered within seven days—15 per cent.

Substantively answered within 10 days—9 per cent.

Substantively answered within 15 days—1 per cent.

Substantively answered over 15 days—0 per cent.

A further 6 per cent. are still to be answered.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the decision of the BBC not to televise Holocaust Memorial Day 2002. [14720]

Dr. Howells: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 638–39W.

European Year of People with Disabilities

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her plans for the 2003 European Year of People with Disabilities. [14831]

Dr. Howells: National plans for the 2003 European Year of People with Disabilities are still in an embryonic state. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston is leading on this issue, and I understand that a decision to approve the formation of the National Co-ordinating Committee will not be taken until 3 December. I will be pleased to consider what contribution would be most appropriate for my Department when this is requested.

WPC Kaur

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) at the employment tribunal hearing of the claim by WPC Kaur, how many days were taken *(a)* by the claimants' case and *(b)* by the response on her behalf; when the judgment is expected; and if she will instruct the Royal Park Constabulary not to stop paying WPC Kaur before the judgment is given; [15283]

(2) if she *(a)* instructed him not to and *(b)* was informed that the former head of the Royal Parks Constabulary did not give oral evidence on her behalf in the employment tribunal case of WPC Kaur. [15284]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its chief executive, William Weston. I have asked him to arrange for replies to be given.

Letter from William Weston to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 16 November 2001:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the tribunal involving PC Kaur because this is an operational matter that is the responsibility of the Royal Parks Agency.

The industrial tribunal sat on a number of days between 24th September and 17th October. During that time the presentation of the claimant's case took six and a half days and the case for the Secretary of State took five and a half days. No indication was given as to when a judgement will be forthcoming.

The former Chief Officer of the Royal Parks was not called to give evidence. The former Deputy Chief Officer was due to give evidence but was unable to do so because he was unwell. We would not expect to inform the Secretary of State about such a detail of the proceedings unless it was of particular significance.

The question of how PC Kaur is paid is not related to the period of the tribunal. We have been paying her according to the procedures for paying all staff in the Agency (and the Royal Parks Constabulary) who are absent from work through sickness and we will continue to pay her on this basis, regardless of when the judgement of the tribunal is made known.

Ofcom

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her plans are for representation for Scotland on the proposed Ofcom; and if she will make a statement. [15066]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The draft Communications Bill to be published in spring 2002 will contain details of how the interests of Scotland will be represented within Ofcom.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to her Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers; [13315]

(2) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to her Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13334]

Dr. Howells: Of the 44 named day written questions tabled to the Department between 15 October 2001 and 5 November 2001, 27 received holding answers. Of these, 20 received substantive answers within three parliamentary days, four within seven parliamentary days, two within 10 parliamentary days, and one within 15 parliamentary days of the holding answer being issued.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of fair trade goods. [15202]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport recognises the public desire to purchase ethically and environmentally sound goods where this is practical. It is inherent in the Department's environmental management system that it should seek to influence the supply chain in favour of fair trade type goods but, at the same time the expenditure of public money demands that procurement must achieve value for money via a competitive market. Where fair trade can compete successfully against other suppliers for cost, quality and service the Department will give preference to the ethical and environmentally acceptable option.

DEFENCE

HMS Ocean

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 659W, for what reason the docking period for HMS Ocean planned for early 2002 has been brought forward; if its four month duration can be shortened; and which Lloyd's Survey Standards it is designed to achieve; [13428]

(2) when HMS Ocean will be ready for deployment; [13423]

(3 whether repairs other than routine maintenance are required on HMS Ocean. [13424]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 November 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on 2 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 877W, and the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 433W.

While it would have been possible to reduce the duration of the now deferred docking period, the optimum solution in the current operational circumstances is to carry out the shorter assisted maintenance period at Ocean's home port of Portsmouth, rather than dock the vessel. This will also maximise the time ships staff can spend with their families before rejoining the vessel if she is required for operational deployment.

A number of surveys to meet Lloyd's standard are undertaken over a period of time to assess the vessel's condition. Many of these surveys can be completed while the vessel is afloat but those which can be undertaken only in dock will be deferred until the docking period. This will not affect the ability of the vessel to operate safely.

Public-private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the projects in his Department which have been considered as potential public private partnerships since 1997 which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public private partnership proposed; and if he will make a statement. [13435]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chief Secretary on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W. Rigorous appraisal processes are applied to public-private partnerships to ensure that they are workable and appropriate, as well as economic. This usually means that we can confirm the viability or otherwise of a project at an early stage. There have been no cases in the last four years within defence where it has been decided not to proceed with a project because of financial comparisons with the public sector comparator.

RAF St. Athan

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of RAF St. Athan; and if he will make a statement. [15155]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 706W. The position remains that we are continuing to work closely with all stakeholders to develop a solution for the St. Athan site. An announcement will be made once this work is complete.

Recruitment

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence of those recruited to the armed forces, how many have successfully completed initial training at depots in each of the last 10 years. [14029]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not held in the format or period requested. Details that are available are set out in the table.

Year	Intake	Gains to trained strength
Naval service		
1995–96	2,337	1,483
1996–97	3,959	2,144
1997–98	4,600	2,959
1998–99	4,767	3,028
1999–2000	4,953	3,314
2000–01	4,623	[illegible]
Army		
1995–96	12,911	7,194
1996–97	15,522	8,718
1997–98	15,379	9,492
1998–99	16,963	9,331
1999–2000	16,483	10,472
2000–01	14,714	9,994
RAF		
1995–96	2,424	2,032
1996–97	2,684	2,292
1997–98	3,526	3,074
1998–99	4,246	3,477
1999–2000	4,097	3,433
2000–01	3,632	3,072

For all of the services there is limited correlation between intake and gains to the trained strength because the date of entry and date of completing training will often fall in different financial years.The figures reflect not just the completion of basic training but also the initial specialist training required to allow each person to join the trained strength of his/her service.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Defence Aviation Repair Agency requested the assistance of the Welsh Development Agency to facilitate the relocation of the fixed wing aircraft repair business from RAF St. Athan to Cardiff International Airport. [15156]

Mr. Ingram: Informal discussions initially took place between the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA) and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) during October and November 2000. DARA gave a formal presentation to the WDA on 12 December 2000 detailing the business development needs at DARA's sites in Wales (St. Athan and Sealand).

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the cost of retaining four sites within the Defence Aviation Repair Agency. [15154]

Mr. Ingram: No formal assessment of the cost of retaining four sites within the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA) has been carried out. I refer my hon. Friend to the letter by the then Minister of State for the armed forces, Mr. Spellar, dated 31 January 2001, which gives a breakdown of the actual cost for running the four sites in financial year 1999–2000, copies of which were placed in the Library of the House.

Afghanistan

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 874, on Afghanistan, what his estimate is

of how many civilians have been killed as a result of Coalition action; and how many actions have caused unintended *(a)* injury and *(b)* damage. [15623]

Mr. Ingram: We cannot estimate the number of civilian casualties or the number of actions that have caused unintended injury or damage because we have no means of independently verifying the allegations made in Afghanistan.

As has regularly been made clear in the House, our targeting processes are rigorous and every effort is made to avoid civilian casualties and damage to non-military equipment and buildings.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of British forces in Afghanistan. [15343]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to the House on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 861–79.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 874W, on Afghanistan, how many claims of damage to civilian life and property have been carefully investigated; which agencies are responsible for investigating such claims; and if he will place *(a)* copies of those claims and *(b)* the results of the investigations made by the Coalition in the Library. [15629]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 874W, on Afghanistan, how many battle damage assessment reports he has received; and how many attacks on a target were over 50 per cent. successful. [15628]

Mr. Ingram: I receive regular Battle Damage Assessment reports and am kept updated on significant developments. The success of missions is not measured in terms of a percentage but against the achievement of military objectives. Our objectives of destroying terrorist camps and creating the right conditions for future action in Afghanistan, including possible humanitarian or stabilisation operations, have been met. As recent events show, we are also making progress on our objective of limiting the Taliban's ability to protect and support Osama bin Laden and the al-Quaeda organisation.

Departmental Assets

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the value of his Department's assets holdings is, broken down by asset holder, under the headings of *(a)* Land & Buildings Scotland, *(b)* Land & Buildings UK, *(c)* Land & Buildings Overseas, *(d)* Fighting Equipment, *(e)* Nuclear Submarine Fleet, *(f)* Nuclear Missile Capacity, *(g)* Heritage Assets, *(h)* Plant & Machinery, *(i)* Vehicles and *(j)* Investments, in the last financial year for which figures are available. [15220]

Mr. Ingram: Information on asset values for the 1999–2000 financial year is contained in the Ministry of Defence section (Section 7) of the National Asset Register published by the Treasury in July 2001. The register lists asset holdings by Top Level Budget Holder and Agency Chief Executive in the asset categories agreed by the Treasury. A copy of the register is available in the Library of the House. Providing the information in the format requested could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Information on our asset holdings for 2000–01 will be published in the Departmental Resource Accounts in December. These will provide a breakdown by Treasury category at MOD departmental level.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many troops have been stationed in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. [13774]

Mr. Ingram: The number of Armed Forces personnel stationed in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years is set out in the table.

As at 31 October	*Number of troops*
1991	17,962
1992	18,982
1993	19,022
1994	18,345
1995	17,070
1996	16,490
1997	16,716
1998	15,566
1999	14,459
2000	13,640
2001	13,820

Swift Sword II

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many battle groups exercised within 1 Armoured Division during exercise Swift Sword II. [14030]

Mr. Ingram: The UK Land contribution to Exercise Saif Sareea II comprised Headquarters 1 UK Armoured Division, 3 Commando Brigade, 4 Armoured Brigade and 102 Logistic Brigade. Of this force, 4 Armoured Brigade, commanding two fully equipped armoured battlegroups, came under the command of 1 UK Division.

Short Service Commissions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the conversion rate of short service to regular commissions in each of the last 10 years. [13704]

Mr. Ingram: Lists of the conversion rate of short service to regular commissions in each of the last 10 years are shown by individual service in the tables.

All naval service officers (trained and untrained)

Year	*Short commission strength*	*Conversions*	*Rate (percentage)*
1991–92	1,659	'134	8.1
1992–93	1,560	'128	8.2
1993–94	1,450	'101	7.0
1994–95	1,299	'75	5.8
1995–96	1,201	'123	10.2
1996–97	1,204	'167	13.9
1997–98	1,158	'184	15.9

All naval service officers (trained and untrained)

Year	Short commission strength	Conversions	Rate (percentage)
1998–99	1,089	[1]179	16.4
1999–2000	1,383	180	13.0
2000–01	1,694	233	13.7

[1] Incomplete data

Note:

Some of the information requested is not held as complete data, and the tables are marked accordingly.

Army officers trained strength

	SSC start strength	Conversions to Reg. C	Rate (percentage)
1 April 1991	4,721	596	12.6
1 April 1992	4,506	507	11.3
1 April 1993	4,264	387	9.1
1 April 1994	3,770	320	8.5
1 April 1995	3,417	272	8.0
1 April 1996	3,174	247	7.8
1 April 1997	3,162	259	8.2
1 April 1998	3,314	254	7.7
1 April 1999	3,237	173	5.3
1 April 2000	3,164	119	3.8

Note:

Until the 'Stepping Stone' approach to commissions was introduced on 1 March 1999, short service commission (SSC) officers could convert to regular commission (Reg. C) or special regular commission (SRC). Subsequently, the standard progression has been from SSC to intermediate regular commission (IRC) and then to Reg. C. As a result, fewer officers now go direct from SSC to Reg. C.

Statistics for transfers to IRC are not yet to hand. I will write to the hon. Member with these statistics when they are available and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

All RAF officers (trained and untrained)

	Conversions SSC to permanent commission		
	SSC strength	Conversions	Rate (percentage)
1991–92	1,614	133	8
1992–93	1,621	182	11
1993–94	1,460	159	11
1994–95	1,260	115	9
1995–96	1,018	93	9
1996–97	799	103	13
1997–98	626	162	26
1998–99	513	102	20
1999–2000	570	126	22
2000–01	574	125	22

Cluster Bombs

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evaluation has been made by *(a)* the UK and *(b)* its allies of the use of cluster bombs in Kosovo, with particular respect to the impact of these weapons on civilians (i) during and (ii) after hostilities. [15669]

Mr. Ingram: 531 RBL 755 cluster bombs were dropped by the RAF during Operation Allied Force. We assessed them to have performed reliably and within their specification. I have no information on allies' evaluation of similar weapons.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13311]

Mr. Ingram: According to our records, 153 named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to the Ministry of Defence between 15 October and 5 November. The proportion which received a holding reply is 35 per cent.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13330]

Mr. Ingram: According to our records 153 named day parliamentary questions were tabled to the Ministry of Defence between 15 October and 5 November. I am unable to provide details in the format requested, however, the table gives details of those questions which received an answer within the time scale specified:

	Number
Within three parliamentary days	15
Within seven parliamentary days	1
Within 10 parliamentary days	0
Within 15 parliamentary days	0
Over 15 parliamentary days	1

These figures include answers which gave an undertaking to write to hon. Members.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Review Bodies

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews established since 2 May 1997 were in existence between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001. [15832]

Mr. Leslie: I have today placed this information in the Libraries of the House, in the form of an annual report; a copy is also being placed in the Vote Office. Future reports will be published annually.

Task forces, advisory groups and reviews provide independent, expert advice to Government on a wide range of issues. These are an effective means of securing high quality advice on matters of real public concern and they seek to operate in as open and transparent a way as possible. While they are not a new phenomenon, it is only since 1997 that detailed information on them has been public.

Pension Mis-selling

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the total lump sum cash payment received by the civil service pension schemes from transfers back into such schemes as a result of the outcome of private pension mis-selling; and if he will estimate the sums still to come. [12655]

Mr. Leslie: This information is not held centrally and the information below has been collected from scheme administrators.

The total amount received for the last three complete financial years (1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01) is £7,147,792. This does not include any amounts received in respect of staff employed by either the Ministry of Defence or the Crown Prosecution Service for 1998–99 as these figures are not available.

I cannot estimate any sums still to be received. It is for those who have mis-sold pension policies to identify cases and, under the relevant Financial Services Authority guidelines, make restoration payments to the PCSPS.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers; [13298]

(2) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13317]

Mr. Leslie: During the period queried the Cabinet Office received 20 named day questions of which seven (equating to 35 per cent.) had holding replies.

Of these seven holding replies, one parliamentary question was answered within three parliamentary days; two were answered within seven parliamentary days; one was answered within 10 parliamentary days; and three were answered within 15 parliamentary days.

People's Panel

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister with effect from which date the People's Panel has been wound up. [15374]

Mr. Leslie: The People's Panel has not been wound up. The contract with MORI does not expire until the end of January 2002. By that time, decisions will have been made about the future of the panel.

Regeneration

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for each *(a)* area-based and *(b)* other regeneration-related initiative for which his Department is responsible, what is (i) the amount budgeted and (ii) the total expenditure in each financial year for the planned lifetime of each initiative (A) nationally and (B) in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [14883]

Mrs. Roche: The Deputy Prime Minister is responsible for the Government Office network which administers initiatives of the type referred to on behalf of other Departments. The budgets for such initiatives are the responsibility of the Secretaries of State for those Departments.

Regional Schemes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what regional schemes are in operation in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [14882]

Mrs. Roche: The Government office for the north east administers the following major schemes operating in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency:

Programmes under the Local Transport Plan;

Programmes under Objectives 2 and 3 European funding;

Regional Selective Assistance;

The Housing Investment Programme; and

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what regional schemes are managed by the Government Office for the North East; how long they will run; and how much investment is involved. [14881]

Mrs. Roche: The Government Office for the North East delivers many programmes in the region for a number of government departments. Major programme expenditure includes:

£458 million to improve transport infrastructure for five years (2001–06);

£434 million over the years 2000–06 by the European Commission under the European Structural Funds;

£215 million under the New Deal for Communities initiative over 10 years (2000 and 2011);

£186 million under the Regional Selective Assistance scheme between 1997 and 2001;

£175 million in 2001–02 under the Housing Investment Programme;

£119 million under the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund initiative over 3 years (2001–04).

48-hour Week (Waivers)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many civil servants in each Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours per week; for how many the Minister has rescinded such a waiver; what grade of civil servant is involved; for what reason the waiver was requested; by whom; and if he will make a statement on his policy. [15171]

Mr. Leslie: This information is not held centrally. It could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

It is for individual departments and agencies to put into place measures which they consider necessary to ensure compliance with the Regulations.

Technologies Advisory Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is *(a)* the remit and *(b)* the membership of the Technologies Advisory Group. [15200]

Mr. Leslie: The Technical Advisory Group (recently renamed as the Technology Advisory Group) was formed by the Office of the e-Envoy earlier this year to enable government to obtain the views of expert and representative members of the Technology, Media and Telecoms Sectors and other industry on technology issues affecting the realisation of the e-government vision. The mechanism also enables industry to gain a clearer understanding of the current and possible future direction of e-government. The full terms of reference for the Group are at Annex A.

The membership of the Group is a cross-section of experts mainly at Technical Director level drawn by invitation from twenty or so industry leading organisations. The Department of Trade and Industry, the Society of IT Managers (SOCITM) and the Computer Software Services Association (CSSA) are also represented. A full list of members is attached at Annex B.

The group met for the first time in July and a second meeting was held in September. The next meeting is planned for December 2001. The subject matter has included the e-Government Interoperability Framework (the e-GIF), Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) and Channels Strategies for e-government services.

A sister group, the E-business Advisory Group (EAG), was also established this year with a remit to provide views on how best to introduce e-business ideas and approaches across the Public Sector.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the cost to local authorities of seeking antisocial behaviour orders. [12026]

Mr. Denham: Based on a survey of 21 cases conducted in April this year, the average cost of applying for an antisocial behaviour order was calculated to be £4,800. This is the cost to either the local authority or the police and includes staff costs associated with evidence gathering, preparing the case and attending court.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the time taken to obtain antisocial behaviour orders broken down by the time taken to *(a)* collect evidence, *(b)* consult with interested parties and *(c)* complete court proceedings; and if he will make a statement. [12025]

Mr. Denham: This information is not available centrally.

Dyfed-Powys Police

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ceredigion of 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 67W, on police suspensions, what is the cost of the suspension of the officers in the Aberystwyth division of Dyfed-Powys police since September and December 1999. [12284]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* The Professional Standards Department of Dyfed-Powys police has informed me that the two officers from the Aberystwyth division were suspended on full pay in accordance with Police Regulations. At the time of suspension, one officer was in receipt of an annual salary of £22,323; the second officer was in receipt of an annual salary of £23,787.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued; [13322]

(2) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November, and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13303]

Mr. Blunkett: 156 named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to the Home Department for answer between 15 October and 5 November. Of these, 92 (59 per cent.) were given a holding answer.

Of these 92 questions:

(a) 62 were given a substantive answer within three parliamentary days,

(b) 12 were given a substantive answer between four and seven parliamentary days,

(c) seven were given a substantive answer between eight and 10 parliamentary days,

(d) seven were given a substantive answer between 11 and 15 parliamentary days, and

(e) three were given a substantive answer over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued.

A further one has yet to be answered.

Special Constables

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many special constables there were in the *(a)* City of London and *(b)* Metropolitan police area in (i) May 1997 and (ii) for the latest month for which figures are available based on current police area boundaries; [12408]

(2) how many special constables there were in the *(a)* City of London and *(b)* Metropolitan police area in (i) May 1997 based on old police area boundaries and (ii) for the latest month for which figures are available, based on current boundaries. [12407]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The strength of the City of London and Metropolitan police special constabularies as at March 1997 and March 2001, the latest date for which figures on special constabulary strength are available, are set out in the table:

	March 1997	*March 2001*
City of London police	86	43
Metropolitan police	1,714	774

The boundary of the Metropolitan police district was redrawn with effect from April 2000, with responsibility for policing areas outside the London boroughs being transferred to Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey constabularies.

The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary and as part of the police reform process we are looking at radical improvements in the management, welfare and deployment of special constables.

Islamic Radicals (Extradition)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since May 1997 requests for extradition of Islamic radicals based in the United Kingdom have been turned down; and if he will make a statement. [14830]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: None.

Police Resignations

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many resignations there were from the police force in the year to March *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001 due to (i) medical and (ii) other reasons. [9724]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 October 2001]:* The information requested is in the table provided by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

	Medical retirements		*Other reasons*	
Forces	*1996–97*	*2000–01*	*1996–97*	*2000–01*
England and Wales	2,012	1,209	3,340	4,244
Avon and Somerset	66	42	113	89
Bedfordshire	15	18	35	33
Cambridgeshire	20	11	39	55
Cheshire	19	22	45	57
City of London	7	9	30	29
Cleveland	22	9	25	41
Cumbria	18	24	40	37
Derbyshire	39	12	32	39
Devon and Cornwall	21	15	106	116
Dorset	11	12	52	54
Durham	23	8	25	41
Dyfed-Powys	12	14	19	33
Essex	29	34	72	106
Gloucestershire	11	7	45	43
Greater Manchester	207	110	152	189
Gwent	28	16	26	34
Hampshire	21	17	111	167
Hertfordshire	10	13	64	99
Humberside	19	20	47	98
Kent	15	29	108	124
Lancashire	36	30	70	99
Leicestershire	29	28	44	50
Lincolnshire	11	4	42	49
Merseyside	167	47	73	109
Metropolitan police	457	225	623	917
Norfolk	15	10	65	49
North Wales	33	31	27	44
North Yorkshire	39	37	22	30
Northamptonshire	14	8	23	38
Northumbria	85	28	78	100
Nottinghamshire	34	16	43	71
South Wales	43	76	92	69
South Yorkshire	33	30	61	99
Staffordshire	47	9	54	56
Suffolk	22	14	40	50
Surrey	24	18	56	74
Sussex	42	16	143	134
Thames Valley	55	20	94	165
Warwickshire	10	15	21	31
West Mercia	39	28	54	68
West Midlands	96	29	228	252
West Yorkshire	57	44	136	161
Wiltshire	11	5	65	46

Domestic Violence

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by police authority, the number of reported incidents of domestic violence for each of the last three years for which figures are available. [10213]

Mr. Denham: Details of the numbers of domestic violence incidents recorded by police forces, obtained from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Annual Statistical Return, are given in the table. The definition of domestic violence incidents used for the 1999–2000 and 2000–01 figures is as follows:

Any violence between current or former partners in an intimate relationship, wherever and whenever the violence occurs. The violence may include physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse.

The figures for 1998–99 used the following definition:

Any form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse which takes place within the context of a close relationship. In most cases, the relationship will be between partners, married, cohabiting or otherwise; or ex-partners.

The figures for 1998–99 are therefore not directly comparable with those for 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

Domestic violence incidents

	Financial years		
Forces	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	4,791	9,973	9,210
Bedfordshire	4,923	5,474	5,616
Cambridgeshire	1,113	2,558	2,959
Cheshire	9,503	7,271	7,393
City of London	83	n/a	22
Cleveland	4,818	3,980	4,540
Cumbria	3,268	3,140	3,294
Derbyshire	12,585	9,872	n/a
Devon and Cornwall	3,453	3,611	2,957
Dorset	2,116	2,306	2,361
Durham	1,930	4,679	5,446
Dyfed-Powys	2,106	2,184	1,670
Essex	10,850	10,841	9,936
Gloucestershire	1,421	6,248	6,061
Greater Manchester	56,203	46,330	51,448
Gwent	4,250	4,603	3,150
Hampshire	3,128	3,856	10,513
Hertfordshire	6,363	6,373	6,228
Humberside	1,148	7,787	6,356
Kent	9,605	8,997	8,926
Lancashire	6,778	8,560	17,392
Leicestershire	7,246	5,631	3,320
Lincolnshire	1,519	738	278
Merseyside	20,612	19,801	16,663
Metropolitan police	41,531	77,099	91,154
Norfolk	4,973	5,567	5,811
Northamptonshire	2,620	4,422	2,843
Northumbria	14,442	10,336	11,898
North Wales	4,305	2,763	3,436
North Yorkshire	4,024	5,327	3,554
Nottinghamshire	3,803	3,799	4,054
South Wales	7,252	7,609	7,507
South Yorkshire	12,209	2,177	n/a
Staffordshire	n/a	9,482	10,868
Suffolk	1,962	495	2,307
Surrey	1,653	3,234	5,026
Sussex	8,174	9,300	10,083
Thames Valley	10,885	10,221	5,887
Warwickshire	2,500	2,687	3,360
West Mercia	n/a	1,866	6,383
West Midlands	20,362	25,225	31,328
West Yorkshire	23,658	26,271	18,604
Wiltshire	7,563	5,977	5,485
England and Wales	351,728	398,670	415,327

n/a = not available

Alcohol (Young People)

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he had with the police prior to the amendment of the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997 to the effect that only alcohol in unsealed containers may now be seized; and if he will make a statement. [12092]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* Section 29 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 amends section 1 of the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997 and increases the power of police in respect of under-age drinkers because it now allows them to confiscate alcohol, and alcohol containers which have been opened, from under-age drinkers in public places.

The 1997 Act was deliberately amended by the 2001 Act to ensure consistency between new police powers to confiscate alcohol (but not sealed alcohol containers) from any person in a public place designated for the purpose by the relevant local authority, and the measures contained within the 1997 Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act.

Prior to the Act discussions on the provisions were held with representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers and individual forces who had included confiscation powers within the model byelaw on banning drinking in public places.

Cemeteries

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is with regard to the provision of new cemeteries. [13488]

Beverley Hughes: Burial facilities are currently provided by local organisations, including burial authorities, religious bodies and private companies, in response to local demand. Whether these arrangements need to be reinforced is a matter we intend to consider over the next year. As a first step, we propose shortly to seek information on existing burial space availability.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the relationship between the street price and purity of *(a)* cocaine and *(b)* heroin in the last 10 years. [9464]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* Information on mean purity of seizures is available from April 1997 to March 2001 and this together with average street prices over the same period is set out in the table.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Heroin purity (percentage)	35.3	38.2	43.6	49.7
Price per gram (£)[1]	74	74	65	70
Cocaine purity (percentage)	52.3	55.9	60.2	53.5
Price per gram (£)[1]	71	77	75	65

[1] in December

Police Numbers (Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* actual and *(b)* funded police officers there are in the county of Essex for the latest available date; and what were the same figures on 1 May 1997. [9734]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The information for funded officers and the most recent strength data has been provided by the chief constable of Essex. The 1997 strength figures relate to 31 March 1997 as the Home Office collects police strength data in March and September for each year. The information is in the table.

Essex police

	31 March 1997	*1 October 2001*
Funded police officers	2,944	3,031
Actual police strength	2,961	2,974
Funded civilian support staff	1,425	1,747
Actual civilian staff strength	1,199	1,586

Notes:
1. Figures are full-time equivalents
2. The funded posts reflect budget provision by the police authority

Fraud (Police Staff Levels)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed *(a)* in each police fraud squad, including the City of London police fraud squad, and *(b)* in the economic and financial crime section of the National Criminal Intelligence Service, in each year since 1996. [11269]

Mr. Denham: *(a)* This information is not kept centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, for the last two years Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary has collected data from all forces in England and Wales according to a range of 62 staff functions, one of which is fraud. The staff function for fraud is defined as

> "staff who predominately investigate fraud cases (not including staff who are predominately employed in asset confiscation duties)"

and

> "staff who are predominately employed to support the investigation of fraud cases (not including staff who are predominately employed to support asset confiscation duties)".

The data are as follows:

	1999–2000		*2000–01*	
Force	*Police officer*	*Civilian staff*	*Police officer*	*Civilian staff*
Avon and Somerset	17	1	15	2
Bedfordshire	8	1	13	3
Cambridgeshire	7	0	6	0
Cheshire	16	0	15	3
City of London	74	12	70	11
Cleveland	10	0	10	0
Cumbria	4	0	4	0
Derbyshire	10	1	12	1
Devon and Cornwall	10	0	18	5
Dorset	13	1	14	2
Durham	5	0	4	0
Dyfed-Powys	7	0	5	1
Essex	0	0	0	0
Gloucester	8	1	8	1
Greater Manchester	36	0	35	0
Gwent	5	0	5	0
Hampshire	11	3	12	3
Hertfordshire	10	0	11	0
Humberside	9	1	10	1
Kent	14	4	13	11
Lancashire	0	0	0	0
Leicester	0	0	7	0
Lincolnshire	7	0	7	0
Merseyside	0	4	0	4
Metropolitan police	118	0	68	2
Norfolk	7	0	7	0
North Wales	9	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	6	0	6	0
Northamptonshire	8	2	8	4
Northumbria	14	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	11	1	17	1
South Wales	15	2	3	0
South Yorkshire	21	2	20	5
Staffordshire	10	2	10	2
Suffolk	6	0	8	2
Surrey	12	0	17	3
Sussex	2	1	0	2
Thames Valley	15	4	15	5
Warwickshire	1	0	6	1
West Mercia	7	0	5	0
West Midlands	28	12	29	9
West Yorkshire	42	0	43	0
Wiltshire	3	0	4	0
England and Wales	616	55	560	84

(b) The number of staff employed in the National Criminal Intelligence Service as at 1 April each year was:

Year	*Number*
1996	17
1997	16
1998	21
1999	24
2000	24
2001	54

Since April 2001, eight more staff have been recruited by the Economic Crime Unit and a further 18 people are currently being recruited. By the end of the financial year there will be 80 staff in the unit.

Police Numbers (Sussex)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have left Sussex constabulary since March 2000 through *(a)* retirement, *(b)* early retirement, *(c)* injury and *(d)* other employment. [11027]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The information requested has been provided by the acting chief constable of Sussex police and is set out in the table.

Officers leaving Sussex police between March 2000 and September 2001

	Number
Retirement	142
Early (medical) retirement	35
Resignation	73
Transfer to new force	54
Other reasons[1]	11
Total	315

[1] Includes officers retiring while on sick leave, for disciplinary reasons, or leaving to return to their original force.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new police officers have been taken on in each division of the Sussex constabulary since March 2000 under crime fighting fund funding. [11026]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* The number of crime fighting fund (CFF) funded recruits taken on by a force is calculated as a proportion of total recruitment. Sussex police recruited 47 officers funded by the CFF in 2000–01. Based on forecasts of recruitment

for 2001–02 provided by the force, a further 26 Sussex recruits appointed between April and September 2001 will be funded by the CFF.

The distribution of CFF recruits within a police force area is a matter for the chief constable of that force. I am informed by the force that Sussex do not identify particular officers as CFF recruits but that the number per division is calculated using an allocation formula based on budgetary provision. For 2000–01 Sussex's CFF officers were distributed as follows:

	Number of officers
Brighton	8
East Downs	7
Forest	6
Highdown	6
Hove and Shoreham	4
Senlac	6
Weald	5
Western	5
Total	47

The force has not yet calculated the distribution of 2001–02 CFF recruits between divisions.

Religious Hatred

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with *(a)* the Law Society, *(b)* the Bar Council, *(c)* the Justices' Clerks, *(d)* the District Judges (magistrates courts), *(e)* the lay magistracy and *(f)* the Crown court judges in relation to the proposed law on religious incitement; and if he will place a summary of their responses in the Library. [13691]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* Because of the need to place an emergency anti-terrorism Bill before Parliament urgently, it has not been possible to undertake a formal consultation exercise.

Public-private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the projects in his Department which have been considered as potential public-private partnerships since 1997 which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public private partnership proposed; and if he will make a statement. [13433]

Mr. Blunkett: From the best information available, there are no instances in this Department where a potential public-private partnership has not gone ahead due to the public sector comparator having a lower net present value than the public-private partnership proposed.

I would also refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to this question.

Communications Data

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make data retention compulsory for internet and communications service providers. [13644]

Mr. Denham: I intend to work with service providers on a voluntary code on retention of communications data as part of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. This is an important element of our drive against terrorism and crime. I propose that compulsory powers should be held in reserve and subject to further consideration by Parliament.

Anti-terrorist Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with internet and communications service providers about new anti-terrorist legislation. [13646]

Mr. Blunkett: Officials met representatives of service providers on 24 October to discuss provisions on communications data retention contained in the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. The meeting was a useful opportunity for Government at an early stage of the process to hear the views of industry representatives. The industry has of course been in dialogue with the Department of Trade and Industry over the last two months and we have reflected the representations made. As I said on 15 October in my statement to the House, we are very grateful to the providers. The Government look forward to continuing co-operation with industry on this important issue and to developing a code of practice with industry to implement the provisions of the Bill.

Afghanistan

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with his European counterparts about dealing with European nationals apprehended in Afghanistan taking arms against British military personnel. [12603]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* None at present.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of fair trade goods. [15208]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Department's policy on the procurement of goods and services is based on value for money principles, which include quality, fitness for purpose and delivery against price. Unless there are reasons to the contrary, all goods and services are acquired by competition. We fully support ethical trading in mainstream business and fair trade products will be purchased where they meet the stated criteria.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [12269]

Mr. Blunkett: Expenditure on information literature advertising and campaign material in the years specified is as follows.

	£ million
(a) 1995–96	10,869
(b) 1996–97	8,328
(c) 1997–98	3,372
(d) 1998–99	4,194
(e) 1999–2000	10,080
(f) 2000–01	35,637

Expenditure figures for years 1997–98 and 1998–99 cover the production of information literature, advertising and campaign material in the following subject areas; absent voting/electoral voting, accelerated promotion scheme for graduates (APSG) police, special constables recruitment and fire safety. No significant marketing campaigns were run in these financial years.

Expenditure in the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 however, covers campaigns in the following areas: police recruitment, vehicle crime reduction, fire safety, rolling/electoral registration and postal voting, passports advice and the introduction of the Human Rights Act 1998.

In 2000–01 the main areas of expenditure were:

	£ million
Rolling registration and postal voting	7
Fire safety	5
Police recruitment	7.5
Crime (including vehicle crime reduction)	10

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rural Payments Agency

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the abolition of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce and the progress towards agency status of the Rural Payments Agency; and if she will publish its framework document, corporate plan and business plan. [16242]

Mr. Morley: The Rural Payments Agency was launched as an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 16 october 2001. It received accreditation as an EU paying agency on the same date. The chief executive is Mr. Johnston McNeill.

Since that date and until 15 November, when the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce (Abolition) Regulations 2001 came into force, the agency has been operating as a joint enterprise between the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce and the Department under a single management structure headed by the chief executive.

The House has already been informed of the agency's performance targets on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1247W. I am arranging for copies of the framework document, the corporate plan and the business plan for 2001–02 to be placed in the Library of the House.

Illegal Food Imports

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to reduce the number of bodies involved in controlling illegal imports of food. [15193]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* There are a number of bodies with an interest in the control of food imports. We are co-ordinating action to identify practical ways to simplify the situation.

Scrapie

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on how the Government will test for scrapie-causing agents in apparently scrapie-resistant sheep. [14531]

Mr. Morley: Next year we will be testing a sample of sheep brains for signs of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) including scrapie. At present the number of sheep to be tested is 23,000 but this may increase. The relevant European Union legislation requires that, if a test performed under that legislation gives a positive result for the presence of TSEs, the sample material must be genotyped. This will reveal any case where the sheep had a scrapie-resistant genotype.

We are also carrying out experiments to see if sheep that are fully resistant to scrapie can be infected with BSE. Over five years the sheep will be culled so that, using a range of available tests, their tissues can be examined for signs of infectivity. Results so far have been very encouraging, as infectivity has not been detected.

Animal Health Bill

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the level of consultation on the Animal Health Bill before its publication. [14530]

Mr. Morley: We have had to draw up this legislation swiftly to prepare for any emergency and there has not been time to consult in the way that we normally would. However, over the coming weeks and months, while the Bill is before Parliament we will consult widely on key provisions and their practical implementation.

With specific regard to the provisions on scrapie and TSEs, we signalled the possibility of introducing a compulsory programme of genotyping and breeding restrictions for TSE-susceptible sheep when we launched a public consultation exercise on the proposed national scrapie plan in July 2000. We are currently consulting stakeholders about the detailed arrangements including the timing of the introduction of a compulsory scheme.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to her Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers. [13304]

Mr. Morley: According to our records, for the period 15 October and 5 November this Department received 254 named day parliamentary written questions, 79 per cent. of which received holding answers.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to her Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13323]

Mr. Morley: The proportion of named day parliamentary written questions that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November, and have subsequently received a substantive answer is in the table:

Parliamentary days	*Number*	*Percentage*
(a) Within three	40	20
(b) Within seven	62	31
(c) Within 10	19	9.5
(d) Within 15	19	9.5
(e) Over 15	61	30

Mink Farms

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many mink farms were inspected during the slaughter period in November and December 2000; and what were the methods of slaughter observed. [13800]

Mr. Morley: Our records show that three mink farms were inspected during November and December 2000. However, slaughter was only observed at two of these farms. Exposure to carbon monoxide was observed on one farm, and exposure to carbon dioxide was observed at the other.

Agricultural Policy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her priorities are for the reform of UK agricultural policy. [12079]

Mr. Morley: The Government want to see a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector which contributes to a thriving and sustainable rural economy and advances environmental, economic, health and animal welfare goals. The independent Policy Commission on the future of farming and food, announced on 9 August, has been established to advise us on how to achieve these objectives.

One key policy objective is to secure further positive change to the common agricultural policy, framing much of our domestic agriculture policy. In particular, we want to see market price support and production controls phased out, with transitional support payments to help farmers to adjust. This should be complemented by a shift towards the "second pillar" of the CAP, expanding the resources available for targeted support for rural development and agri-environment schemes.

Vets (Domestic Pets)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what information she has collated on *(a)* how many vets in each of the last five years have been struck off or disqualified and *(b)* how many were struck off or disqualified for mistreating domestic pets; [14284]

(2) what information she has collated on *(a)* how many complaints have been made about vets in each of the last five years and *(b)* how many of those complaints were about the mistreating of domestic pets. [14285]

Mr. Morley: This Department does not collate figures regarding this matter, as responsibility for these matters rests with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. However, figures furnished to this Department by the college indicate that during the last five years a total of four vets have been struck off. Of these one was struck off for the mistreatment of pet animals.

During the same period, a total of three vets have been disqualified for periods ranging from one to three months.

	Disqualified	*Struck off*
1997	0	2
1998	0	0
1999	0	0
2000	1	2
2001	2	0

Over-30-months Scheme

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent discussions she has had with the European Commission on the continuation of the OTMS scheme; [14788]

(2) what time limit has been set for the continuation of the over-30-months cattle scheme. [14792]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* It is the Government's intention to review the over-30-month scheme (OTMS) in light of any changes to the over-30-month rule. The rule will be reviewed by the Foods Standard Agency when a sufficient sample of cattle has been tested for BSE and the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) is expected to reconsider existing guidance in the new year. Changes to the scheme would need to be agreed with the European Commission and other member states if amendments to Commission Regulation (EC) No. 716/96, under which the scheme operates, are required.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle were slaughtered under the Over 30 Months Cattle Scheme in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [14794]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* The total numbers of cattle slaughtered under the scheme for the years in question are shown in the table.

	Total scheme throughput
1997	847,409
1998	895,278
1999	970,125
2000	972,751
2001[1]	459,606

[1] To 31 October 2001

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was of the over-30-months cattle scheme in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [14793]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The total cost of the over-30-months cattle scheme for the years in question are detailed in the table. The second column shows the total amount of compensation paid to producers. The third column shows the total cost of the scheme including compensation payments.

£ million

Year	Total compensation paid to producers	Total cost of the scheme including compensation
1997–98	288	432
1998–99	264	380
1999–2000	265	394
2000–2001	240	358
2001–2002[1]	44	81

[1] To 30 September 2001

Border Inspection Posts

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the establishment of border inspection posts in the United Kingdom by the European Commission Food and Veterinary Office. [14812]

Mr. Morley: Community law requires that all products of animal origin from third countries enter through, and are subject to checks at, a border inspection post (BIP).

Before a BIP can operate it has to be approved by officials of the European Commission Food and Veterinary Office (FVO). FVO veterinary experts will inspect the facility to ensure that the layout, structure and procedures comply with Community requirements.

Once approval has been given this must be ratified at the Standing Veterinary Committee who will adopt a decision amending the list of approved BIPs.

Common EU Fisheries Licence

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress made towards a common EU fisheries licence, with respect to communitarisation of national fleets. [14816]

Mr. Morley: There has been no movement in this direction. The belief that this is a likely development is based on a misreading of the Swedish Accession Treaty and has no basis in fact.

Fisheries (Derogation)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the state of negotiations to extend the derogation on six and 12 mile limits. [14819]

Mr. Morley: A decision on the six and 12 mile limits will be taken as part of the CFP review in 2002. Discussions in the Council of Ministers have revealed a very strong consensus among member states in favour of renewing the limits; the Commission is also known to support them. For my part, I shall be making every effort to get the limits made permanent.

Fishing Controls

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1936/2001, laying down control measures applicable to fishing for certain stocks of highly migratory fish, on *(a)* her Department's activities and *(b)* Dependent and Associated Territories, with special reference to (i) the Falklands and (ii) Gibraltar. [14796]

Mr. Morley: No assessment has been made of the effect of Council Regulation (EC) No.1939/12001 laying down control measures applicable to fishing for certain stocks of highly migratory fish in any fisheries.

Live Export Refunds

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policy regarding live export refunds for cattle; and if it is her policy to support their suspension as concerns the European Communities budget. [14813]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) on 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 597–98W.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in what percentage of cases livestock owners who resisted an animal culling order were subsequently informed that their animals were infected with foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [13887]

Mr. Morley: The London headquarters of the Department was involved in or made aware of a total of 127 cases where livestock owners appealed against a cull. At the time of appeal, 104 were contiguous premises, 17 were dangerous contacts, three were 3km cull cases, two were slaughters on suspicion and one was an infected premises. In 15 per cent. of this total number, the owners were subsequently informed that their animals were infected with foot and mouth disease and the status of their premises was amended accordingly.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regulations govern *(a)* the export of game, and *(b)* compensation for game exporters whose business was affected by foot and mouth. [14308]

Mr. Morley: The Import and Export Restrictions (foot and mouth disease) Regulations regulate the export of fresh meat and animal products from animals susceptible to foot and mouth disease (FMD); there is no statutory provision for payment of compensation to farming or other businesses for consequential losses caused by the outbreaks of FMD, and there are no plans to introduce such payments.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the protocols and guidance for the removal of ash from a foot and mouth disease burn site. [7748]

Mr. Morley: The protocols and guidance for the removal of ash from foot and mouth disease burn sites have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs under what powers the foot and mouth contiguous cull was carried out. [13815]

Mr. Morley: The contiguous cull was carried out using powers contained in schedule 3, paragraph 3 of the Animal Health Act 1981.

Laptop Computers

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many laptop computers held by her Department have been *(a)* stolen and *(b)* lost; how many have been recovered; and what is the total cost of replacements since June 2001. [15354]

Mr. Morley: Since June 2001, the Department has had four laptops stolen, and has lost none. None of the stolen laptops has been recovered and none has been replaced to date.

Departmental Plan

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish her departmental plan. [15358]

Mr. Morley: I intend to publish the DEFRA Departmental Report in April 2002 in common with other Government Departments. The report will contain information on progress against the Department's objectives and the challenges ahead for the forthcoming financial year. It will also contain summary expenditure plans for the Department.

IT

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what problems have been identified in the *(a)* installation and *(b)* management of her Department's IT programmes. [15359]

Mr. Morley: IT programmes in DEFRA are managed using the Government's methodology for project management known as "Prince 2", and have a single individual with overall responsibility for their delivery. In addition, the Department submits IT programmes to independent review under procedures introduced by the Office of Government Commerce earlier this year. The Department's experience is that these approaches are powerful tools for ensuring that problems in individual programmes are addressed at an early stage and successfully.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of her Department's budget is for IT. [15360]

Mr. Morley: Around 2 per cent. of the 2001–02 resource budget (ie expenditure covered by the Departmental Expenditure Limit and Annually Managed Expenditure) is planned to be spent on IT.

Civil Servants

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many civil servants there are in each division of her Department. [15342]

Mr. Morley: The number of civil servants employed by DEFRA as at 1 October 2001 is given in the table. The figures relate to people in post; they include staff employed to deal with foot and mouth disease and those who were in the process of transferring to the Rural Payments Agency. All other executive agencies are excluded.

Division of DEFRA	*Number of employees*
Agriculture and Food	577
Fisheries	217
Environment, rural and regional services	4,075
Animal health (including state veterinary services)	2,914
Science directorate	101
European Union and international policy	57
Economics and statistics	175
Central services	1,133
E-business directorate	360
Communications directorate	106
Total	9,715

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many civil servants *(a)* are employed in her Department and *(b)* were employed by its predecessor department at the latest date for which figures are available. [15372]

Mr. Morley: As at 1 October 2001, 9,715 civil servants were employed by DEFRA.

As at 1 June 2001, 8,735 civil servants were employed by the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The figures given include staff employed to deal with foot and mouth disease and those who were in the process of transferring to the Rural Payments Agency, but exclude all other executive agencies of the Department.

PFI Contracts

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the PFI contracts which *(a)* have been agreed and *(b)* are under consideration. [15355]

Mr. Morley: There are four existing PFI contracts: the Countryside Agency's SPIRIT contract for IT services, Pevensey Bay Sea Defences, Broadlands Flood Alleviation Scheme, and the Broadlands Avenue Office

Development (Cambridge). The British Waterways Board have two PPP projects under consideration: a property project known as P4, and the Water Grid scheme.

Vets

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many vets were employed by *(a)* the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in May 1997 and *(b)* her Department in October 2001. [15368]

Mr. Morley: The number of veterinary surgeons (full-time equivalents) employed by the State Veterinary Service (SVS) for 1997 and 2001 are shown in the table. Of the 286 full-time equivalent veterinarians employed by the State Veterinary Service in 2001 as a whole, 220 veterinarians are employed as field veterinary officers. The work of these officers is supplemented by about 100 Temporary Veterinary Inspectors (TVIs) from the private sector in normal times.

Year as at 1 January	*Number*
1997	289.5
2001	286.0
2001[1]	316.0

[1] As at October

Flood Defence

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what communications have been received from local authorities in respect of the availability of resources to implement flood defence plans. [14686]

Mr. Morley: This Department provides funding to local authorities in England for flood and coastal defence capital works. Other central Government funding for flood and coastal defence is provided through revenue support grant. Local authorities submit forecasts of their plans for capital works on a regular basis and the local government association has provided high level justification of their flood defence spending in future years as part of the Spending Review 2002 process.

Managed Retreat Schemes

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for managed retreat schemes in Essex; and if she will make a statement. [13922]

Mr. Morley: Operational management of flood and coastal erosion risk in England is a matter for local operating authorities—the Environment Agency (EA), local authorities and internal drainage boards. The Government require them to consider a range of options when considering their response to the risk, including managed realignment where appropriate (sometimes called managed retreat). I understand the EA is actively progressing two schemes involving realignment in Essex at present, namely Abbot's Hall in the Blackwater estuary and Brandy Hole on the river Crouch.

I also understand the EA is currently undertaking strategy studies of the Essex Estuaries which will involve consideration of managed realignment as an option for other sites in the future.

Movement of Livestock Scheme

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at what dates and times the autumn movement of livestock scheme helpline has been unavailable; and if she will make a statement on the impact on applicants of the unavailability of that helpline. [12542]

Mr. Morley: The Movement Licence Helpline (01392 314941) is open 08.30 to 17.30 Monday to Friday and 09.00 to 13.00 on Saturday. The helpline has never been unavailable. Some calls may be answered by an automatic message, when all the lines are busy, but the number of unanswered calls has not exceeded 5 per cent. of calls made to the helpline.

The Department also provides a helpline for the use of local authorities and local veterinary inspectors. This helpline is not intended to be used by farmers. However, some farmers have obtained the number and will have been asked to call the Movement Licence Helpline.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the autumn movement of livestock scheme applies to movements between different parcels of land held by the same person. [12541]

Mr. Morley: Since 8 October, sole occupancy licences have been available to permit the movement of foot and mouth disease susceptible stock between premises which are in the same control, management and occupation in respect of FMD susceptible animals. All premises listed on the licence must be within a circle of a maximum diameter of 20.0 kms (12.4 miles). Movement of stock between premises covered by the same sole occupancy licence may take place without prior veterinary inspection and without triggering a 21 day standstill of destination. Full details are available from local offices of the DEFRA website.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the help available from her Department to local authorities to deal with the backlog of applications in respect of the autumn movement of livestock scheme. [12544]

Mr. Morley: The Department is working extremely closely with the Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards (LACOTS) on the administration of the livestock movement scheme. The initial backlog of applications which built up after the introduction of the livestock movement scheme has been cleared.

Potato Industry

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the annual output of the UK potato industry in

each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what percentage of the land in England under cultivation is used for the production of potatoes. [14062]

Mr. Morley: The volume and value of UK potato production and the percentage of crop area in England used for potato production are given in the table.

Year	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[1]
Potatoes in the United Kingdom:										
Volume of harvested production[2]	6,393	7,841	7,097	6,568	6,435	7,251	7,153	6,439	7,156	6,611
Value of production[3]	527	533	390	710	1,095	636	390	630	750	501
Area[4]	178	182	172	165	173	178	167	165	178	165
Percentage of UK total crop area	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.3	3.3	3.8	3.5
Potatoes in England:										
Area used for potato production[4]	135	137	131	125	130	135	127	124	137	127
England total crop area[4]	4,222	4,244	3,839	3,804	3,865	4,016	4,244	4,229	4,005	3,982
Percentage of England total crop area	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.0	2.9	3.4	3.2

[1] Provisional
[2] Thousand tonnes
[3] £ million
[4] Thousand hectares
Source:
Agriculture in the UK

Land Use

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of land in England was *(a)* under cultivation for crops and *(b)* used for animal rearing in (i) 1975, (ii) 1985, (iii) 1995 and (iv) the most recent year for which figures are available. [14059]

Mr. Morley: The information is given in the table.

	Thousand hectares	*1975*	*1985*	*1995*	*2001*
Total area of England[1]	13,042	—	—	—	—
of which:					
Percentage total crops	—	30.1	33.7	29.6	29.0
Percentage animal rearing	—	40.2	36.4	34.3	33.1

[1] Including inland waterways
Notes:
1. Crops including all arable crops, some of which are grown for stockfeeding.
2. Animal rearing is all grassland and rough grazing.
3. Common land has not been included in the figures for animal rearing. There are 427,889 hectares of common land in England.
Sources:
1. Crops and Animal Rearing—June Agricultural Census 1975, 1985, 1995 and 2001 (main and minor holdings).
2. Total Area of England—Office for National Statistics (2001 data).

Common Agricultural Policy

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the principal changes her Department is seeking on reform of the common agricultural policy. [12812]

Mr. Morley: The CAP needs further reform to deliver better outputs for our farmers, consumers and taxpayers. The Government are committed to striving to secure a more economically rational CAP, and one which is sustainable in relation to the countryside environment and rural economy. In particular, the Government want to see market price support and production controls phased out, with transitional support payments to help farmers to adjust. This should be complemented by a shift towards the "second pillar" of the CAP, expanding the resources available for targeted support for rural development and agri-environment schemes.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Chelmsford of 29 May on behalf of his constituent Mr. J. Matchett of Langton Ave., Chelmsford; and if she will make a statement about the reason for the delay in replying. [8266]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for the delay in providing a reply to his letter. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs replied to his letter yesterday. We have recently identified a real problem with the correspondence system which has led to a backlog of correspondence which Ministers and officials are working hard to clear. I am sorry the hon. Gentleman's letter was caught in that backlog.

Farming Assistance (Exmoor)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to speed up the process of the collection of cattle and assist farmers with welfare problems in Exmoor. [10778]

Mr. Morley: Under the animal movement restrictions which apply to control the spread of foot and mouth disease, collection for movement is permitted to only a single destination on any one day at present.

Following representations from Exmoor farmers, veterinary advice is that provided there is proper cleansing and disinfection between batches, it will be possible to allow more than one operation per day of gathering for movement to a single destination, without an undue increase in disease risk. Officials are therefore finalising changes to the collecting centre procedures to allow more than one batch per day subject to cleansing and disinfection between each batch and these should be implemented shortly.

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Printed indexes to Hansard

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- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
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- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

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- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
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  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
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